
Nineteenth Century Etiquette

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Why Etiquette is Important

(1) Rules of etiquette have their allotted place among the forces of life, and must be acknowledged as moral agents in refining and making more agreeable our daily intercourse with each other. They are agents for good. They teach us to be more lenient with the various elements which compose society. Life is a sort of a partnership in which each human being has an interest; and the laws of etiquette, well enforced, oblige us to make concessions to the many tastes, prejudices and habits of those we meet in the social circle, at public entertainments, in business relations, or when traveling.

(2) Etiquette is not a servile yielding up of one's individuality, or cold formality. It is rather the beautiful frame which is placed around a valuable picture to prevent its being marred or defaced.

(3) Etiquette throws a protection around the well-bred, keeping the coarse and disagreeable at a distance, and punishing those who violate her dictates, with banishment from the social circle.

How Ladies Should Behave

(4) A rude, loud-spoken, uncultured woman is a positive blot upon nature, and repels, by her lack of breeding, those who would not be slow to acknowledge the real worth and talent she possessed, and which would come to the surface, were she clothed in the beautiful garments of modesty, gentle speech and ease of manner. A lady should be quiet in her manners, natural and unassuming in her language, careful to wound no one's feelings, but giving generously and freely from the treasures of her pure mind to her friends. Scorning no one openly, but having a gentle pity for the unfortunate, the inferior and the ignorant, at the same time carrying herself with an innocence and single-heartedness which disarms ill nature, and wins respect and love from all. Such an one is a model for her sex; the "bright particular star" on which men look with reverence. The influence of such a woman, is a power for good which cannot be over-estimated.

Discussing Interesting Experiences

(5) There is great pleasure to be had in listening to the experiences of those who have traveled, but such narrations are solicited. The conceit which leads a man to talk of himself constantly, soon makes his society detested. His exploits are secretly sneered at, and but half believed. No matter how well he may talk, as he is the pivotal center on which his conversation turns, he is credited with nothing but egotism.

The Art of Listening

(6) A good talker makes a good listener. Dull people can best be brought out of their reserve by saying as little as possible yourself, but rather by leading them up to some subject in which they are at home. You pay your listeners, by a "few brilliant flashes of silence" now and then, the compliment of supposing that they have something to say, and that you are desirous of listening to their views. It is told of a young man who was very shy, that a lady succeeded in starting him on a certain train of

thought with which he was familiar, and he entertained the company in a charming manner. She spoke but seldom. He afterward remarked of her that she was the finest talker he ever heard.

Calling on a Lady

(7) A gentleman cannot consider himself privileged to call upon a lady upon the strength of an introduction alone. He may desire very much to do so, but waits to be invited. If the invitation does not come, and he is anxious to prosecute the acquaintance, he may leave his card at her residence. If he is acceptable, the young lady's mother will send him an invitation to visit the family, or ask his presence at some entertainment to be given at their home. After that, it is plain sailing, and the gentleman can feel that he has a right to call occasionally.

(8) If his card receives no acknowledgment, he may conclude that for some reasons best known to themselves, they do not wish to extend their acquaintance. And in this case, he must wait when next they meet in public, for a recognition at their hands, as would any stranger.

The Model Hostess

(9) The model hostess must unite a frank and generous nature with a calmness and serenity that are almost marvelous. She must be really fond of entertaining; her bounty must flow out with unstinted measure. She must be able to smile even though her very soul is wearied beyond endurance. She must possess the rare gift of blending in one harmonious whole, the varying elements about her. To entertain must be a perpetual delight, and her good nature and friendly wit must gladden all who come in contact with her. Such a hostess never finds her invitations slighted, for to visit at her home is to be certain of enjoyment.

Dare to be True

(10) It has been well said that "the mother's heart is the children's school-room." Then be yourselves just what you would have your children be. Never stoop to pander with expediency. If a question of right or wrong comes up for decision, meet it squarely. Let your children feel that mother and father are always found on the side of the right, and not policy. Never use coarse or rude language. If the home conversation is pure and elevating, the children will imbibe the same tone of thought, and home will be the fountain-head of all that is ennobling; the spot where pure affection has its birth. The hearthstone must be the shrine of purity, of generous teachings, the repository of the virtues. In its shelter are taught those lessons which make the girls and boys who go from its walls, good women and men, who will leave their impress upon the world.

Banish Unpleasantness

(11) In the home, bickerings and distrust and petty jealousy must be banished. Children who grow up under the baleful dissensions of discordant homes, will learn to doubt the existence of a peaceful home, their faith in goodness will grow weak, and their fondness for the home circle dim. This is not the true idea. It should be a sheltering retreat, where the suspicious world is shut out, and where their dear ones will be fitted for contact with the hard realities of life, and grow and ripen spiritually for the world to come.

Speaking One's Mind

(12) Do not take pride in offensively expressing yourself on every occasion, under the impression that you will be admired for your frankness. "Speaking your mind," says Jerrold, "is an extravagance which has ruined many a man."