

The Project Gutenberg eBook of True Politeness: A Hand-book of Etiquette for Ladies, by Anonymous

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TRUE POLITENESS: A HAND-BOOK OF ETIQUETTE FOR LADIES ***

Transcriber's Note

Obvious typographical errors have been corrected. A list of corrections is found at the end of the text.

TRUE POLITENESS.

[1]

A
HAND-BOOK OF ETIQUETTE
FOR
LADIES.

BY AN AMERICAN LADY.

New York:
LEAVITT AND ALLEN.

Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year
1847, by

[2]

GEORGE S. APPLETON.

In the Office of the Clerk of the District Court of the United
States in and for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

[3]

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TRUE POLITENESS

FOR

LADIES.

INTRODUCTIONS.

I.

NEVER introduce persons to each other without a knowledge that it will be agreeable to both parties; this may sometimes be ascertained without a formal question: very great intimacy with and knowledge of each party may be a sufficient assurance that the introduction will be agreeable.

II.

The inferior should always be introduced to the superior—ladies take precedence of gentlemen; you will present the gentleman to the lady, not the lady to the gentleman.

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III.

An introduction at a ball for the purpose of dancing does not compel you to recognise the person in the street or in any public place; and except under very peculiar circumstances such intimacies had better cease with the ball.

IV.

When introducing one to another, mention the name of each distinctly. A failure to do this is often the cause of much embarrassment. If you have been introduced, and have not caught the name, it is better to say at once, "I beg pardon; I did not hear the name;" it will save much unpleasant feeling.

V.

As a general rule, avoid all proffers of introduction, unless from those in whom, from

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relationship or other causes, you can place implicit confidence. A lady cannot shake off an improper acquaintance with the same facility as a gentleman can do, and her character is more easily affected by contact with the worthless and dissipated.

VI.

Upon a first introduction to a lady or gentleman, make a slight but gracious inclination of the head and body. The old style of curtsying has given place to the more easy and graceful custom of bowing. It is ill-bred to shake hands.

VII.

If you meet a lady for the second or subsequent times, the hand may be extended in addition to the inclination of the head; but never extend the hand to a gentleman, unless you are very intimate.

VIII.

Bow with slow and measured dignity; never hastily.

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IX.

If you wish to avoid the company of a gentleman who has been properly introduced, treat him with respect, at the same time shunning his company. But few will mistake you.

X.

If, in travelling, any one introduces himself to you in a proper and respectful manner, conduct yourself toward him with reserve and dignity, yet with ease and politeness; and thank him for any attentions he may render you. If he is a gentleman he will appreciate your behavior; if he is not, he will be deterred from annoying you. All such acquaintances cease with the occasion. Converse only upon topics of general interest; it is necessary only to be civil. If he should betray the least want of respect, turn from him in dignified silence; a lady by her behavior always has it in her power to silence the boldest.

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XI.

If on paying a morning visit you meet strangers at the house of your friend and are introduced, it is a mere matter of form, and does not entitle you to future recognition by such persons.

XII.

Be very cautious of giving a gentleman a letter of introduction to a lady,—it may be the means of settling the weal or woe of the persons for life.

XIII.

If you have an introductory letter, do not deliver it yourself, unless upon cases of urgent business, but send it with your card and the number of your lodging, enclosed in an envelope, as soon as you have made yourself comfortable after arriving at your destination.

XIV.

On receiving a letter introducing any person, so soon as convenient wait upon her, and show such attention as the nature of the introduction may require: upon meeting the party introduced, you will easily perceive whether any further INTIMACY will be desirable.

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XV.

A lady, who receives a letter introducing a gentleman, may answer it by a note to the bearer, inviting him to pay a morning or evening visit.

XVI.

When introduced to another lady, you may say, "I am very happy to make your acquaintance;" but there are few cases where this remark can be addressed with propriety to a gentleman. It is a favor for him to be presented to her, therefore the pleasure is on his side.

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RECOGNITIONS AND SALUTATIONS.

XVII.

THE superior in rank and station should first salute the inferior. Therefore, if you meet a gentleman in the street with whom you are acquainted, recollect that it is your province to recognise him before he presumes to salute you. Another reason is, he may bow to you, when you do not recognise him, and there is no remedy; but if you recognise him first, no *gentleman* would fail to return the salute. Though etiquette is quite definite on the subject, it is often waived with advantage when intimacy, equality of station and circumstances, and a known appreciation of each other, warrant the liberty.

XVIII.

If a person whom you have met as specified in Nos. IV. and XI., should presume to salute you, do not recognise the salute, but pass on, and leave him to suppose that you imagined it was intended for another.

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XIX.

On meeting a friend in any public place, do not boisterously salute, or proclaim her name aloud.

XX.

It is, in general, bad taste for ladies to kiss each other in the presence of gentlemen, with whom they are but slightly acquainted.

XXI.

It is proper to vary the phraseology of questions concerning another's health as much as possible, and to abstain from them entirely toward a superior or a person with whom we are but little acquainted, as such inquiries presuppose some degree of intimacy. Custom forbids a lady to make these inquiries of a gentleman, unless he is very ill or aged.

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XXII.

After we are informed of the health of the persons we are visiting, it is proper to inquire of them in relation to that of their families; and in case of absence of near relations, if they have heard from them lately, and if the news is favorable. They on their part usually ask the same of us.

XXIII.

If in a public promenade you repeatedly pass persons of your acquaintance, salute them only on the first occasion.

XXIV.

It is unladylike to *cut* a person; if you wish to rid yourself of any one's society, a cold bow in the street, and particular ceremony in the circles of your mutual acquaintance, is the best mode to adopt.

XXV.

Always bow when meeting acquaintances in the street. To curtsy is not gracefully consistent with locomotion.

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DRESS AND FASHION.

XXVI.

THE plainest dress is always the most genteel, and a lady that dresses plainly will never be dressed unfashionably. Next to plainness, in every well-dressed lady, is neatness of dress and taste in the selection of colors.

XXVII.

Let your dress harmonize with your complexion, your size, and the circumstances in which you may be placed: for instance, the dress for walking, for a dinner or an evening party, each requires a different style of both material and ornament.

XXVIII.

Avoid the extreme *mode*; and, in adopting the style of your friend, be careful that it will suit your figure, your complexion, and stature: the dress which may be adapted to her may be absurd in you. [15]

XXIX.

If your stature be short, you should not allow a superfluity of flounces upon the skirt of your dress: if you are tall, they may be advantageously adopted when fashion does not forbid them.

XXX.

A very high head-dress would not be suitable for a very tall or short person; the latter may venture upon a higher dress than the former. A person with a short neck should be careful as to the sort of frill she wears, if she considers one necessary; while a person with a very long one may relieve the awkwardness of the appearance by judiciously adopting this article of dress.

XXXI.

A hostess should not dress so richly as when she is a guest: it is good taste in a lady not to appear to vie with her guests in the richness of her attire. [16]

XXXII.

Be not ostentatious in the display of jewelry: if, however, you have superb jewelry, your dress and your establishment should harmonize therewith, or the world will either not give you credit for their real worth, or it will charge you with ostentatious extravagance.

XXXIII.

Never wear mosaic gold or paste diamonds; they are representatives of a mean ambition to appear what you are not, and most likely what you ought not to wish to be.

XXXIV.

Let your ornaments be, then, more remarkable for their intrinsic worth, and for the taste with which they are chosen and worn, than for profusion.

Ladies of good taste seldom wear jewelry in the morning, and when they do, confine themselves to trinkets of gold, or those in which opaque stones only are introduced. Ornaments with brilliant stones are unsuited for a morning costume.

XXXVI.

In large parties do not exhibit any remarkable anxiety for the care of your dress, nor, if an accident should happen thereto, exhibit peculiar or violent emotion; if you are so *distracte*, many will believe that you have exhibited the best portion of your wardrobe.

XXXVII.

Adapt your head-dress, or the style of your hair, to the character of your face. If you have your own maid, she will soon ascertain what style suits you best; if, however, you intrust to a *friseur* this important portion of your appearance, give him complete directions, or he will not regard the character of the physiognomy, but arrange your hair according to the last importation of blocks from Paris or London.

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XXXVIII.

Gloves should harmonize with your dress; and must always be clean. Nothing can be more vulgar than high-coloured gloves: the primrose (and the white for evening parties) are the most elegant, if your dress will admit of their being worn.

XXXIX.

Perfumes are a necessary appendage to the toilet; let them be delicate, not powerful; the Atta of roses is the most elegant; the Heduesmia is at once fragrant and delicate. Many others may be named; but none must be patronized which are so obtrusive as to give the idea that they are not indulged in as a luxury but used from necessity.

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XL.

Keep your finger-nails scrupulously clean, and avoid the disagreeable habit of allowing them to grow to an unnatural length.

XLI.

Singularity of dress and ostentatious ornament are by no means characteristic of a lady, but their adoption proves a *primâ facie* case against the wearer of being a *nouveau riche* striving after notoriety. Station and refinement of manner will make those vulgarisms bearable, or even pleasing; but the parties are then bearable or pleasing in spite of, not in consequence of them.

CONVERSATION,—TATTLING.

XLII.

CONVERSATION is a difficult art, but do not despair of acquiring it. It consists not so much in saying something different from the rest, but in extending the remarks of others; in being willing to please and be pleased; and in being attentive to what is said and to what is passing around you. Talking is not conversation, it is the manner of saying things which gives them their value.

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XLIII.

One of the greatest requisites, also, is the art of listening discreetly. To listen is a delicate piece of flattery, and a compliment so gratifying as to surely recommend you.

XLIV.

Cultivate a soft tone of voice and a courteous mode of expression.

XLV.

It is better to say too little than too much in company: let your conversation be consistent with your sex and age.

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XLVI.

Cautiously avoid relating in one house any follies or faults you may hear or see in another.

XLVII.

Never converse with strangers or mere acquaintances upon family circumstances or differences.

XLVIII.

Do not look for faults in the characters or habits of your friends—the critic generally likes to communicate her opinions or discoveries—hence arises a habit of detraction.

XLIX.

Never encourage tattling or detraction; if there were no listeners this petty vice could not exist; besides, the habit of listening to this sort of gossip will soon induce you to participate, by similar communications.

L.

Abjure punning, and exercising even the most refined RAILLERY: the latter requires both observation and talent, and most people mistake satire for raillery; the one may be the offspring of a vicious, the former must be of an enlightened and benevolent mind.

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LI.

Do not appear abstracted while another person is speaking; and never interrupt another by intruding a remark of your own.

LII.

Avoid pedantry and dogmatism. Be not obtrusively positive in the assertion of your opinions—modesty of speech, as well as manner, is highly ornamental in a woman.

LIII.

Double entendre is detestable in a woman, especially when perpetrated in the presence of men; no man of taste can respect a woman who is guilty of it: though it may create a laugh, it will inevitably excite also disgust in the minds of all whose good opinions are worth acquiring. Therefore not only avoid all indelicate expressions, but appear not to understand any that may be uttered in your presence.

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LIV.

Rather be silent than talk nonsense, unless you have that agreeable art, possessed by some women, of investing little nothings with an air of grace and interest; this most enviable art is indeed very desirable in a hostess, as it often fills up disagreeable pauses, and serves as a prelude for the introduction of more intellectual matter.

LV.

Flattery is a powerful weapon in conversation; all are susceptible to it. It should be used skilfully, never direct, but inferred; better acted than uttered. Let it seem to be the unwitting and even the unwilling expression of genuine admiration, the honest expression of the feelings.

LVI.

Do not (except with a view to improvement) introduce subjects with which you are but superficially acquainted. If you should do so with the idea that all others present are equally or more ignorant than yourself, you may be very disagreeably undeceived, by some quiet, unassuming person, who may have been listening to the development of your ignorance. [24]

LVII.

Do not use the terms "*genteel people*;" "This, that, or the other, is very *genteel*." Substitute for them, "They are highly accomplished;" "he is a gentlemanly man;" "that has a gentlemanly appearance;" "she has the manners of a gentlewoman."

LVIII.

It is not good taste for a lady to say "Yes, Sir," and "No, Sir," to a gentleman, or frequently to introduce the word "Sir" at the end of her sentence, unless she desire to be exceedingly reserved toward the person with whom she is conversing.

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LIX.

Do not introduce proverbs and cant phrases; a well educated lady can always find words to express her meaning, without resorting to these.

LX.

Never introduce your own affairs for the amusement of the company; such discussions cannot be interesting to others, and the probability is that the most patient listener is laying the foundation for some tale to make you appear ridiculous.

LXI.

It is not contrary to good-breeding to laugh in company, and even to laugh heartily when there is anything amusing going on; this is nothing more than being sociable. To remain prim and precise on such occasions, is sheer affectation. Avoid, however, what is called the "horse-laugh."

"

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LXII.

Never laugh at your own remarks; it may be a very agreeable excitation, but it invariably spoils what you are saying.

LXIII.

If you are a wit, do not let your witty remarks engross the whole conversation, as it wounds the self-love of your hearers, who also wish to be heard, and becomes excessively fatiguing.

LXIV.

Do not address persons by the initial of their names; "Mrs. A. says this;" "Mrs. B. does that;" it is a mark of vulgarity.

VISITS.

LXV.

A LADY'S visiting card should be of small size, glazed, but not gilt. It should be engraved in script characters, small and neat, not in German text or Old English. Never have your card printed; a written card, though passable, is not perfectly *au fait*. If you write them, never first draw a line across the card to guide you,—it betokens ill-breeding. [27]

LXVI.

A morning call should not exceed from a quarter of an hour to twenty minutes in duration; the most proper time for such visits is between eleven and two o'clock; if your friends are people of fashion, from twelve to three will be the best hours.

LXVII.

If the persons called on be not at home, leave a card for each person to whom the visit was designed, or beg the servant to mention that you inquired for so many persons.

LXVIII.

The subjects for conversation should harmonize with the character of your visit, and prevent your introducing a gay conversation, when paying a visit of condolence; or subjects requiring deep thought, upon casual visits or calls of ceremony. [28]

LXIX.

In making friendly calls almost all ceremony should be dispensed with. They are made at all hours, without much preparation or dressing.

LXX.

Visits of ceremony should be paid after a nearly similar interval has elapsed from when they were made. People in this way give you notice whether they wish to see you seldom or often.

LXXI.

Never display the visiting cards you may receive, by placing them in the frame of your looking-glass. It is usual to have an ornamental card-basket on the centre table. [29]

LXXII.

If the person you call upon is preparing to go out, or to sit down at table, you ought, although asked to remain, to retire as soon as possible. The person visited so unseasonably, should on her part be careful to conceal her knowledge that the other wishes the visit ended quickly.

LXXIII.

Ceremonious visits should be short; if the conversation ceases without being again continued by the person you have come to see, and if she rises from her seat under any pretext whatever, custom requires you to make your salutation and withdraw. If other visitors are announced, you should leave soon after without saying much. If a letter is brought in, entreat your hostess to read it; she will probably not do so, and this circumstance will warn you to shorten your visit.

LXXIV.

A lady is at liberty to take either a gentleman or another lady to pay a morning visit to a friend, without asking permission; but she should never allow a gentleman the same liberty; if he desires to make any of his friends known to her, he must first ask if the acquaintance would be agreeable. [30]

LXXV.

When a lady visits another for the first time, her visit should be returned within a week.

LXXVI.

If when paying an evening visit you should find a party assembled, enter as you would otherwise have done, but remain only a few minutes, and escape in as quiet a way as possible. Let it be known shortly after, in such a way that it will reach the family, that you were unaware of company being assembled.

LXXVII.

In calling upon a person staying at a hotel, if she is not at home add your address to your name, [31] else your visit may be fruitless.

LXXVIII.

When about to be absent a long time, make your farewell visit short, announcing the fact; if necessary to leave your card, mark on it T. T. L. or P. P. C. When you return, those upon whom you have called will pay you the first visit; those whom you have neglected, will properly conclude the acquaintance is discontinued. If you are married while abroad, this is especially the case.

LXXIX.

Visits after a party or dinner should be paid within the week.

LXXX.

Upon the death of any member of a family with which you have associated, visits of condolence should not be *personally* made until after a week or two has elapsed.

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RECEIVING VISITS.

LXXXI.

In receiving morning visits, lay aside any employment in which you may be occupied; this will enable you to pay those little attentions, and to say those elegant but appropriate nothings, which make your guests immediately at home, and tend to the establishment of your character as one of *the mode*. When your visitors rise to depart, ring the bell for a servant to open the street door.

LXXXII.

Avoid all appearance of anxiety; yet let nothing escape your attention.

LXXXIII.

When visitors enter, rise immediately, advance toward them, and request them to be seated. If it is an elderly person, insist upon his occupying the arm-chair; if a lady, beg her to be seated on the sofa.

[33]

LXXXIV.

In winter the most honorable place is the corner of the fireplace; therefore, if a married lady enters, offer her that seat. If this place is occupied by a young lady, she ought to rise and offer her seat to the other, taking for herself a chair in another part of the room.

LXXXV.

In proportion as the visiter is a stranger, you will rise, and any persons already there, should do

the same. If any withdraw, conduct them as far as the door of the parlor.

LXXXVI.

As hostess, in your attentions, consider all your guests equal; the greatest stranger or person of least rank should, if any, receive more attention than others.

LXXXVII.

If your guests are about to remain on a visit of any length, see before their arrival that their room is furnished with everything which can contribute to neatness, and their comfort. Congratulate them upon their arrival, and express the pleasure it gives you; inquire kindly about the incidents of their journey, and request them to make your house their home. Be assiduous in your attentions, and show them every object of interest about the house and neighborhood. [34]

LXXXVIII.

If your guests express an intention of leaving you, affectionately endeavor to detain them; if not successful, renew your invitation for another visit, and express your regret at parting so soon.

LXXXIX.

The art of receiving company can only be acquired by education, experience, or close observation. Have a determination to act naturally, not hurried, and let a desire to please be a ruling principle; you will then generally act correctly.

[35]

THE BALL-ROOM.

XC.

INVITATIONS to a ball or evening party should be given in the lady's name, and answers to such invitations should be addressed to her, cards of invitation are usually issued from one to three weeks previous to the entertainment.

XCI.

The hours for the arrival of the guests vary from nine to twelve o'clock: in this you will be guided by the usages of the circle in which you move.

XCII.

Never go early to a public ball; and do not be frequently seen at such. When you do attend, do not dance from the time you enter the room until you leave; it may leave the impression that you have few opportunities of dancing except at such balls. [36]

XCIII.

As the fashion for a lady's dress for a ball is so constantly changing, it is impossible to prescribe. But we may remark, that the handkerchief should be "fine as a snowy cobweb," and perfumed just sufficiently to render it agreeable. Your gloves should be of white kid, your shoes small and fitting with the nicest exactness.

XCIV.

When you enter the drawing-room, immediately advance and pay your respects to the ladies of the house; until this is done, do not recognise any one you may know. If, as it sometimes happens, the lady is not in the room when you enter, though the position may be rather embarrassing if you do not meet any acquaintances, do not show that it is so, but enter into conversation with

your partner or the lady nearest you, until the lady returns, when you immediately pay your respects; which should be a little more marked than when paying a morning visit. [37]

XCV.

If possible, do not enter a room alone. If you have no brother or near relation, you may at any time request a gentleman of your acquaintance, who has not been invited by the lady of the house, to accompany you.

XCVI.

The lady of the house should dance, if at all, but little, unless there is a distinguished stranger present to whom it is desirable to pay a compliment. This is necessary, that you may be enabled to attend to your guests, and make the evening agreeable to them. If you do dance, you may select your partner, who should feel honored by the act.

XCVII.

If the hostess intends to dance, it is customary for her to open the ball: if she does not, the host opens it with the lady of the highest rank present. [38]

XCVIII.

When a gentleman who has been properly introduced requests the honor of dancing with you, you will not refuse unless you have a previous engagement.

XCIX.

At the ordinary public balls, it is desirable to make up a party sufficiently large to render you independent of the introductions of the master of the ceremonies, as, in spite of his best efforts, objectionable individuals will gain access to such. When a party is thus formed, you can easily and without rudeness refuse to be introduced to any gentleman, by stating that you are engaged; as of course you would be to your friends for that evening.

C.

If a gentleman presumes to ask you to dance without an introduction, you will of course refuse. It is hardly necessary to supply the fair reader with words to repel such a rudeness; a man must have more than ordinary impertinence if he was not satisfied by your saying, "I must decline, sir, not having the honor of your acquaintance;" and recollect that his previous rudeness ought to be punished by your refusing to be introduced. [39]

CI.

Draw on your gloves in the dressing-room, and do not take them off during the evening, except at supper-time, when it should be invariably done.

CII.

Let your dancing be quiet and unobtrusive; let your movements in the dance be characterized by elegance and gracefulness, rather than by activity and complexity of steps.

CIII.

In giving the hand for "ladies' chain," or any other figures, you should wear a smile, and accompany it with a polite inclination of the head in the manner of a salutation. [40]

CIV.

Pay attention to the dance, but not so marked as to appear as if that attention was necessary to prevent a mistake. A lively manner harmonizes with the scene; but, to preserve this, it is not necessary to be boisterous. Refinement of manners has, in woman, an unspeakable charm.

CV.

Recollect that your partner is for the time being your very humble servant, and that he will be honored by acquiescing in any of your wishes: for instance, you may wish to promenade, to walk from one room to another, to join your friends; you may require a jelly, ice, wine, or any other refreshment; your dress may have become disarranged; in short, he will feel honored by receiving your commands, and ought to anticipate your wishes on most of the above, and many more ordinary occasions. On no account be seen parading a ball-room by yourself. [41]

CVI.

When you are dancing, you will consider yourself engaged to your partner, therefore not at liberty to hold a flirtation between the figures with some other gentleman.

CVII.

Do not mistake affectation for refinement: it would be no less an error than confounding vice with virtue.

CVIII.

Do not make a public room the arena for torturing any simple swain who *perchance* may admire you a little more than you deserve. Recollect that while you are wounding another's heart you may be trifling with your own peace. [42]

CIX.

When you leave a party before the others, do so quietly and as little seen as possible; first making your parting curtsy to the ladies of the house, if convenient. During the week, make them a visit of thanks, at which you may converse of the pleasure of the ball, and the good selection of the company.

CX.

If you are engaged to a gentleman, do not let your attention be paid exclusively to him—the object of your love should alone perceive it.

CXI.

If you have accepted an invitation, do not fail to keep it unless for the most unavoidable reasons.

CXII.

The members of an invited family should not be seen conversing often together at a party.

[43]

MUSIC.

CXIII.

NEVER exhibit any particular anxiety to sing or to play. You may have a fine voice, have a brilliant instrumental execution; but your friends may by possibility neither admire nor appreciate either.

CXIV.

If you intend to sing, do not affect to refuse when asked, but at once accede. If you are a good

singer, your prompt compliance will add to the pleasure of your friends, and to their regard; if you are not the desire to amuse will have been evinced, and will be appreciated.

CXV.

Do not sing songs descriptive of masculine passion or sentiment; there is an abundance of superior songs for both sexes.

[44]

CXVI.

If you are singing second, do not drag on, nor as it were tread upon the heels of your *prima*; if you do not regard your friend's feelings, have mercy on your own reputation, for nine out of ten in every party will think you in the wrong, and those who know that you are singing in correct time, will believe you ill-natured or not sufficiently mistress of the song to wait upon your friend.

CXVII.

If playing an accompaniment to a singer, do not forget that your instrument is intended to aid, not to interrupt: that it is to be subordinate to the song.

CXVIII.

If nature has not given you a voice, do not attempt to sing, unless you have sufficient taste, knowledge, and judgment, to cover its defects by an accompaniment.

[45]

CXIX.

Never sing more than one or two songs consecutively.

CXX.

When at concerts or private parties where music is being performed, never converse, no matter how anxious you may be to do so, or how many persons you may see doing so; and refrain from beating time, humming the airs, applauding, or making ridiculous gestures of admiration.

THE DINNER-TABLE.

CXXI.

INVITATIONS to dinner must of course be answered to the lady. Cards of invitation to a dinner party are usually issued from three days to a fortnight previous to the entertainment; they should specify the hour of meeting. The proper number for such a party is somewhat in dispute: the happy medium may be considered ten.

[46]

CXXII.

As persons are necessarily introduced at a dinner party, only such persons as are known to each other, or who mutually desire to be acquainted should be invited, except under the circumstances alluded to in No. 1.

CXXIII.

Be punctual to the hour appointed.

CXXIV.

When an invitation is accepted, let nothing but imperative necessity compel you to break the

engagement, or at the last moment to send an excuse.

CXXV.

When your guests enter, present them to the others, and if any delay occur, let the conversation be light and on commonplace topics.

CXXVI.

It is usual for the host or hostess to point out to the gentlemen the ladies they are to conduct to the dining-room, according to some real or imaginary standard (age or distinction). If persons of distinction are present, it is desirable that this should be done—of course giving them precedence. [47]

CXXVII.

The hostess follows her guests to the dining-room, the host having led the way with the lady of most consideration; the gentleman of the greatest distinction accompanies the hostess to the dining-room.

CXXVIII.

The hostess takes the head of the table: the seat of honor for a gentleman is at her right hand; for a lady, it is to the right of the host.

CXXIX.

Ladies do not wear gloves during dinner.

CXXX.

In the best houses, the operation of carving is performed at the side tables; *i. e.* the principal joint, or joints, which require strength in the operation, are there carved. [48]

CXXXI.

Table napkins are indispensable at the dinner table; and silver forks are now met with in almost every respectable house. Steel forks, except for carving, are now seldom placed upon the dinner table.

CXXXII.

It is usual to commence with soup, which never refuse; if you do not eat it, you can toy with it until it is followed by fish; of either of which never take more than once.

CXXXIII.

When all are seated, send a plate of soup to every one. Do not ask any one if they will be helped, as every one takes it, of course.

CXXXIV.

Always feed yourself with the fork; a knife is only used as a divider. Use a dessert spoon in eating tarts, puddings, curries, &c., &c. [49]

CXXXV.

If what you are eating before the dessert has any liquid, sop the bread and then raise it to the mouth. For articles of the dessert having liquid, a spoon is usually provided.

CXXXVI.

In helping sauce or vegetables, place them upon the side of the viands on the plate.

CXXXVII.

If anything is sent you from the host or hostess, do not offer it to any other person; and when helped do not wait until others are served, but at once arrange your napkin, and proceed to the important business of the moment.

CXXXVIII.

In helping a joint, do not overload a person's plate; and if game, or any particularly select dish is placed before you, serve it with discretion. [50]

CXXXIX.

In helping, wherever a spoon can be conveniently used, it is preferable to the use of a knife and fork.

CXL.

Fish must be helped with a fish slice: you may carve it more dexterously by taking a spoon in your left hand.

CXLI.

Soup must be eaten from the side, not the point of the spoon; and, in eating it, be careful not to make a noise, by strongly inhaling the breath: this habit is excessively vulgar; you cannot eat too quietly.

CXLII.

In helping soup, recollect that a little more than a ladle full is sufficient.

CXLIII.

As hostess, do not press people to eat more than they appear inclined to take, nor force upon them any particular dish which you may think superexcellent. If any difficulty occurs in carving, you should feel no diffidence in requesting the gentleman to your right or left to assist you: it is a part of their duty and privilege. [51]

CXLIV.

Do not ask any one at the table to help you to anything, but apply to the servant.

CXLV.

The hostess should never send away her plate until all the guests have finished.

CXLVI.

When you send your plate for anything, leave your knife and fork upon it. When you have done, place both together on one side of the plate.

CXLVII.

Servants wait at table in white gloves, or have a fine napkin in their hand, which prevents its contact with your plate.

CXLVIII.

Finger-glasses come on with the dessert; wet a corner of your napkin and wipe your mouth;

then immerse your fingers in the water and dry them with the napkin.

CXLIX.

As hostess, you will give the signal for retiring by rising from the table. The time for so doing varies in different companies, and must be left to your discretion.

CL.

Should your servants break anything while you are at table, do not appear to notice it. If they betray stupidity or awkwardness, avoid reprimanding them publicly, as it only draws attention to their errors, and adds to their embarrassment.

CLI.

During the week which follows the entertainment, each of the guests owes a visit to the entertainer. Converse about the dinner, the pleasure you have enjoyed, and of the persons whom you have met there. [53]

CLII.

The mistress of the house should never appear to pride herself regarding what is on her table, nor confuse herself with apologies for the bad cheer which she may offer you; it is much better for her to observe silence in this respect, and leave it to her guests to pronounce eulogiums on the dinner.

CLIII.

Ladies should not leave the table before the end of the entertainment, unless from urgent necessity. If it is a married lady, she requests some one to accompany her; if unmarried, she goes with her mother.

COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE.

CLIV.

WHEN about to be married send your card with the gentleman's in an envelope to the circle which you intend to visit. They are usually sent by your connexions, or your bridesmaid and groomsman, with your assistance. The lady's should have engraved on it: "At home, —, —th inst. at — o'clock." They should be sent at least one week previous. [54]

CLV.

The styles of card and envelope are so varied that none are more fashionable than others. The cards are sometimes united by a white ribbon, or silken cord.

CLVI.

After marriage you need not retain the whole of your previous acquaintance; those only to whom you send cards are for the future, considered in the circle of your visiting acquaintance. The bridegroom selects those persons among his former associates whom he wishes to retain as such.

CLVII.

When the married pair receive company call upon them, offer your compliments, and wish them much happiness in their new sphere. Address the bride *first*. Do not remain longer than a few minutes, unless it is an evening party; when, after paying your respects, mingle with the rest of [55]

the company. Retire early from a wedding party.

CLVIII.

Newly married persons should abstain in public from every mark of affection too conspicuous, and every exclusive attention.

SERVANTS.

CLVIX.

Do not imagine that you will increase your importance by *hauteur* to your own or to other people's servants.

[56]

CLX.

At the house of your friend always preface your request to a servant by the words, "I would thank you for so and so;" and do not omit the usual courtesy on receiving it.

CLXI.

Do not scold your servants; you had better turn them away at once. When they need reproof, give them it in a calm, dignified, and firm manner; but on no account, if you can possibly avoid it, find fault with them in the presence of strangers, even though they should let fall the tray with your best set of china upon it.

CLXII.

If you have only one servant, speak of her by her Christian name; if you have more, talk of them by the names of their offices, such as nurse, cook, housemaid, footman, &c., but always address them by their Christian names.

[57]

LETTERS AND NOTES.

CLXIII.

In writing, endeavor to make your style clear, concise, elegant, and appropriate for all subjects. Avoid repetitions, erasures, insertions, omissions, and confusion of ideas, or labored construction. If your letter is to an equal or friend, these blemishes may remain; if otherwise, it must be commenced again.

CLXIV.

To write on very coarse paper is allowable only for the most indigent; to use gilt-edged and perfumed paper for letters of business, would be ridiculous. The very best paper, but plain or without much ornament, is most to be recommended.

CLXV.

It is extremely impolite to write upon a single leaf of paper, even if it is a billet; it should always be double, although we write only two or three lines. Envelopes are now used almost as much as the paper itself is.

[58]

CLXVI.

Use a lofty style towards persons to whom you owe respect; an easy, trifling, or even jesting style toward a friend, and a courteous style toward one another generally.

CLXVII.

The date is often necessary to the understanding of many passages of your letter, therefore never omit it. It may be put at the right hand of the commencement of the letter, if writing to an equal; but in writing to a superior, it should be at the end, in order that the title at the head of the letter may be entirely alone.

CLXVIII.

Seal your communications with wax: bronze or other colors are more suitable than red; use black wax when in mourning. Let the seal be small; large ones are in very bad taste.

[59]

CLXIX.

Ceremonious notes and social letters should always be in the third person, and of course not signed.

CLXX.

Letters of introduction should be concise and brief, and enclosed in an envelope, unsealed.

FUNERALS.

CLXXI.

WHEN any of your acquaintances are deceased, be at the house at not quite an hour after the time specified, as the procession moves exactly one hour after the time announced.

CLXXII.

It is optional whether you go to the grave or not; it is customary now, to go merely to the house, until the procession has moved, when you are at liberty to return to your ordinary pursuits.

[60]

CLXXIII.

Returning cards "of thanks" after a death for visits of condolence, implies that the bereaved parties are prepared to receive visitors; it must, therefore, be with them entirely a matter of feeling, as to how soon it is done.

CARDS.

CLXXIV.

NEVER be too punctilious and exacting with regard to the penalties incurred through mistakes.

CLXXV.

Lose without any exhibition of ill-humor, and win without any symptoms of exultation.

[61]

CLXXVI.

Never lose your temper at cards, and avoid the exhibition of anxiety or of vexation at want of success. If you are playing whist, not only keep your temper, but hold your tongue; any intimation to your partner is not ladylike.

CLXXVII.

Women should never play, unless they can retain the command of their temper. She who wishes to win a heart or retain one, should never permit her admirers to behold her at cards, as the anxiety they produce is as destructive to beauty as to sentiment.

PRESENTS.

CLXXVIII.

LADIES' gifts to gentlemen should be of the most refined nature possible; little articles not purchased, but those deriving a priceless value as being the offering of their gentle skill, such as a trifle from their needle, or a picture from their pencil. But such offerings, though invaluable among friends, are not used on occasions of ceremony.

[62]

CLXXIX.

In the eyes of persons of delicacy, presents are of no worth, except from the manner in which they are bestowed. Strive, then, to give them this value.

CLXXX.

Never give away a present which you have received from another; or at least, so arrange it, that it may never be known.

CLXXXI.

Endeavor always to present an article which the recipient has not. This in many cases may be difficult; but where it is possible, it should always be done. I have known gentlemen to receive half a dozen purses, only one of which did they use.

[63]

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

CLXXXII.

IN entering any public room with a gentleman, let him precede you and obtain a seat.

CLXXXIII.

If at another's house you should break anything, do not appear to notice it. Your hostess, if a lady, would take no notice of the calamity, nor say, as is sometimes done by ill-bred persons, "Oh! it is of no consequence."

CLXXXIV.

Do not beat the “devil’s tattoo,” by drumming with your fingers on a table. Never read in an audible whisper; it disturbs those near you.

CLXXXV.

You should never take the arms of two gentlemen, one being upon either side.

[64]

CLXXXVI.

A lady ought not to present herself alone in a library or museum, unless she goes there to study or work as an artist.

CLXXXVII.

Perfect order, exquisite neatness and elegance, which easily dispense with being sumptuous, ought to mark the entrance of the house, the furniture, and the dress of the lady.

CLXXXVIII.

The most obvious mark of good breeding and good taste is a sensitive regard for the feelings of others.

CLXXXIX.

Dean Swift, I think, remarks, that good breeding does not consist so much in the observance of particular forms, as in bringing the dictates of refined sense and taste to bear upon the ordinary occurrences of life.

THE END.

Transcriber’s Note

The following typographical errors were corrected.

Page	Error	Correction
1	ALLEN,	ALLEN.
47	CXXVII	CXXVII.
49	CXXXVIII	CXXXVIII.
53	in an evnelope	in an envelope

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TRUE POLITENESS: A HAND-BOOK OF ETIQUETTE FOR LADIES ***

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