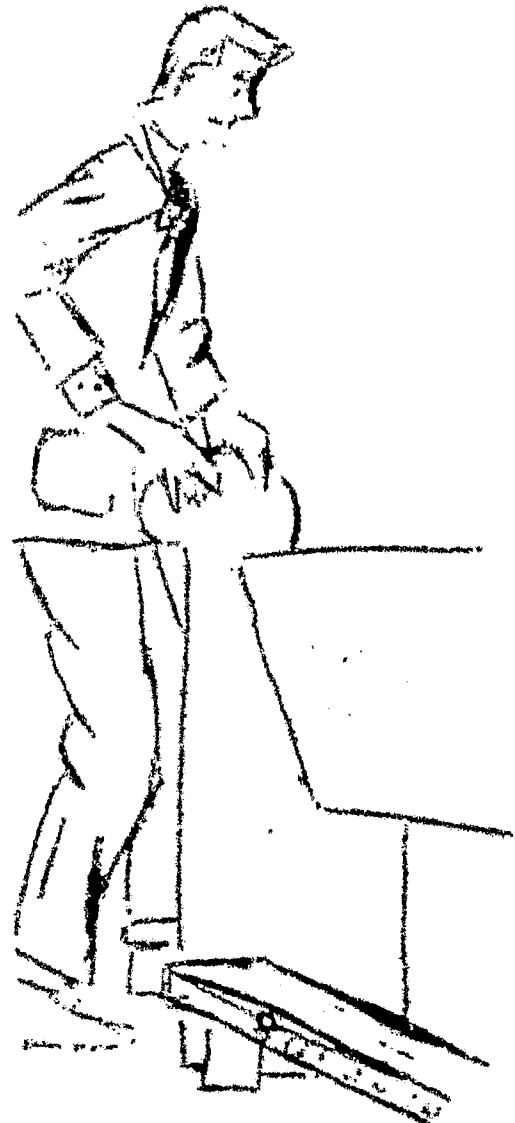


-----  
Politeness In The Pews  
 -----



Poor Phinias! He's the terror of the tennis courts -- the demon of the diamond -- the hero of the hockey rink. What grace! What coordination! What muscles! He makes Charles Atlas look like one of the Seven Dwarfs.

Now watch him shamble down the aisle. Odds are that he'll never make it to Red Gap by sundown. But he finally throws out a hand to clutch the pew; then there's a general collapse, apparently, as he goes down on one knee for the count and rolls into the pew. Saved by the bell! Old men in rest-cure homes have less trouble negotiating the battle from one armchair to another.

The art of genuflecting is simple, and should be dignified. The upper part of the body remains erect as the right knee touches the floor at a point near the left foot. You should rise immediately. It may be a mark of piety for your right knee to remain momentarily on the floor -- but it isn't rubrical. A correct genuflection is one continuous movement, and not so exhausting at all.



When it comes to kneeling Phinias is a fraud, too. His tactics are nothing more than a camouflage. The position he assumes was invented by city fireman and ambulance drivers who sometimes must take off in a hurry, without much warning at all. This three-point landing with his shins braced against the kneeler, and face covered with his hands, gives the impression that he's been struck suddenly by some fatal malady.

The man next to him may consider calling the priest; but the case isn't that serious at all, though it is a strain on the sacro-iliac.

Kneeling up straight is much preferred to the gorilla droop that friend Phinias assumes -- much more dignified, too. Kneeling upright is also an act of reverence in the presence of God. If there's a little penance involved in doing so, so much the better.

Now Phinias, because it is time to sit down, assumes the well known deck-chair slouch. Really this is proper to convalescents only, but not for young Phinias who, in no time at all, will grow drowsy. If sleep is induced, the droop quickly turns into the wilt, and Phinias is off into the land of nod. Then, all sorts of frightful things begin to happen. He may even miss the collection box as it is shoved under his nose -- to say nothing of the principal parts of the Mass.

A pew-slumper can be a public hazard. A missal will do wonders for your physical well-being, no less than your piety. Hence, don't come to church empty-handed. The Mass isn't half so boring as Phinias would have you believe.

