

The Bad Manners of "Polite People"

By Walter Prichard Eaton in The Scrap Book

All my life I have suffered from politeness—not my own, but the politeness of other people. So far as I know, nobody has ever accused me of being polite. I suspect that I must be, however, for hitherto I have borne the politeness of other people without a protest. But I must protest now, if only to vindicate my lack of politeness; in other words, to prove my good manners.

For, what I object to in polite people is their bad manners. It is this I have suffered from, as, I suspect, have many thousands of my fellows, to whom life is real and earnest, and gable not its goal. As a rule, the polite person the worse are his (or, more often, perhaps, her) manners. The limit is reached when the amateur is sunk entirely in the professional, and that curious product of "Society" is developed, the professional hostess. I cannot better illustrate my theme than with a description of the professional hostess.

I call her professional because all the joy of entertaining for its own sake has gone out of parties because she is glad to see them, because she is interested in them, or wishes to give them pleasure. She invites them because to entertain them is a part of her day's work—whether her work be to get into a certain social stronghold, to keep that stronghold against assault, or merely to kill time, her arch-enemy. And, in performing this task of hers, she has developed a technique of politeness which is to the amateur's technique what the professional golf-player's style is to the form of the mere bumblepuppy. Her politeness is astonishingly brilliant, flexible, resourceful. It is inspired by the lowly and aped on the stage. And yet her manners are the worst in the world.

Let us suppose her about to give a dinner. She is trimmed down to the fashionable slenderness (perhaps), and brilliant with jewels. Cannel coal snaps pleasantly in the drawing-room grate, and the lights are gratefully shaded. A guest or two arrive, whom she greets with affable handshake. The man moves over to the fire, warming his back; his wife talks to the hostess rapidly, in the way women have when they seem to think it better to say anything than not to speak at all. But the hostess is quite at her ease. Her politeness is triumphant. Presently she turns to the man, who is, perhaps, an author.

"Your new book," she begins, as if she had been waiting all day to ask that question, "what is it going to be about? I'm tremendously eager to know."

Already the genial fire has warmed the noted author after his chilling ride in a street car to this mansion of luxury. The kindly

question positively expands him. He launches eagerly into his answer.

"You see," he begins, "the great modern question is—"

But suddenly he is aware that he has no listener. His hostess has gone toward the door with outstretched hand, and his own wife is gazing at the gowns of the women entering. The author turns and prods the grate with his toe. Perhaps, if he is new at being "entertained," he fancies that his hostess will presently return to hear his answer. He holds it in readiness. Poor man!

The newcomers are brought into the circle. When introductions are necessary, they are made with studied informality. And then the author hears the hostess say to a big, energetic woman, who is among the arrivals, "Oh, dear Miss Jones, I have heard so much about your perfectly splendid work down there among the horrid poor! I did so much want to hear you talk about it at the Colonial Club, this afternoon, but I simply couldn't get there. Won't you tell me just a bit of what you said?"

The tone of entreaty betrays the utmost interest. The big, energetic woman smiles, and begins. "Well," she says, "I was just trying to get the members interested in our new health-tenement for consumptives. You see, we need—"

Then she, too, becomes aware that her audience has departed toward the door. She turns about to see if anybody else was listening, but nobody was. The other women are engaged in inspecting the newcomers. The men are looking uncomfortably, or chatting with one another. Only the author's sympathetic gaze meets hers.

The guests have all gathered by now, but dinner is not yet announced. The hostess moves easily among them, stopping by each with a winning smile, to ask some carefully chosen personal question. Each as politely replies, only to find himself talking to the empty air.

There is soon a confused babble of voices, a whirl of windy words—and no one hears.

The author watches her, still curious to know whether she will remember that she has not yet heard his answer. But she has quite forgotten. She moves, the incarnate spirit of politeness, about the room, rousing trains of eager ideas in her guests, and as speedily leaving them to run down a side-track into a bumper.

She has no real interest in any of them; probably she has no real understanding of them. She thinks her manners are above reproach, that she is treating her guests in the most exemplary fashion. In reality, nothing

could be worse than her manners, and she is treating her guests most shabbily.

By being polite she ends by being rude. For nothing is so rude in this world as to ask a man a question about some subject close to his heart when you have no intention of listening to his answer, nor any interest in it. The hostess thinks to feed his vanity; she ends by wounding it. She thinks to make her guests comfortable; she ends by making them uncomfortable.

The best manners I have ever seen were possessed by the most impolite man I have ever known. As a result, nobody that he ever invited to his house felt uncomfortable there.

He was interested in all kinds of conditions of people, all kinds and conditions of activities. If he asked you a question, it was because he wanted to hear your answer. He paid you the compliment of assuming that it was worth listening to, and other people waited till you were through. At his table you weren't supposed to confine your talk to the sweet young thing on your left, who was more interested in the gay young blade on her left, nor to the sedate, elderly female person on your right, who was more interested in the bishop on her right.

Talk was largely for the whole table; and if you hadn't some definite contribution to make, you were usually glad to keep still.

I say nobody ever felt uncomfortable in his house. That is not quite true. Occasionally the person who expressed an opinion on a subject he knew nothing about must have felt uncomfortable. For, though he was listened to gravely while speaking, conversation was at once resumed as if nothing whatever had been said.

Nothing could have been more conventionally impolite. And yet the act was so utterly free from sham that it seemed the only decorous and decent thing to do. Thus was the dignity of conversation maintained; thus was each man and woman made to feel his or her worth along personal lines of endeavor; thus was a real democratic spirit preserved, which is the true essence of good manners.

True democracy consists in bringing each man out, not in reducing him to a common level of inanity. Good manners consist in showing him respect for what is worthy of respect in him, treating him as a rational human being, not as a mere social unit, who deposits his hard-won opinions, along with his hat and stick, in the care of the butler when he enters the house.

That is why men, as a rule, better manners than women, though they are far less polite. A man respects the judgment of a

specialist on any given subject, and he is rather tolerant of the snap judgments of the dabbler or the dilettante. He listens, if forced to, with unconcealed impatience to the babbling of his pretty neighbor at table about art, perhaps, or engineering, or some other topic concerning which her ignorance is as profound as her cocksureness is lofty. But, after all, to be polite to her is to insult a whole race of engineers or artists! Put one of them beside him, and see how readily he will listen.

Politeness too often consists of shamming. Good manners are the absence of sham. It is not the gentleman's place, certainly, to insult the lady. Good manners seldom go quite so far as that. But even politeness cannot expect him to endure the torture for more than a limited time, especially if the topic chosen chances to be his own specialty.

It is his place to lead, as gently as possible, the conversation back upon more neutral ground, where he may find what consolation he can in sprightly personalities, while praying for the coffee.

I enjoy the privilege of acquaintance with a very charming person, who has never paid a compliment to her sex except by being a woman. Some of her sex say that she is a delightful hostess and very beautiful. Others say that she is atrociously rude, and they "can't see what it is people admire in her." Most men adore her. She herself says that the only people she cares to entertain are those who have earned their own living. Her reasons are, I believe, interesting and significant.

She earns her own living, I may state, and a very considerable one, for she is famous and highly successful in her branch of artistic endeavor. Socially, one may say of her, in that atrocious phrase, which implies a queer jumble of values, that she is "very much in demand." But, though her private telephone number is in the "Social Register," and a man in livery opens her front door, the street cars bring quite as many guests to her house as do expensively purring motor cars.

For, as she puts it, "I can stand the talk of the average woman in 'Society,' just about fifteen minutes, and then I have to scream. I don't know how the fiction arose that American women of the leisure classes are so superior mentally to the women of other nations. The fact is, they are not."

"The fact is, that they are so superficial that a person who has really 'done' something—I don't mean who has played at it, but has really under the spur of necessity got to the bottom of some subject—can hardly endure their conversation. They chatter, chatter,

chatter, about everything under heaven, and if you happen to know anything about any of the subjects, it is simply torture to listen."

"Why, the other day one of them who 'patronizes' artists—who feeds them and flatters them, who has, in her set, a considerable reputation for 'culture'—talked to me about a certain play she had been reading by an English woman of some note. She wished to present it for one of the charities she affects, and was planning to stage it herself. 'Is it in verse?' I incidentally asked."

"No," said she. "At least, I don't think so. 'Don't you know?' said I. 'You read it, didn't you?'"

"Well, it didn't rhyme, anyhow," she replied. "Maybe it was in blank verse."

"I suppose that woman is going about now, telling how bad my mubbers are. But I have spent most of my life in the theatre, and I could not endure her any longer."

"What did you say to her?" I asked. She smiled.

"I told her she ought to lecture on the 'Drama' to women's clubs or else get a job as a critic!"

"Life is too short, and too interesting, and the world too full of real people," she went on, "to bother with the folks who didn't know their business. The man or woman who has had to be self-supporting has got to the bottom of some branch of activity, however small, and learned humility. To learn that mastery of even a tiny subject requires effort and concentration and skill, is to learn respect for other subjects; and it is to learn, too, how to listen."

"Nobody can listen who isn't truly interested, and who hasn't the grasp of mind to appreciate the complexities of a craft not his own, who doesn't know enough to know when he doesn't know anything. If I'm going to talk my shop, I want to talk it with folks who've been in it. If I'm going to hear some other shop discussed, it must be by some one who is familiar with that, not by directed dabbles who, you feel, after three minutes have elapsed, don't know a thing about the subject."

"If politeness consists in letting them suppose that I take any stock in what they say, then I plead guilty to being a boor."

Probably no one who has experienced the awful ordeal of listening to some female chatter about his chosen subject, or who has undergone the even worse ordeal of dropping great thoughts of his own into the deep, deep pools of her incomprehension, will fail of sympathy with my friend.

"But I tire you," said an incessant gabbler one day to the great Duc de Broglie.

"No, no," replied the duke; "I wasn't listening."

Household Economy in Germany

Not alone in America has the rise in the cost of living developed a problem of the gravest importance to every one. From all over the world come reports of the increasing hardship of the human struggle for existence. Especially grinding is it in those lands where wages are lowest and opportunities fewest.

In Germany, the very name of which has become a synonym of thrift, an investigation by the government of the relation of receipts and expenditures in the average German household, recently completed, has revealed the startling fact that, taking the families which rendered accounts as a basis, the wage-earner is running behind his income at the rate of ten dollars a year. The Imperial Statistical Bureau, which conducted the inquiry, offers no deductions from this finding, but it is evident to the simplest mind that such a state of affairs cannot continue indefinitely. If conditions among the families which reported hold good for the remainder of the nation, either a readjustment must be effected, or the empire must become a nation of paupers.

Full household accounts for one year, from eight hundred and fifty-two families, furnished the data for the report of the statistical bureau. These families averaged 4.64 individuals each, of whom 2.29 were children under fifteen years of age.

The heads of three hundred and eighty-two families were skilled industrial workmen and the annual incomes in such homes averaged \$448.63. In fifty-two families the breadwinner was an unskilled industrial workman, with an average income of \$310.79 a year. The highest average was in the families of three engineers and building superintendents, \$881.79, and the scale of income ranged from that to laborer's wages.

The total income for the eight hundred and fifty-two households, during the year the investigation lasted, was \$444,561.18, and the total expenditure was \$453,005.88, leaving a deficit of \$8,544.70. Or, averaging incomes and expenditures, each family received in the year \$521.70, and each spent \$531.69, which left it in debt on New Year's Day, to the amount of just \$9.99.

This deficit was not, however, universal among all the families. On the other hand, it was noteworthy that it appeared with some regularity in the families of highest earning power, while those with the least managed to make both ends meet. But in none was there much of a margin for meeting the proverbial rainy-day, or illness.

How was the average income spent? Out of the \$521.70, \$242.17, or 46.55 per cent (nearly one-half), went for food. Ninety-five dollars and a half, or about one-sixth was spent for rent; clothing and washing claimed \$67.23,

or one-eighth—not a large sum for dressing and laundry-work for a family of 4.64 persons. Heat and light cost \$21.62, and other expenses, not classifiable, \$105.18, or nearly one-fifth.

An odd and interesting fact developed in the course of a similar inquiry conducted along more restricted lines in the city of Nuremberg. It was that of the fifty-five families there, which turned in complete accounts for one year, the average spent more than one-half of their entire income for food and drink. The item included not only the cost of the home table, but the cost of food and drink consumed at public houses. And almost ten per cent of the entire income was expended at public houses, most of it for beer.

Very little went for tobacco. The home diet was mainly meat, sausage, black bread, and beer. Every other item on the list was lower than those revealed in the wider investigation, covering a number of German cities. Clothing and washing, for instance, took only 10.5 per cent of the total income; heat and light, only 4.6 per cent.

There are other items of life in Nuremberg, however, which deserve attention. One is that of insurance. An average of 6.1 of the total income goes for imperial sick, accident, and old age dues. Contributions to social and intellectual ends, including subscriptions of newspapers, contributions to political parties, and union dues, demand 3.6 per cent of the income.

So if the increased cost of living seems to bear down hard on the American wage-earner, he enjoys the cold comfort of knowing that others than himself find it a difficult task to make both ends meet.

THE INDEPENDENT HOUSE-FLY

I believe we can nowhere find a better type of a perfectly free creature than in the common house-fly. Not free only, but brave; and on-reverent to a degree which I think no human republican could by any philosophy exalt himself to. There is no courtesy in him; he does not care whether it is king or clown whom he teases; and in every step of his swift mechanical march, and in every pause of his resolute observation, there is one and the same expression of perfect egotism, perfect independence and self-confidence, and conviction of the world's having been made for flies. Strike at him with your hand; and to him, the mechanical fact and external aspect of the matter is what to you it would be if an acre of red clay, ten feet thick, tore itself up from the ground in one massive field, hovered over you in the air for a second, and came crashing down with an aim. That is the external aspect of it; the inner aspect, to his fly's mind, is of a quite

natural and unimportant occurrence—one of the minor conditions of his active life. He steps out of the way of your hand, and lights on the back of it. You cannot terrify him, nor govern him, nor persuade him, nor convince him. He has his own positive opinion on all matters—not an unwise one, usually, for his own ends—and will ask no advice of yours. He has no work to do—no tyrannical instinct to obey. The earthworm has his digging; the bee her gathering and building; the spider her cunning network; the ant her treasury and accounts. All these are comparatively slaves, or people of vulgar business. But your fly, free in the air, free in the chamber—a black incarnation of caprice—wandering, investigating, flitting, flitting, feasting at his will, with rich variety of choice in feast, from the heaped sweets in the grocer's window to those of the butcher's back yard, and from the galled place on your cab-horse's back to the brown spot in the road, from which, as the hoof disturbs him, he rises with angry, repulsive buzz—what freedom is like him?—John Ruskin.

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ODD ITEMS FROM MANY SOURCES

Marriages of minors are much more frequent in mining and manufacturing than in agricultural districts.

The Australian Minister of Defence has offered \$25,000 for the invention of an efficient aeroplane by an Australian.

As recently as 1837 forgery was punished by death in England.

In the English "Black Country" there are thirty thousand waste acres, of which fourteen thousand might be profitably afforested.

Upon experiments in aerial navigation for military purposes, France spent \$238,500; Germany, \$1,993,655; Austria-Hungary, \$27,500; and Great Britain, \$26,350, in 1908.

A resolution advocating the forthrightly washing and disinfecting of all mail bags has been passed by a conference of Irish post office clerks.

The United States Weather Bureau is making arrangements for a perfect system of communicating warnings of coming storms to all steamers at sea fitted with wireless apparatus.

Nearly three and one-quarter million tons of potatoes were raised in Ireland last year.

Five collections of stamps have realized an aggregate total of \$504,500 at recent sales.

Blackmail in a serious case may be punished with penal servitude for life in England.

In most of the civilized countries of the world, except Ireland, Italy and Bulgaria, the death-rate is lower among females than among males.

The British House of Commons was originated by Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, in 1258, to strengthen his own power in opposition to Henry III.

News From Our Consulates

A syndicate of American capitalists from Michigan and Puget Sound Lumber Company, composed of millionaire Michigan lumbermen, has purchased for one million dollars the largest lumber mill on Vancouver Island. The mill is equipped with latest improved American machinery, but it is announced that it will be practically rebuilt, and the annual capacity increased from fifteen million feet to fifty million feet.

Consul Isaac A. Manning, of La Guayra, reports that the government of Venezuela has cancelled a concession granted January 14, 1908, to Narciso Seldivia, who in turn had ceded it to Dr. Rafael Garbarras Guzman, for the exploitation of asphalt deposits in the municipality of Cano Colorado, district of Monagas, State of Bermudez, because the concessionaries have not recorded maps of the deposits as required by the contract.

The first survey and preliminary arrangements have been completed by the Transvaal government for the extension of the railway from Pietersburg to the copper fields of Messina, two hundred miles to the north, with an ultimate continuation across the Limpopo into Rhodesia. The whole district through which the railway will run is rich in mineral resources and agricultural possibilities. The construction of the line, which is to be proceeded with forthwith, will mark an important epoch in Transvaal development.

In September, China will entertain twenty-four representatives of the eight associated chambers of commerce of the Pacific Coast. Governor-General Forbes, of the Philippine Islands, has asked them to visit Manila. The Honolulu Chamber of Commerce will send three representatives with the party.

The National Demographic Bureau of Buenos Ayres estimates the population of Argentina on December 31, 1909, as 6,805,684, an increase of 311,684 in one year. In population Argentina ranks second among the South American republics. Brazil is first, with 22,000,000. Chili ranks third with 3,520,000. Of Argentina's population, five-sixths are native Argentines, 843,540 Italians, 424,805 Spaniards and 104,990 French.

Venezuela is establishing wireless stations and using American apparatus.

The one hundred and sixteen mile extension of the Mexico Northwestern Railroad, now in progress, will connect the city of Chihuahua with El Paso, Texas, and open up large tracts of valuable timber land in western Chihuahua.

An American company has been incorporated to build a forty-mile railroad in Ecuador. The capital is one million three hundred and eighty thousand dollars.

Aden makes ten million cigarettes a year at a very low cost of production. Wages are sixteen cents a day.

On March 1 Canada will abolish its surtax on German goods under a temporary trade agreement.

The Honduras Monetary Commission recommends adoption of the gold standard; practically no gold is in circulation at present but considerable is exported.

Concrete construction is coming into general use on English farms.

Fifteen American consulates in France report \$133,000,000 worth of shipments to the United States in 1909, against \$31,000,000 worth in 1908. Paris leads with \$66,000,000.

All the large watch factories of Germany have pooled their issues under an agreement binding until 1920.

Riga, Russia, population 355,000 is to have a new central passenger station with approaches, an improved custom-house quay, harbor extension, and new warehouses.

An Anglo-Persian oil syndicate is drilling wells extensively at Ahwaz, on the Karun River, Mesopotamia, Turkish Arabia. This threatens the market of American oil, which British firms at present control.

HOW CHINESE KILL THEMSELVES WITH GOLD

The well-known General Ma Yu-K'un is among those of the Chinese officials who have succumbed from their attempts to break off the opium habit. In one or two cases the disgraced officer has "swallowed gold." The following is an authoritative account, written by a very learned Chinese for the Westminster Gazette, of how this much-contested form of suicide is accomplished:

"In swallowing gold, it is not loose gold-leaf or gold-dust that is swallowed, but a solid lump of gold, or even a gold ring, weighing about half an ounce. Gold is not at any time of a corrupting nature; but when a lump of it is swallowed and gets into the bowel, it fails, on account of its intrinsic weight, to rise and surmount the convulsions of the bowels, and can therefore never complete its passage. After two or three days it therefore sinks through the bowel and destroys life without any suffering."

The working power of an able-bodied man is about one-tenth that of a horse.