

BOTH ENDS OF A BELL WIRE

BY FLORENCE HOWE HALL



DOOR bells are pretty fair indicators of character. Probably you have not been conscious of it, but every time you pull a door bell you register what manner of man you are as certainly as though you were dropping a nickel in the ubiquitous slot. Your ring will not tell everything about you, from the color of your eyes to your taste in flowers, but to those who know the signs the door bell is as good as a title page. Anyone who has had occasion to answer bell pulls knows how much difference there is in them. One person's method varies very little from time to time, though the difference between that method and somebody's else, while slight, will be sufficiently well marked. It is seldom that two rings are exactly alike.

Any busy housewife doing or superintending her own work, and anxious to avoid unnecessary interruptions, learns the language of door bells with almost unerring certainty. The one she knows best is perhaps the postman's. That has a professional snap and vim in it which is unmistakable. It says as plainly as words, "Come now; I'm in a hurry. I shall stand here just forty-five seconds, and then shove this letter under the door." The grocer's young man has a bad temper; we do not have to watch him to know all about the quick, vicious jerk that almost snaps the wire, and sends a wild jangle into every corner of the house. That bell almost swears. The ring which announces the minister's wife is as different as can be; the bell seems almost to ring itself, and the tones flow smoothly out, proclaiming "peace to all in this house."

So the housewife recognizes each; the impatient man, who pulls the bell twice in quick succession, and does not wait long before trying it again; the one of more phlegmatic temperament, whose ring is slower and more substantial; the hesitating woman who draws the knob out in a succession of nervous little jerks; the seedy individual with matches to sell, who stretches the wire carefully to its full length, and then allows it to relax with a faint, apologetic tinkle; and the jolly friend who knows he is welcome, and therefore grasps the knob with a hearty swing that is fairly eloquent with good nature, and sets the bell to shaking its sides with such peals of echoing laughter that it positively cannot stop all at once, but subsides gradually with a merry, irrepressible, little titter. A door bell has as many voices as visitors.

There is nearly as much difference in the way bells are answered. It is quite as important to know how to answer the bell as to know how to ring it. Servants are apt to be quite neglectful in this particular. I know of certain houses where you can always tell whether the mistress is out or at home by the speed, or lack of speed, with which the servant comes to the door. To be sure, it is not always possible to respond instantly. In houses where there is only one servant she may be engaged in kneading bread or scrubbing a kitchen floor, and will, of course, require a couple of minutes to wash her hands and put on a clean apron. But servants are not always the offenders in this matter of slow response to a bell. It seems almost to amount to a fad among certain fashionable people to keep one standing on the door step an unconscionably long time, no matter if the weather be wet or the thermometer down among the teens. Perhaps it is intended that the visitor shall have an abiding sense of the importance of the household, or it may be that the mistress wishes more time to make a change of toilette; but whatever the cause the delay is highly exasperating and altogether unpardonable. The practice does more than cast a doubt upon the hospitality of the household; it is a gross discourtesy. In your parlor you would not wait fifteen seconds before answering your visitor's question; why should you keep him on your door step five or ten minutes when he rings to know whether you are at home?

The philosophy of door bells is not known to the etiquette books, but it includes some things which may be remembered with profit at either end of the wire.

THE CHICAGO WAY

A group of Western and Eastern members were recently sitting in a committee room in the House, at Washington, when the subject came up of Sousa, the famous band-master of the Marine Band, going to Chicago.

"Why, Chicago'll want the Capitol next," an Eastern member remarked.

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