

## THE WELL-BRED GIRL IN SOCIETY

By Mrs. Burton Harrison

FIRST PAPER—THE YOUNG GIRL AND DANCING



IT is my purpose in taking up the subject of young womanhood in its relation to well-bred society, to treat it not in the manner of a literary essay, nor yet of a guide to etiquette, but to set forth simply what observation has suggested as some aims to be kept in view, and some mistakes to be avoided by a girl who wishes to be judged by the standards that prevail in the conventional life of large cities in America.

If one were to accept the oracles sent forth by certain newspaper correspondents writing from New York, our débutantes might be ranked by the reading public with athletic champions in training for boxing matches. What these young women are supposed to eat and drink, details of their bran baths, alcohol baths, massage treatment, exercise during the hours when they are not engaged in the display of their physical accomplishments before the world, are there enumerated to a degree that ceases to amuse, and comes dangerously near disgusting the recipients of the confidence. Next, we hear of how many cotillions a week the young lady dances; how many luncheons and dinners she attends; her meteoric course from one scene of gaiety to another; the methods employed by her backers and trainers to recuperate exhausted nature in order that she may go at it again—not to speak of the amount of costly millinery considered essential for her various appearances—and all told in a way to make the casual reader throw down his journal and thank Heaven he has not a daughter to bring out, or a wife to seek in the glittering ranks of fashion.

Of this alleged type of the American girl I must avow myself ignorant. I have never met her except in the columns of a sensation-seeking newspaper. My impression is that such a creature would not enjoy herself overmuch if she were to dawn before the startled gaze of conservative entertainers. And I protest against her being accepted by people at a distance as a specimen of American civilization. She has wrought mischief enough in young imaginations who follow her from afar and model themselves accordingly.

## A GIRL'S FIRST GLIMPSE OF SOCIETY

MORE pleasant to contemplate is our familiar modern débutante; the home-bred maiden who, arriving at the age of eighteen or thereabout, is introduced by her parents to their acquaintances, to thenceforth take her place beside her mother as hostess, and as participant in hospitalities extended to the family. If we look up the specific definition of society it will be found to be not only "the more cultivated portion of any community in its social relations and influences," but also "those who mutually give and receive formal entertainments." The first step in the conventional exchange of town life is some function, either evening party, or a general "tea" in the afternoon—the latter the more common—given by the mother of the new-comer in society. To the greater portion of the company expected to be present, the débutante is practically a stranger. With the parents of the young people of her age and set she may have been familiar more or less, and her progress may have been by them watched out of that "difficult" period that is sometimes the despair of guardians, who know not what manner of thing it will bring forth. For the crucial test of her introduction into full-fledged society, the poor girl must needs equip herself in a shining armor of conventionality; must step neither to the right nor to the left of the line prescribed by custom; must, above all, repress her preferences in the matter of companionship, and mete out civility in equal share to all who are presented to her. What wonder that she often dreads, rather than welcomes, her great occasion? That it is an experience to be endured, even though her way be strewn, as it generally is, with flowers, must be admitted.

## AT HER FIRST LARGE BALL

THE next ordeal, and this, especially in New York, is a serious one, to which many an eye-witness may be summoned, is the first large ball. Old-fashioned girls in the less conventional portions of our country used to be spoken of as finding the occasion a scene of dazzling gaiety that sent them reluctantly homeward after dancing out the stars. The *fin de siècle* maiden of our large cities has another tale to tell. Unless, indeed, she shall have been brought out with extraordinary forethought and diplomatic preparation; unless her family is known as one profuse in giving entertainments of the "smart" sort; or she is heralded as the heiress of many shekels; or unless the fates have gifted her with the beauty that strikes all beholders speechless—a prize mostly appropriated by heroines of fairy tales—the débutante is apt to feel more pang than pleasure while standing with reluctant feet where the brook and river meet.

Take her, arrived in the dressing-room at the ball, a room crowded with strange faces, or unfamiliar ones. She sees the breaking up into cliques of women and girls who have interests in common which she does not share. The conviction that her lovely new frock, praised to the echo by home admirers, is but a

pale glimmer in all this splendor, depresses her at the outset. She recalls the bustle and flutter, the confidences and chatter of the girls' dressing-room at the dancing class last year. There she knew every one, had her own little ring of satellites, and feared not to relax into mischief and merriment. The grave countenances of her fellow débutantes reflect her own. It seems to all of them so vast, so business-like, so self-absorbed, this struggle for pleasure they call society. How can a timid maiden assert herself in such a multitude? What can she do or be, to justify her introduction to the scene? Above all, how maintain herself, not to reveal her faint heart in the fray? As well may a blossom dropped into a mill stream try to push its way against the current.

By and by, out of chaos emerges order in her ideas, and, the plunge made, she tries to adapt herself to the requirements of the hour. She finds that, once in the ball-room, many of the confident ones, who have on its threshold looked her over and tried to look her down, have no better chance than she. The occasion becomes an universal exchange, a market in which wares are offered and accepted or passed by for whatever is more attractive to the seeker. Oftentimes a girl's youth and freshness and her readiness to be amused attract when self-consciousness and labored vivacity send men to the right-about. But to give points in the art of pleasing is beyond the scope of this paper.

## DEPARTMENT OF THE BALL-ROOM

A FEATURE of ball-room life, which, in the eyes of débutantes and chaperone alike, calls aloud for redress, is in order of discussion here. One hears everywhere the complaint that a woman, old or young, may not stir from her seat to get supper, or to avoid a draught, or to change places for a better point of view, without being annexed to the arm of some member of the selecting sex, for whom she must wait, or whistle, to use the ancient, pungent phrase. Hard as this unwritten law is to the elders, who see themselves doomed to dependence on callow youths, the age, it may be, of their sons, for the privilege of crossing a crowded bit of parquet floor, it is doubly so to the girls who must wait the pleasure of these sultans of the hour to rise from the seats into which their healthy activity has been enchained. If they might only fraternize with each other, cross the ball-room hand in hand, go into supper likewise, and, better than all, dance together, without proclaiming themselves wall flowers, what a merry set our débutantes would be. Untrammelled by absurd necessity, the girls who now sit, often grave and spiritless, beside their protectors, would then take flight, chirping and chattering like a flock of birds. As it is, who has not seen the unnatural spectacle of these young creatures holding back from conversation with each other, bravely suppressing yawns, waiting and gazing with sad eyes upon the pageant of a dance which they are not bidden to join because the men are not so plentiful as the women. During a recent season of revelry in New York, it was no uncommon incident for girls whose carriages had been ordered late to be seen retiring to the dressing-room to wait, because partners were not forthcoming for the cotillon. And it is in New York, especially, that this lack of dancing men is patent. Numbers of young fellows, forced by the nature of their employment to keep early hours, make no pretence to keep up with the mad rush of society after midnight. The oldsters, who have danced down the generations, with a limited supply of very youthful supporters of the saltatory art, carry the burden of the ball.

## TWO MISTAKES WELL TO AVOID

A GREAT and most patent error in taste is the habit of monopolizing the man who has tarried to pay his compliments to a girl in passing, until he and all lookers-on are made aware of a certain apprehension on her part lest he escape. A severe, but useful, lesson was conveyed to a very young girl recently, who to an old friend of her father's family approaching under these conditions to give her gracious salutation, exhibited such evident nervousness in answer that the gentleman laid a hand on the young fellow's arm and remarked with pleasant emphasis, "There, my dear, I have him safe and he cannot get away. Now you may go on telling me what you began to say."

A fashion safe to stamp a young girl in general society as but ill-equipped with knowledge of good form, is that of "vanishing" in company with her attendant after a dance and remaining in unfrequented corners until remark is thereby created. Such is the young woman whose chaperone is in continual speculation as to her whereabouts, or else in active exercise to find her. She is no doubt often innocent of intention to offend, but at large and mixed entertainments the better part of wisdom in a woman is to keep in view of her fellows. A witty Frenchwoman, Mme. de Girardin, once wrote: "Amuse yourselves, oh young beauties, but flutter your wings in the broad light of day. Avoid shadows in which suspicion hides." The "vanishing woman" act, made famous by a clever Hungarian magician in fashionable séances in drawing-rooms last season, should be limited in performance to a platform in full view of the audience. The prompt return of a young woman to the side or vicinity of her chaperone after dancing is not only a graceful and well-bred action, but affords an opportunity to the man, who too often is embarrassed in this respect, to withdraw and fulfill some other engagement.

## MANNERISMS OF THE DANCE

CONSPICUOUS mannerisms in dancing are offensive to good form. I refer to certain tricks of holding the left arm and hand, of carrying the train of the dress (which should be of what is called "dancing length," and then be forgotten utterly), of dipping the knees when waltzing, etc. These habits, contracted through heedlessness, perhaps, have been seen to mar the otherwise charming grace of maidens whose youth and beauty called attention to their movements on the floor. A dancing master in New York, whose pupils are known throughout Europe for their admirable form, would never tolerate an approach to either affectation or hoydenism among the young ladies of his classes. Most of these girls had afterward occasion to discover that what he thus taught them was of the first importance in shaping the verdict of the jury of chaperones, who, sitting on the benches around ball-room walls, make or mar a maiden's claim to place in the front ranks of good society.

One can touch here with but the dip of a swallow upon the matter of gowns worn unduly low-cut in dancing. So obvious is the offence of this fashion against a woman's finest feelings of propriety that it would seem hardly requisite to lay down laws by which to control it. A girl so equipped in dancing, appears, more than at any other time, to the eye of the casual looker-on, to challenge criticism that, could she read minds, would dye her cheek with maidenly blushes. The dress-makers, often to blame in sending home at the last moment bodices so tightened in the seams as to make the wearers miserable with the consciousness of unintended display, should be controlled in this respect more stringently by their customers. It is quite possible, by a judicious management of darts and seams, to obviate this most inartistic as well as offensive cut of décolleté gowns.

SMALL talk in a ball-room, so often decried, would seem to be as much in place there as music, lights and evening clothes. Subjected to the interruptions of greeting friends and changing partners, a girl can hardly be asked to key her conversation to a very intellectual pitch. An effort in this direction might run the risk of meeting the misinterpretation of the undergraduate from New York in response to an inquiry, during a pause in dancing, of a young lady from Boston: "Have you read 'Kant'?" she asked. "You mean 'Don't,' don't you?" was the artless answer. That on such occasions small talk may be bandied lightly and entertainingly, without frivolity or ill-nature in personalities, is the golden mean we may safely strive to reach.

[Mrs. Harrison's second paper in her series of "The Well-Bred Girl in Society" will appear in the next (December) JOURNAL, and will treat of "A Young Girl's Dress in Society," taking up such phases of the question as the distinguishing marks of good dress; the social code of the low-cut gown; when to wear gloves and bonnets; the matter of jewels; artifices of the toilet; use of scents and flowers, and other little points in a girl's toilette upon which often hinge the after-enjoyment of her social pleasures.]

## METHOD IN A VOICE

BY CLARA POOLE



EVERY one can sing—and most people, if their vocal culture be of the right kind, will be found to possess good voices. I know very well that this statement will be questioned by many people, but it represents the opinion of the most successful singers, as of the most advanced teachers. If one measures the truth of beliefs by the results obtained from them, what belief can have a more secure stronghold upon credulity than this? I have seen the smallest and weakest of voices developed into tones of strength, purity and sweetness by a proper cultivation and an intelligent use of method. Method is, or should be, the great test of ability. We have so many beautiful voices which receive our homage because of their natural beauty, not because of the training and work which may have been expended on them, that we are apt to lose sight of the comparative values of method and voice. The latter wears out, the former is perennial. In times of ill health, when the voice cannot be at its best, a good method will carry one through the most difficult tasks of singing. I know, in my own case, where I have suffered much from ill health, that there have been hundreds of times when nothing but my conscious security in my ability to sing, rather than in my voice, has enabled me to get through my parts without a fiasco.

A naturally beautiful voice is a beautiful thing, and a gift to be appreciated and cared for "reverently, discreetly and advisedly," but it is a gift which is not given to every one. Proper cultivation, however, and, what is synonymous with it, a right method, can do as much and more, without much natural voice than the most beautiful voice without them. The moral of all this is, therefore, secure a good teacher, and then work with your teacher. The best teacher is not the one who, at the first lesson, will give you a solo and teach you to sing, after his fashion, "twenty songs in ten lessons." It is, rather, the one who, commencing with tone production, develops, one by one, the notes of your voice until each one is perfect, of even quality and quantity, and under your complete control. This will be the work of time, of patience and of care; but the result will fully justify your pains. Having your voice under control, solo and part singing will be a matter merely of reading, and of attention with you. And you will be, what so many singers are not (I am speaking of professional as well as of homesingers), a finished artist.