

## THE PERFECT LADY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "ETIQUETTE OF GOOD SOCIETY."

## I.—INTRODUCTORY.



WHO can lay claim to a title such as this, which comprehends so much within its limits? I shall not cull my specimen from real life, although I could make a selection of those universally allowed to be worthy of this title; it will be better for our purpose to consider the question in the abstract. It is far easier to point out imperfections, and by this means show what perfection should be, but the wisest course is to ensconce in a niche in our minds an ideal of perfection, and from time to time it is well to place ourselves beside this ideal, and see whether we reach any point near the level of its lofty height.

Now my words will not dwell very much on the moral and intellectual qualities of the perfect lady; those qualities and capacities certainly influence, and have an effect upon, her actions, and thus help to form perfection; but even short dissertations upon the formation of morals and the expansion of intellect would stretch out the subject beyond our limits. Besides, there is not the necessity for pursuing these particular branches, for in childhood it is the endeavour of those who rear us to cultivate the mind and imbue us with the spirit of truth, honesty, and the like. When we grow out of childhood into girlhood, parents and instructors still continue to fan the flame with assiduous care; they combine their efforts to impress the virtues upon the character, and to strengthen and enlarge the brain power.

In womanhood these threads of light should still run through the life; but as presumably they have been securely interlaced therein by our mentors who have acted as guides thus far, my remarks will be chiefly directed to lines of instruction not required beforetime.

On entering womanhood we enter a new world, we tread on different ground, we are surrounded by different circumstances and requirements: the entrance into society necessitates our learning a fresh set of lessons; we have to learn how to comport ourselves on a thousand and one different occasions. Social duties suddenly rise up and confront us; sometimes we are bewildered and unable to cope with our difficulty; sometimes we overlook or ignore it, and so cause offence or hurt the feelings of others. The manners, deportment, and what is called the general style of a lady, characterise and affix their seal on the perfect lady.

As yet these marks have been but faintly traced—but little beyond the simple politeness of "If you please" and "Thank you" has been taught, together with the admonition to hold the shoulders straight, and to turn out the toes. Silence has been encouraged, remarks on persons have been discouraged. Hitherto the girl has been under the direction of mother or governess, and her actions are supposed to have been done under their superintendence.

Directly the girl takes her place in society as a woman, directly she emerges from the schoolroom, her position is changed; all that she does and says is subject to the observation and criticism of those amongst whom she moves. Her manners, her deportment, her style are commented upon, and form a subject for discussion amongst her acquaintances. This being so, our aim is, by the suggestions given in these papers, to protect her from adverse criticism.

We often see girls who have just stepped on to the world's stage, standing half-reluctant to go forward, not knowing what to do, looking shy, embarrassed, uncomfortable, and fearful of committing some blunder. As a consequence of these feelings and visible quakings, they appear to singular disadvantage; this shyness or embarrassment gives an impression to the onlookers of stupidity or awkwardness. We sometimes also see, and have feelings of compassion for, the girl who thinks she has no need of instruction, or who does not care to receive it, but rushes on the arena in full confidence and self-satisfaction, determined to be regardless of all that people say or think about her.

Yet again, there comes another epoch in a woman's life, when a further series of lessons is needed in the matters we are going to discuss. Marriage brings another and a greater change. Again she is placed in a new and untried position, and in it she stands alone; again her manners and bearing and actions are freely commented upon. Hitherto, although she has in a measure controlled her own conduct, she has, to a certain extent, been under the surveillance of mother or chaperone; some one has been at hand to suggest or advise. After marriage a woman's life is virtually in her own hands. She is expected to be her own guide in her own particular province; she finds herself suddenly placed in the midst of new duties and requirements, the centre for a time of an unknown sphere. Oftentimes she is ill at ease in her new province; she feels she ought to come to the front, and yet she shrinks from the ordeal, from want of confidence; her knowledge of these matters is scant, she is afraid of showing her ignorance.

I propose, therefore, to give some practical hints in future papers, which will, I trust, help the young married and unmarried lady through the maze, and give them an insight as to what constitutes the perfect lady.

he was getting considerably the worst of it, and seeing Peter arrive to make a third against him, had then retreated, vaulting over the low wooden paling that separated the garden from the field, from which point of vantage he had turned round, and producing a revolver, had deliberately taken aim at Marie, firing straight at her heart, and disappearing immediately afterwards, unpursued in the confusion that had ensued upon his fiendish act.

What wonder was it that I never left Marie's bedside—watching, nursing, tending her, with a strength only equalled by my wretchedness? For Tom never even looked at me, and I thought my heart would break. There was no need for me to confess my sin to him, for he knew it but too well. Peter, the half-witted boy, whose eyesight was as keen as his intellect was weak, had seen me, from a great distance off, point out Marie to the stranger, and had at once run as fast as his legs could carry him to give the alarm to Tom.

At last came the day when all my devotion to the invalid began to bring forth fruit. Marie was pronounced out of danger, and for the first time for many weeks I was able to look Tom in the face, and to say—

"Tom, speak to me."

"Speak to you?—yes," he answered; "but forgive you—never. You have ruined my life and hers—my little Marie."

"Ah, Tom!" I wailed, "and don't you remember, or don't you care, that you have ruined mine?"

"I? yours? ruined your life? What do you mean? Oh! Flora, Flora!"—with a sudden flash of illumination—"I only loved you as a sister!"

But I did not wait to hear more. I ran out of the room to give way up-stairs to all the grief and shame that were well-nigh killing me.

Marie recovered—that is to say, her wound healed, but she was always more or less of an invalid. And meanwhile came the termination of the war, and my adieu to the dear old farm, where I had known so much happiness and such bitter grief. For I could not stay on there. I was not wanted, and Tom was glad that I should go. Would he never forgive me?

"Good-bye, Tom," were my last words to him. "Some day you will marry Marie, and perhaps learn to think more kindly of me; but I shall never come to see you till you write and ask me yourself."

I went to New York, and became a nurse there in one of the large hospitals. I met with kind friends, I liked my work, and after a time I attained to a certain degree of calm. I heard that Tom had married Marie, and settled down at the old farm; and then came a silence of years. The word of forgiveness that I was waiting for—would it never, never come?

At last, when I had almost given up hope, it came to me in the shape of a telegram:—

"Flora, will you come to us We are in trouble.—Tom."

Of course I went, to find his wife and three children all ill with scarlet fever, and he at his wits' end what to do. My uncle and aunt had been dead some time.

I nursed them all back to health, except the baby, who died, and I did not leave them until I had seen Marie once more in her place down-stairs.

I go to them every year now. The children call me Aunt Flora, and Marie says I am a witch, for ever since I nursed her through the scarlet fever she has been a stronger woman. As for Tom, I am, as of old, "his dear sister."

## THE PERFECT LADY.

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### SECOND PAPER.



IN my introductory remarks on this subject, I pointed out the importance of every young lady making herself conversant with the manners and usages of society on her entrance within that border-land.

Good and perfect manners are acquired by observation, by cultivation, and by practice; the neglect of these observances you

will find is seldom pardoned by the world: that censorious autocrat exacts rigid deference to its opinions, and a strict conformity to its rules.

It must be owned, even by those who most dislike the idea of being thus trammelled, that the world and society do a kindly action in being thus punctilious; for good manners are certainly an embellishment to

the possessor of them: they greatly enhance personal charms, and they act as an excellent substitute where nature has omitted to bestow the much-prized gift of beauty. Beauty has its special charm apportioned to itself. Refinement, true politeness, gentleness in speech, gracefulness of action, courtesy and consideration, which cluster under the term of "good manners," these also have their peculiar attraction and power of fascination. Beauty, we are told, is "only skin deep," and will fade; refinement, with its attendants, is indelible, and its attractive powers increase as years pass on.

What should the perfect young lady be? and what should she do in her every-day life? Politeness is a large field in which to range; let us gather and adorn ourselves with some of the many flowers which spring up on every side of us.

Politeness requires that we listen to people who talk

to us, even when we are not interested in their conversation. I sometimes see young ladies visibly smother a yawn to show their indifference or distaste, and I hear them merely utter an apathetic "Yes" or "No," and sometimes I hear them interrupt the conversation rudely by abruptly introducing another topic. Politeness requires an attentive ear and more than a tranquil silent acquiescence: it demands that an exertion be made to reply, and that the reply be something beyond mere monosyllables. Politeness requires that we do not stare at the dress of the person with whom we are talking; I notice that some ladies deliberately scan the attire of those to whom they speak, from the crown of the head downwards; this is rudeness, and therefore an imperfection.

Politeness requires that when in company communications should not be whispered, that tittering and giggling should not be indulged in, that remarks should not be made upon any person present, that we should not pass in front of any one without an apology, or talk across any one.

Politeness requires that we take no notice of any eccentricity that may appear in those we meet in company. A recognition of eccentricity or absurdity must not be shown by words, still less by a smile. Oftentimes it is a difficult matter to appear insensible to mistakes which are made or accidents which happen, especially when they are of a laughable nature; but control must be exercised, out of consideration for the feelings of others, if for no other reason. When an old-fashioned hand-shaker keeps prolonged possession of your hand, and from time to time gives it a succession of convulsive shakes; when a lady walks the length of a long room unconscious that the wind has given her a grotesque appearance by blowing the feather in her bonnet rigidly upright; when the servant trips with a dish in her hand, and the round cake upon it rolls off and bowls up the room; when a page slips, and falls on his back, amidst a shower of dinner-rolls scattered around his prostrate form; when a manservant throws open the door, and announces you to a room-full of ordinary folk as "Lady Baldichinas," and your simple title is "Miss Baldwin;" when your friend's servant blackleads your boots, thus giving them an unusually curious and startling appearance as you send them forth from beneath your dress when walking along the streets: whenever little incidents such as these occur, politeness demands that we neither speak of nor smile at them at the time of occurrence.

Politeness requires that we do not rudely push through a crowd, but that we wait to take our proper turn, whether it be the entrance into hall or public room, railway carriage or omnibus, or in a shop, library, or ticket-office. In public vehicles and public rooms it often happens that there is a scarcity of seats for the number of applicants for them. I have constantly seen ladies demand as a right—silently, but yet unmistakably—that some gentleman should yield up his seat, and the coolness with which they treat the kind action, not even troubling themselves to say "Thank you," also

disturbs my mind. Politeness demands that a recognition in the form of thanks should be made of politeness received.

Courtesy requires us to be polite to those who serve us, not to speak domineeringly or rudely to those who we may think are our inferiors in position; courtesy binds us to be courteous to those advanced in years.

Gracefulness is another component part of perfection. There is such a thing as sitting still gracefully; legs and feet are not to be crossed, hands and fingers are not to fidget and rub each other on their owner's face, dress, or ornaments; a lounging, lolling attitude cannot be called graceful. The department mistress will have taught the graceful style of walking.

One charm which is very attractive is that of being natural.

"Led by simplicity divine,  
She pleased, and never tried to shine."

Affectation, of whatever kind, is really a blemish. Some girls affect to be sharp and smart; they make ill-natured and caustic remarks on their friends and acquaintances, which amuse their listeners and raise their laughter. Some affect to be nervous and timid: they utter little shrieks at the sight of a spider, or become helpless when they should be helpful; it is quite possible to be brave without being bold or masculine. Some affect eccentricity of dress or behaviour. Affectation will always certainly attract notice, more particularly that of the opposite sex, who are always ready to be amused at it. But, young ladies, there are two kinds of laughter which can be raised by you. If the laugh goes with you, it is pleasant and harmless; but should it be that men laugh *at* you, then the case assumes a very different and a disagreeable aspect.

Another mark of a perfect lady is her dress. We have nothing to do with its costliness nor with the fashion of it, beyond the word of warning against the adoption of any marked singularity of style which would make the wearer a gazing-stock; true modesty and womanliness will shrink from setting itself on this public pedestal.

Our consideration is neatness and cleanliness in dress; these two perfections are frequently neglected and disregarded by the young lady when she emerges from the school-room: she is then apt to cast impatiently aside needle and thread and orderly habits, as well as her lesson-books, and too often we see slovenliness in attire. White-headed pins project from black dresses, and black-headed pins from light-coloured dresses, where thread should render the services required. Ragged braid disfigures the edges of skirts: a button is missing here and there from the ranks: creased and crumpled cloaks show signs of careless usage: soiled collars and cuffs, and frills which should be in the fire, often encircle neck and wrist. All these are small details, but it is these little details combined which give the general effect of neatness or of slovenliness. Great expenditure of money on dress is not essential to perfection; nicety and neatness of apparel, freshness and purity of lace or muslin, these are requisites.

The perfect young lady will also be as particular about her dress when at home as when in company. One often hears it said, "It does not matter what we wear at home; anything will do." But it does matter. The texture of the dress need not be so expensive or the trimmings so elaborate as that worn in company, but the general aspect should be the same, and the wearer will always be more at ease when she is daily accustomed to be carefully dressed.

So far we have discoursed mainly on what the perfect young lady should be; now we will turn to what she should do.

One of her home duties is to take part in the entertainment of callers, guests, and visitors. The daughters of the house should help their mother on all occasions, and take her place without embarrassment when she is absent. When callers arrive, the young lady should come forward and join in the conversation; she should bestow her attention on those with whom her mother is not occupied. This same rule applies to behaviour to invited guests. The daughter of the house is expected to be pleasant and conversable to each and every one, and ready to accede to any expressed wish on their part. Acquiescence to play or sing, or to display any accomplishment, should be given readily; some young ladies show undue reluctance, and make so many excuses, and require so very much pressure and persuasion.

In speaking of entertainments of all kinds, I must give a word of advice. It sometimes happens that young ladies are eager to go to them, and yet have not a *chaperone* for every occasion. It is well to observe a certain amount of delicacy in asking to join others who may be going. If they are particular friends, well

and good; but some young ladies do not hesitate to ask this favour of comparative strangers. We were once surprised by a call from some young ladies whom we knew only by name, who came to ask to join our party to a public entertainment. This placed us in a great dilemma, for they were *very* imperfect young ladies, who always caused themselves to be talked about, and we did not wish to be responsible, or even to be considered as their friends.

A young lady whom I know was anxious this summer to go to a public tennis-ground some miles away, at which there were weekly contests which she found pleasure in watching. Each week she asked a family near her home to take her; she took her seat in their carriage, caring nothing for any inconvenience to which she might put others, and utterly disregarding the fact that they would invite her to join them if they wished for her company.

There are young ladies who borrow money from their friends. Now, the safest, and really the happiest, rule is to refrain from buying anything for which we have not the money in hand; but sometimes an allowance is over-run, and borrowing appears to be a necessity. Young ladies sometimes forget, or do not care, to pay back. No excuse will cover over this dereliction; whatever is borrowed—whether it be money or stamps, whether of great or small value—the strict rule of repayment should be observed. It is easy to slip and slide from one level to another, and I have known cases where young ladies have been utterly regardless about repayment. The same may be said about bills and debts. Much misery is often caused to work-women by careless, thoughtless young ladies, who delay giving payment for work done for them.

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## A MORNING AT THE FEMALE SCHOOL OF ART.

BY A FORMER STUDENT.



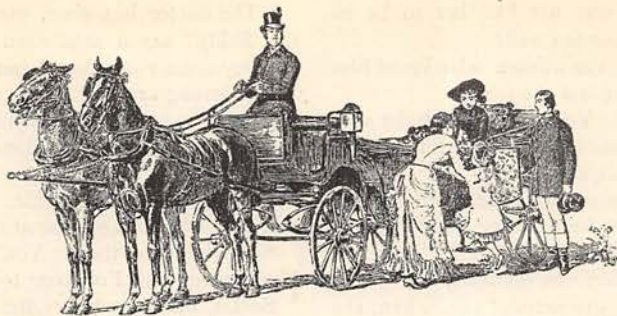
THE clock strikes ten as we mount the steps of the School of Art; but we are not the first-comers, for when we are admitted into the hall a group of girls is standing round a table, on which lie three open books, in one of which each student must sign her name, together with the hour of her arrival and departure. As we are only spectators we need not stop here, but will follow a girl carrying a T-square

down-stairs into a large gloomy room, where in semi-darkness a few early students are hanging their hats and jackets on the pegs

assigned to them, each of which has a card beneath it bearing the name and school-number of its owner.

We are glad to leave this subterranean dressing-room, and climb the stairs to the top of the house, where the Elementary room is beginning to fill. One side is taken up by a row of windows, and the desks cross the room at right angles to them, so that the light falls over the left shoulder of each student. A blackboard on a raised dais shows where lectures in geometry, perspective, and kindred subjects are given; but this is not a lecture morning, so the casts that cover the walls of the room are being fastened to the rail above the desks, and boards are being put into position, with an accompanying hum of conversation, by the apron-clad damsels, who are now appearing in great numbers. A word about the aprons.

An apron is a recognised institution in a Ladies' School of Art, but the size and shape give ample scope to the taste of the wearer, and surely a greater variety it is impossible to imagine. Some few of the



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THIRD PAPER.



At the outset of married life, the complete and entire freedom from parental control and surveillance, the untried post of ruler of her own actions, as well as those of others, which is now hers, often bewilders the girl-wife, and puts her into a state of flutter and nervousness. A much-

feared shower of criticisms falls upon and around the young married lady, the ordeal has to be gone through, and sensitive natures very often feel uncomfortable, and sometimes a degree miserable, with the fear of making some blunder, of omitting some social duty, or of showing ignorance on any point. When the feet find the right path at the outset, it is not a difficult one to keep. We will draw attention to the rocks over which the young matron often stumbles, and the thorns, briars, and brambles in which she gets entangled; if caution-signals are set up to mark these dangerous places, the troubles they entail may be avoided.

Ostentation is a rock to steer clear of. The housewife is of course proud of her new position, and desirous of making it appear an exalted one to her friends. Take the entertainment of guests, for instance. It is truly laudable to try and give the best we can to our friends, but it is a mistaken notion to think that their happiness and pleasure can be enhanced by any extraordinary efforts on the part of the entertainers. If the means and the *ménage* be small, then let the entertainment match them in character, and do not

strive to show great display. One of the most, if not *the* most, trying ordeals for the young married lady is that of returning the hospitalities which have been shown to her by friends and neighbours. The greater the simplicity of her arrangements, the less likelihood will there be of anything untoward happening to disturb the equanimity and the ease of mind and bearing which ought to characterise her conduct on these occasions.

Let me illustrate the preceding remarks by relating an experience. Some months ago I was invited by a strictly formal invitation to an evening "At home," at the house of some new housekeepers. On our arrival, a small maid opened the door, and when we were within it, said in formal phrase—"Ladies, up-stairs, please. Gentlemen, in there," pointing to the stairs, and to a back room, as she gave the directions. Having deposited my cloak in a bed-room which had evidently *not* been prepared for visitors, I descended, and was ushered into a room; it was furnished as a dining-room; a large square table occupied most of the space, and there was but just room for people to move round it. Guests came flocking in, all in full evening attire (the nature of the invitation warranted them in donning it). Very soon there was not standing room, and then the hostess said that a leaf of the table had better be taken away; this operation was a difficult matter, and caused a disturbance, for there was no other room into which the guests could overflow. After this was accomplished, several of the company were asked to play and sing at a piano which was squeezed up in a corner, and then refreshment in the shape of a sweetmeat commonly known as "rock" was handed round in a glass dish. We then wished to say our adieus, but were begged to stay awhile longer to hear a recitation, which was thereupon given by the host. This was the conclusion of the entertainment.

Now a friendly invitation to pass a sociable evening might have proved pleasant, even though there was only the one room in which to pass the hours; it was the whole incongruity which was so disturbing; the mistaken effort to give a grand entertainment under such circumstances was a complete failure, and a failure which made itself felt; the guests were all strangers

to one another, we felt in an unnatural position and condition, we were all constrained and restrained ; we could not move or change our places ; where we sat or stood at the beginning of the evening, there we remained until the end. Let me be distinctly understood : it was not the paucity of the entertainment which disappointed our expectations, but the foolish ostentation which prompted our entertainers to attempt an evening party. Lest it should be thought that I speak of what happened in an out-of-the-world spot, I will mention that this took place in London, in the year 1882, and that the host was a member of one of the learned professions.

I have one or two more topics to discuss while on the subject of guests. The young married lady is apt to be absorbed in her own personal affairs ; thus she falls into one stream of talk, and babbles continuously about the perfections of her husband, the imperfections of her servants, the superiority of her possessions ; her domestic arrangements, their complications and worries, and more than all about the ways and doings of the baby. All these matters are, of course, and should be, intensely interesting to herself, but a prolonged flow of conversation solely on these matters becomes wearisome to callers, guests, or visitors.

Another error into which the young housekeeper falls is that of finding fault with, correcting, and directing her servants in the presence of guests. Instruction and tuition should be given, if necessary, beforehand, and in private. Here, again, simplicity of arrangements would obviate many difficulties which are increased by over-much formality and ceremony. My gravity was sorely tried a few weeks ago by a young hostess at a five o'clock tea. She had both her maids in the room to wait upon her guests ; one managed her duties tolerably well, but the other was untrained, and was afraid to venture near the ladies, so the hostess went behind her and guided her about just as one would guide a little child ; with her hands on the young servant's arms, the mistress gently pushed her in front of one person, and then another, so that they might take off or put on their cups on the tray she held. Now, would it not have been a more comfortable arrangement if the hostess had handed the cups herself ? I thought so ; but, unfortunately, there are young married folk who think it beneath their dignity to perform little acts of service, or they wish to show their acquaintances that they know how things ought to be done.

I have as yet been speaking upon general matters, now I will turn to details. Many of the points of perfection mentioned in the last paper on this subject are as necessary to be observed by the married as by the unmarried lady : politeness in all its forms, gracefulness, courtesy, and consideration for others. "Kindness in women, not their beautiful looks, shall win my love." I need not reiterate, but will merely add some of the extra forms which the married lady needs to know.

When you expect callers, be seated where you can be easily seen by them on entering your room. Try to pay attention to all alike. Speak a few words to

the latest comer, and then turn to those who have previously entered. When a caller rises to leave, the lady of the house also rises, and, while talking to her friend, rings the bell for the servant to open the door.

When receiving guests, stand in a conspicuous place, and greet each comer on arrival. The hostess should be quite ready before the hour named to receive her guests ; it is a terrible breach of good manners on her part for any one to arrive and not find her there to receive them. She should move about among her guests, and contrive that they shall not be rooted to one chair the whole of the evening.

When visitors arrive to stay in the house, it is also a breach of good manners if the lady of the house is not ready to welcome them on their arrival.

On her first appearance as a bride at any entertainment out of her own house, the young married lady takes precedence of all other guests ; and on these occasions she is the one to take her departure first. When ignorant of this formality, she keeps the other guests longer than they wish to stay, by waiting for some one to make the move, whereas it devolves upon her to do so.

The first calls paid to her by all her friends should be returned by her in a few days' time, and on the occasions of calling the lady should leave her own card and two of her husband's cards on the hall-table ; one of the latter is for the lady, and the other for the gentleman of the house at which the call is paid.

I spoke before of borrowing and repayment. I must bring the subject forward again, as I know that one phase is much practised by imperfect married ladies. They do not ask their neighbours for money, but are constantly sending to ask the loan of something or other—coals or candles, tea or milk, saucepans or shawls, patterns or papers. This habit of continuous borrowing is an imperfection, it bespeaks a careless housekeeper ; and when repayments are forgotten, or their necessity is silently ignored, it shows a lack of principle.

The remarks I made on dress are equally applicable to the married lady, for she is even more likely to slip into untidy habits. Her morning attire at breakfast often shows want of neatness and nicety, her evening dress is soiled, and the notion that "anything will do for home wear" seizes hold of her more tenaciously ; more especially does she shelter herself under that excuse when children begin to cling to her skirts. No, my dear lady, you will miss perfection if you let any excuse serve you for being untidy or dishevelled at any hour. You may have to forego the adornments of brooches and trinkets, of pretty laces and furbelows, for the sake of tiny fingers, but I beseech you do not lapse into slovenliness, either in your personal attire or in the arrangements of rooms, the freshness and brightness and attractiveness of which depend so much upon you and your supervision. So many slovens there are already, who gradually and yet quickly lose their interest in making and keeping themselves and their homes bright and cleanly. Do not increase the number.