

THE ESSENCE OF MANHOOD

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Our childhood impression of the all American boy and typical American male was a composite ideal of Daniel Boone, Abe Lincoln and log cabins, Horatio Alger heroes, Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, Pewee Harris of the Boy Scout stories, Don Sturdy, Baseball Joe, Tom Swift, Black Jack Pershing, Admiral Byrd, Walter Johnson, Dizzy Vance, Red Grange, Gene Tunney, and our American Lone Eagle, Charles Lindberg. Our concept of American masculinity was an unshakeable one that pictured a paragon of youth, virtue, health, vigor, and red bloodedness, a real man in whom, above all, there was not the faintest suspicion of effeminacy. In contrast, our impression of the European male was typified by the boutonnièred Frenchman, elegantly posed, foppishly dressed, pallid, powdered, and drenched in perfume.

There was no doubt that the reason America was great and the European nations weak was that in this country men were men. Any nation whose men powdered and perfumed themselves was bound to be decadent. It was unthinkable that masculinity could exist in an aura of sweet-smelling fragrance. This delusion about American masculinity persisted in our mind for many years. Our confidence in the men of America has gradually been eroded. Reluctantly, over the past twenty years, we have been forced to give up our chauvinistic belief in the virility of American manhood.

The first intimation that American men might not be all that masculine came some eighteen years ago when a doctor friend from Barcelona roomed with us for two weeks in the hospital resident quarters. He would stare in amazement and disbelief as his American associates, fresh from the shower, would dry then douse themselves with hair tonic, aftershave lotion, and finish up in a cloud of powder. In his Spain, at least, there was no doubt about what scent and powder on a male signified.

Since then the American man has been hustled down a primrose path, his olfaction and sensibility drugged by the powerful pitchmen of the soap and cosmetic industries. He is bathed in effluvia and rutting emanations calculated to excite voluptuous maidens to run fingers through his hair and entwine themselves about him. He jet sprays his bathroom with the smell of the fresh outdoors; he bathes with scented soap, brushes his teeth with pastes of ten delicious flavors, gargles with tangy mouth washes, massages his scalp with redolent tonics, shaves with perfumed creams and foams, soaks his shaven cheeks in spicy, aromatic lotions, powders all over with tinted, fragrant talcs and finishes up by spraying or rolling onto those telltale danger areas an odorous deodorant.

Among females, not only here but also the world over, perfumery has always been an accepted practice, part of the feminine mystique. The American male, an innocent victim of the Madison Avenue salesmen, has submitted meekly and unthinkingly, and he has allowed himself to become a fragrant, fruity essence of his plain-smelling forebears. Americans somehow have come to believe that people shouldn't smell like people. If the perfumed male is a sign of national decadence and loss of virility there is no hope for America and its men.

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