

## ON SOME MINOR POINTS OF ETIQUETTE.



YES, my dear young matrons, I often see you endeavouring to appear quite at your ease while you go through all the different forms and ceremonies which attend upon you in your new position as married people; and I verily believe that you suffer much nervous trepidation, and many an inward palpitation, lest you should make some small mistake, and not behave with proper punctilio. Say, am I not a correct observer?

Naturally, it is difficult to assume the air and dignity of matronhood in a few short weeks, but a little conscious shyness is rather pretty and attractive than otherwise,

and is quite distinct from that form of awkwardness which arises from a want of knowledge of the various conventionalities which crowd around our modern life. Shall we discuss some of these minor points of etiquette?

One of the first ordeals through which the young matron has to pass is that of receiving callers, and these usually come in considerable numbers when there is a bride to be called upon, which renders her task all the more difficult.

The lady of the house should occupy a seat facing the door of the room, and then she is at once seen by the in-comers, and is ready to receive them. Possibly—nay, probably—she will not be acquainted with many of the people who come to pay their *devoirs*, but this must not make any difference in her manner of reception; she should rise from her seat and shake hands with all alike, both ladies and gentlemen.

Bear this in mind, matrons, young and old, it is proper you should shake hands with every stranger who enters your house, whether as a caller or as an invited guest. I am urged to make this remark, because I see that some ladies receive strangers with a bow only, and the laws of hospitality require a warmer welcome to the house, in the shape of an outstretched hand, and not merely a formal bend of the head.

Should the Fates ever lead you to be honoured by the notice of royalty, then a curtsy accompanies the action of giving the hand. This is by no means an easy matter to perform gracefully, for etiquette demands that the obeisance be made while tending the hand. But we must turn back from possibilities to probabilities, and to the actual every-day requirements needed by us in ordinary life. I was tempted

to make the foregoing observation from seeing a lady shaking hands with one of our princes the other day, and very prettily she performed her part of the ceremony.

We really must return to our visitors in the drawing-room. It is not customary to introduce people to one another. If possible, arrange for the last-comers to sit beside you, and devote a little time to them, and then turn to the other occupants of the room, for courtesy demands that no feeling of neglect should have occasion to creep into the minds of any one present.

When a visitor rises to take leave, the lady of the house also rises, and, while addressing a few parting words, she rings the bell as a signal to the servant to be ready to open the door, for it is considered very discourteous to allow a visitor to open and shut the hall-door.

After having received calls, it is time to think of returning them. This is not nearly so formidable a duty as that we have just described, because the burthen of entertaining, if we may use such an impolite phrase, now falls upon those on whom the call is made.

A first call should be returned within the space of a few days. Royal personages, you know, return the calls made by royal personages upon them within a few hours, but we humbler folk are not expected to follow this piece of court etiquette.

From three to five are the correct calling hours; in London, where the dinner-hour is usually later than elsewhere, the time is a little extended. The duration of this first call should be short—about ten or fifteen minutes. It is quite permissible to speak to any one in the room without an introduction. When paying a formal call of this description, a card-case is taken, but it is not now usual to take cards from it while in the room. For instance, if your husband does not accompany you, but sends his cards, instead of giving them to the lady of the house you leave two on the hall-table—one being for the lady and the other for the gentleman of the house.

While on the subject of calls I may as well speak of a matter which is relevant to that. When illness, or the death of a near relative, has secluded you for a time from society, it is customary to return thanks for the inquiries made or sent by friends or acquaintance. There are printed forms procurable for this purpose, which ladies fill in and send in recognition of the inquiries, and also as a sign that they are now able to see their friends. Another mode, and a less formal one, I think, is that of sending an ordinary visiting card with "Thanks for kind inquiries" written under the name.

After awhile, when the calls have been made and paid, the newly-married couple receive invitations to dinner or other festivities. Wonderful to relate, the lady has not to consider what she will wear, for the



bridal costume is invariably donned on all such occasions, the only difference being that the veil is now used as a shawl.

Remember, young matron, that you are the chief personage at all these entertainments. Even if you are still in your teens, you take precedence of older matrons. It is the bride whom the host takes in to dinner; it is she to whom the hostess looks when rising from the dinner-table; it is she with whom the host opens the ball; it is she who must take her departure before the other guests venture to bid their adieux.

I know a young bride whose ignorance of this last little detail caused much chagrin to herself and much weariness to others. At the first party at which she appeared, she, being young and modest, thought it was only showing proper deference to wait until some of the elderly matrons made the move for departure. The older ladies waited, as a matter of course, until the young bride took her leave; and so one tedious quarter of an hour after another passed on, until when the suppressed yawns were becoming unconcealable and dangerous, a kind neighbour whispered a hint to the youthful matron that the company were waiting for her departure before they felt at liberty to take theirs.

It is possible, however, to fall into the opposite error.

Well, after all, to be the chief personage in another person's house is not half so trying a position as that of being the chief personage in one's own house. Indeed, I know of no greater trial to a young hostess than that of her first dinner-party. So much responsibility rests upon her inexperienced shoulders; she is so terribly anxious that "all shall go off well" and creditably; and yet she must not let a trace of this anxiety be seen in her demeanour. To achieve this state of unruffled serenity, it is essential that she look well to the arrangement of the details beforehand; and although it hardly lies within my province at this time to discuss these details, I must just step out of it for a moment to mention one or two which are found from experience to be very essential. Briefly, then: it is a pity for a young matron to attempt any great display. When she is more accustomed to her part as house-keeper and hostess, she can then advance in grandeur, if wishful to do so. It is also a mistake to invite a great number of guests, for the number increases the responsibility. One word more: a great secret of success is to ask people who are likely to amalgamate and coalesce—people of diversities of character, grave and gay, but yet a diversity which will unite and form a harmonious chord. A wise choice in this latter respect will much lighten the labours of both host and hostess.

We will suppose that all these details have been satisfactorily arranged, and that the time has come for the guests to arrive. The hostess should be very punctual in her own drawing-room, and quite ready to receive her company at the appointed hour. In order that she may be at once approached, she should take up her position not far from the door, and facing it; and as the guests arrive in quick succession, it is more convenient to remain standing until most of them have

entered the room. Meanwhile, it is the duty of the host (I am supposing the occasion to be that of a "dinner") to communicate to the several gentlemen whom they are to take in to dinner, and if they happen to be strangers, to introduce them to the ladies.

When dinner is announced, the host offers his arm to the lady who it has been previously decided has the greatest claim to precedence, and escorts her to the dinner-table, placing her on his right hand.

The guests follow in assorted couples, the hostess being the last to arrive, accompanied by the principal gentleman guest. During the dinner-hour the attention of the young matron should be concentrated on her visitors, and not allowed to wander to the movements of the servants. It requires an effort and a certain amount of courage to start subjects of conversation, especially after a pause, or during a dead silence. Sometimes people are not in a talking vein, and conversation seems to be continually falling to pieces, but it is the duty of both host and hostess to prevent this—to set the ball rolling, and to make strenuous efforts to keep it in motion.

There ought not to be any whispered directions to servants—no reproving glances. If anything goes wrong in the household department, it is far better taste to let it pass unnoticed than to make everybody present uncomfortable either by trying to remedy the error or by apologising for it. Sometimes accidents will happen—laughable ones, too—but it is a mark of good manners to appear unconscious of their occurrence.

I was dining at an old-fashioned house last Christmas where the dessert was placed on the table after the dinner had been removed. In advancing from the sideboard to the table, whilst carrying the centre dish, the servant stumbled over the hearth-rug, whereupon a big cake jumped off the dish and bowled up the whole length of that long room! Here was a trial for the risible muscles; and yet it would have been most impolite to laugh, or even to permit the faintest titter to escape.

I for one found it terribly difficult to continue the thread of my discourse, which, unluckily for me, happened to be on a grave subject.

It is the custom for the ladies to remain at table but a short time after the dessert has been handed, and so the young hostess must not allow many minutes to elapse before she directs her glance to the lady who sits on the right hand of the host, and having caught her attention, she slightly bows to her and rises, and follows her guests out of the room.

The hostess should never leave her guests at any period of the evening if she can possibly avoid it, and certainly not under any pretext if the host is not present. I was at a party not long ago when both host and hostess absented themselves—a great breach of etiquette. True, it was only for a few moments, but a feeling of awkwardness fell upon all the guests. As it happened, we were mostly strangers to one another, and we all fell to pieces then and there; and I don't think it was possible for any one, however much they possessed those valuable qualities of attraction and cohesion, to bind us together again.

E. C.