

SOME OF THE SOCIAL GRACES

By Ruth Ashmore

CERTAIN is it that the dictionary which is considered an authority on both sides of the water explains a virtue as "the human quality; goodness of heart; right conduct." Now every girl who has even a little social life desires, properly enough, to conduct herself in a right manner, and to be possessed of at least some of the social virtues. To my way of thinking these virtues are simply the knowing how to conduct one's self properly; the having acquaintance with the customs of the best society, and the best society all over the world is that which has for its foundation the consideration of other people and their happiness. Therefore, the wise girl, while she will train her mind so that she can be a good talker when that is necessary, will also cultivate the art of listening, so that she may give pleasure to those other people who enjoy talking. It is not a crime to be ignorant of the small virtues of society, but it is a mistake, yet a mistake that any American girl can correct if she will keep her eyes open and ask questions. She must ask them, however, only of those whom she can trust, or whose duty it is to answer her. I have appreciated very much the confidence the American girl has placed in me, and I am going to try and answer, as far as possible, all the questions she has put to me.

WHEN YOU GO A-VISITING

IF your visit is to be one of several days or weeks you must make your hostess, if she has not been wise enough to state it in her invitation, understand in your answer not only exactly what time you will arrive, but exactly the day and hour when you will leave, and you will show great wisdom if, no matter how much you are enjoying yourself, you refuse to prolong your visit. During your stay you must find everything pleasant that your hostess arranges for you. Ask no special service of a servant. A good hostess will always order a maid to unpack and pack your boxes, or show you some necessary attention. Thank a servant for any kindness she does for you, and when you are leaving give her, if she has devoted much time to you, as large a tip as you can afford. Ladies are not expected to tip men servants. You must neither expect nor ask that your laundry be done in the house, and you must take great care not to leave the dainty toilet-table or the pretty room in disorder. I saw a beautiful duchesse table entirely ruined by powder, perfume and alcohol which had been spilled upon it, not to mention the damage done by burns in the lace from the dangerous curling tongs. And this was because a girl was careless and had not been taught, and did not realize that a lady was not a destroying animal. And after you return to your home you should write a letter to the lady you have been visiting, thanking her for all the kindness she has shown you, and sending your regards to the members of her household.

ETIQUETTE OF INVITATIONS

INVITATIONS to every-day affairs, dinners, luncheons, dances or whatever they may be, require immediate answers, and it is very ill-bred to wait any length of time before answering, as it suggests the possibility of your hoping for something more pleasant to turn up for the same time. Your answer should be worded like your invitation—that is, if it is in the third person, the answer should be in the third person—if it is informal, and in the first, your response should be in harmony. When you write, say that you accept the invitation, not that you will accept.

In making ordinary visits one gives what one receives—that is, a personal call for a personal call, a card left in person for a card left in person, and a card by post for a card by post. Cards are never left for men by ladies unless a bachelor should entertain, and then the married ladies call and leave their own cards accompanied by the cards of their husbands, but they do not ask to see the gentleman, nor do they enter the house. By-the-by, if a bachelor gives an entertainment he "requests the honor," but never says that he is "at home."

No matter how small the affair may be to which you are invited you must, out of respect to yourself, reply to the invitation. Well-bred people no longer wait for the "R. S. V. P." which always seemed a hint of ignorance on the part of the recipient, but acknowledge an invitation at once. This rule is as stringent as any one of the Medes and Persians.

AT THE TABLE

THE bright girl who is not quite sure that she is acquainted with all the social virtues, asks me if she must say "thank you" to a servant who offers her anything at the table. No, it is not necessary for the ordinary table service, but if a servant should pick up a napkin which you have dropped or restore a fallen fan, then a quiet, almost a whispered "thank you" is proper. She also asks about the management of some food, and here are a few general rules for her: Never bite food of any kind. Break your bread in small pieces; cut celery in bits and then eat it from your fingers, and enjoy your cheese by cutting small pieces from the portion given to you, and with the assistance of a knife, putting each on a bit of bread or toasted biscuit, and so conveying it to your mouth. Common usage has made it proper to eat corn from the cob. It is never a pretty sight, but it is done, and hence the action must be as delicate as possible. A wise hostess usually selects very small ears of corn for her table.

Strawberries, when served on their stems, are eaten from the fingers. An apple or a pear is pared, quartered and then cut in bits which may be conveyed to the mouth either with the fingers or a fork, as one fancies. Peel a banana with a knife, and cut off the small pieces that you wish to eat, using either your fingers or fork in conveying them to your mouth. Learn to eat an egg from the shell. It can be done if one will take a little trouble, and breaking it into a glass and mixing it up is not a pleasant sight.

By-the-by, though you may be very hospitable and very fond of your friends, it is bad form to urge and entreat people to remain when they wish to depart. To welcome the coming and speed the parting guest is an absolute evidence of good will and good breeding.

ABOUT THE WEDDING

THE question oftenest asked about the wedding is, "What shall the bridegroom wear?" It is a positive rule that no man puts on a dress coat until the evening, and no matter how elaborate the bride's toilette may be, the daytime finds him in frock coat and what is known as formal morning dress. It must be remembered that the bridal party no longer have "groomsmen," but instead "ushers." This is, of course, a mere word difference, but the usage of the right words is an evidence of one's being informed as to all changes in the social world.

Every present requires a note of thanks from the bride. It may be written by her mother or sister if she is very much occupied, but it must be signed with the bride's name. If there is to be a breakfast or reception after the wedding, and some one sends you a present, some one whom you had not expected to ask to the house, an invitation must go to this person. This sounds rather like "for value received," but the giving of gifts is, in good society, by no means as common as it used to be, and one must be either of the same family, or a dear friend to either bride or bridegroom, before one can feel that one is entitled to this privilege. Consequently, a wedding invitation does not necessitate a present.

In answer to another oft-asked question I would like to say that a wedding invitation requires no answer unless there is included an invitation to a sit-down breakfast, and then it should be answered as promptly as if it were a dinner invitation. At the same time it must be understood that though the invitation to the church requires no answer it is always proper to acknowledge it. In small places a bride has precedence for three months; in larger cities, where brides are more numerous, for one. During that time she is the guest of honor wherever she may appear, and at dinners is taken in by the host. She may, with propriety, wear her wedding dress, but the orange blossoms must be removed from it, and roses or some other flowers substituted. Many dressmakers are now doing as Worth did, and are furnishing with the wedding gown a trimming of white roses to take the place of the orange blossoms after the wedding. Many modest maidens, properly enough, have complained of the indiscriminate kissing to which they have been subjected at their wedding receptions. The best way to get out of this is to suggest to the bridegroom that to the young people he make some tactful remark about the kisses belonging to him, while to the older ones the bride may, with politeness, offer her cheek. Among the French a bride is kissed on the forehead, a greeting we might, with propriety, copy.

SOME MORE LITTLE VIRTUES

AS a nation we are prone to introduce people without reason. It is not necessary when ordinary visits are being paid to present people to each other unless the number is so small that it would be embarrassing for the two or three ladies present not to know each other's names. At a crowded afternoon where one is near a lady who seems a stranger, the roof introduction is sufficient, and one may break the ice and speak to the stranger, although after this, unless the little chat has been very pleasant and a desire has been expressed for further acquaintance, there need be no bow if these two should meet on the street. Very old ladies, invalids or very busy women discharge all their social obligations if they are "at home" to their friends once a year. Miss Calvert, whose mother is dead, may, with propriety, have her name engraved on her father's card, but this is not often done. If some one who is ignorant of the visiting hours should surprise you in a neat morning dress, dusting the books, make no apology for your appearance; you are dressed properly, for your costume is suited to the hour of the day and your occupation, and it is your visitor who has made a mistake.

The hours for visiting in different cities often cause blunders which result in considerable awkwardness for the stranger, so it is wise to ask some one who knows exactly the special customs of that town, and then you will know what to do. In New York, Philadelphia and Chicago, where the dinner hour ranges from half-past six to half-past eight, the visiting hours are from four to six, but in many of the smaller cities, especially where an early dinner is the custom, the visiting hours are from three to five. When you are visiting do not let "you" and your belongings form the sole topic of your conversation, and do not discuss your servants. Never accept an invitation to a house from a gentleman alone. He may tell you that his sisters are anxious to see you, but if they are they can express this anxiety in a note of invitation, and under no circumstances be persuaded to go unless you have a distinctly cordial invitation from the women of the family. In answer to another question I would say that a widow invariably removes her first wedding-ring before she assumes a second. In writing your name you sign yourself "Mary Randolph," unless you are placing it on the register of a hotel, and then you put "Mrs. James Randolph" or "Miss Randolph," whichever you may happen to be.

If you take your meals in a public dining-room wear a simple street dress, and, if you fancy, a hat. If you are going out after dinner, and have to dine in a public dining-room, go there early enough to allow yourself plenty of time to make your toilette after dinner, but do not appear there in full evening dress and sit where any man, with the price of a dinner in his pocket, may appear and stare at you. At a dinner you are not forced to drink wine, but do not commit the *faux pas* of turning your glasses over, or doing, as one woman suggested, stuffing your gloves in them, for either of these actions is equivalent to criticising your hostess, which you have no right to do. Instead, as you do not care for the wine, you do not drink it, and a good servant comprehends that, as your glasses are untouched, you do not desire it, and offers you no more. Appear pleased with the people you meet, and do not criticise your fellow-guests.

THE END OF THE SERMON

THIS sermon is all text and no comment. It is one that says, "This is done." And it means that one will be much more comfortable, socially, if one does as other people do, for then society itself runs on smoother wheels. To say the right words, to act in the right manner makes one think aright, and it is a social crime to do that which is wrong. There is a vulgarity in words as well as in manners and actions. A much-laughed-about phrase that probably had an innocent rise is "my gentleman friend." I fear some nice girls do, thoughtlessly, use it. They forget that all their friends are supposed to be ladies and gentlemen. When you wish to speak of a friend use his name if possible; if not, say "a man friend of mine." Natural courtesy will teach you when to say "woman" or "lady." The wash-lady may have every instinct of gentility, but her position in life does not cause the world to recognize this, so she has no right to the title. By-the-by, remember that all slang is vulgar no matter how piquant it may seem, and that, even if you are a leader socially, you cannot use an improper phrase and be forgiven. It was a great lady who was corrected by Beau Brummel when she asked him to come and take tea with her. "Madame," he said with a bow, "I take a walk, you take a liberty, we drink tea."

Little things? Yes, but a tiny thorn can make one's finger bleed, and a little lack of knowledge can make all social life uncomfortable.

EDITOR'S NOTE—Miss Ashmore's answers to her correspondents, under the title of "Side-Talks with Girls," will be found on page 31 of this issue of the JOURNAL.