



Etiquette.

THE ART OF CONVERSATION.

Conversation is rapidly becoming one of the lost arts. With all our increased knowledge and improved methods of acquiring it, few persons can formulate their thoughts on any question, or express them gracefully. Speaking has become a public profession. At the most intellectual assemblies, instead of such interchange of thought as men of vivid mentality would enjoy, there are usually a few addresses by what may be called professional speakers, the matter of which has usually been read previously in reviews or books. On all such occasions, it is very evident that few but the speakers themselves find these addresses of interest. Men go to them to look rather than to listen, and seem so absorbed in their own reflections that even the ordinary courtesies of life, in the way of social greetings, are ignored. It is just the same in more social circles, or, rather, circles which should be more social. The majority of people have not ideas enough to entertain themselves or one another. If something in the way of song, dance, or game is not provided for the amusement of the guests, the gathering themselves together becomes a melancholy function. Education, if it means anything, should prepare people to find some satisfaction in the mind itself, without the aid of mechanical appliances.

It does appear as though many of the minor arts, which were formerly regarded as mere accomplishments, have of late years been relegated to a strictly financial basis. Any one who can turn a tune studies for the stage or church choir, and those who used to hear them in social circles hear them no more, save in public performances, and yet with so many musicians there is not as lively singing as there used to be on the stage.

GOOD MANNERS.

Good manners are commonly urged because of the great personal advantage that they give one.

Their value in this respect cannot be overestimated; they are the passport everywhere and to all, and make one the equal of any.

But I want to speak of the matter as a duty; and it is a duty, because it is the source of so great happiness.

A person of refined manners is, like a fine work of art, a source of pleasure to others.

Duty comes not only by doing, but by being, and to be a person of delicate ways and gracious manners is a part of character.

It requires special thought and rules, and thorough training.

I do not intend to suggest any rules, but only to offer a hint or two that may be helpful.

Let me first say that you cannot put on and lay off good manners as a garment; you cannot observe them in society, as it is called, and neglect them at home; you cannot treat one set of people politely, and another set indifferently.

Good manners, more than almost anything else, are the result of uniform habit, and the best aid in learning them is a spirit of reverence and helpfulness.

Old Dekker was not irreverent when he spoke of Jesus as "the first true gentleman that ever breathed," and Hare hit the exact truth when he declared that "a Christian is God Almighty's gentleman."

The basis of politeness to woman is reverence for the sex.

A gentleman will never, by look, or word, or touch treat a woman with other than reverence, and if there can be added a touch of mystical chivalry or idealism, all the better.

The basis of good manners among elders and superiors is reverence for age and position, for the reason that age is supposed to bring wisdom and position to indicate worth.

The basis of general good manners is reverence for humanity.

We must not graduate our politeness to others by their deserts—little here, much there—but, instead, make it full and constant to all.

But the helpful spirit is the most practical point. The last of Mr. Hale's four rules is the best, and the sum of the rest, "Lend a hand."

Nothing will take one so far on the road to good manners as this, if it springs from a real desire and is made habitual.

But it must include giving the easy chair to your sister, as well as to her pretty friend, and showing consideration for the poor man, rather sooner than for the rich.

So many fine things have been said upon the subject that I cannot forbear quoting a few of them.

The best definition, perhaps, is that of Sydney, "high erected thoughts seated in the heart of courtesy."

Emerson says that "a beautiful behavior is better than a form; it is the finest of the fine arts."

I close with some lines by J. T. Fields, who was himself a fine illustration of them:

"How sweet and gracious, even in common speech,
Is that fine sense which men call courtesy!
Wholesome as air, and genial as the light,
Welcome in every clime as breath of flowers,
It transmutes aliens into trusting friends,
And gives its owner passport round the globe."

A LADY.

No lady who is rude to her servants, who gets into rages and abuses them, will ever win the mysterious and difficult title. Again, no lady who is hail-fellow-well-met with her servants, who chaffs them, or who makes friends with them too obviously, can attain it. That sort of lady may be liked, may be loved indeed, but she will not be called perfect. "A very pleasant-spoken lady," "as good-tempered a lady as ever lived," or possibly "a very familiar lady"—a somewhat Malapropian expression in occasional use—but not a "perfect lady."

A perfect lady means, then, a lady who keeps to her own place—or what is considered to be her place by those who use the words. She is a lady who lets it clearly be seen that she is incapable of doing anything for herself that a servant can possibly do for her, whether it be putting on coals or tidying a room, who is always somewhat expensively dressed, who keeps perfectly calm and self-possessed, whatever accidents happen, who is coldly polite to her inferiors, and yet never rude, and who, in fact, treats her household as if they were made of a different clay. This is the perfect lady. Truly a not very interesting or amiable figure.