

# BOOKS OF ETIQUETTE.



**I**F I had the time to amuse myself, I think that—among other things—I should collect books of etiquette, and read them. If you will examine the works of fiction most popular nowadays you will come to the conclusion that the three qualities considered most engaging in written matter are mystery, humour, and surprise. The story of mystery, done with reasonable dexterity, always pleases; the story of humour often does; surprise is frequently an active ingredient in the pleasure derived from both, but it has its own more particular domain in the novel of rattling adventure. But to enjoy these three qualities you must read three, or at least two, separate books of fiction; in the book of etiquette you get them all three together. Where will you find a more ingenious and astounding puzzle than in the maze of instruction (and contradiction if you consult more than one book) that clusters about the simple visiting-card? The rules of that game that no mind but the female can ever comprehend, the game that reaches its perfection when played by a stout old lady with three daughters

and a brougham, and a full pack to deal to every hand for three miles round! I defy anybody to recite the rules correctly after any reasonable number of perusals; and when you've learned them all by rote you haven't begun to attack the real mysteries, which are: who invented the whole complication, and why did he (or she) do it? As to humour you will find it everywhere, and quite of the best sort—the unconscious. And when once you get clear of the puzzles and the fun, the rest of the work supplies constant surprises; for you are repeatedly amazed to find that any living creature, out of a Hottentot kraal or a wild beast show, needs telling the things so solemnly impressed on the barbarous reader.

I remember a charming etiquette book published some few years back in America. A friend, who managed somehow to get a copy, refused to part with it at any price, but lent it me, and I made a few excerpts wherewith to console myself for the loss of the volume when I returned it. I get a deal of consolation (and instruction) out of those excerpts, and since I made them I don't think I have transgressed the rules laid down

very often. For instance, you are told that you should not permit a lady "to carry your cane in the city." Now, that is a valuable warning, and I have attended to it. If ever I grow fatigued with the weight of my walking-stick in the city, I do not shove it into a lady's hand and order her to carry it for me—that is, since I read that book. In the city, I mean, of course; in the country it would seem to be different, according to the authority. More, I never sit among ladies in my shirt-sleeves—a thing which this American book considers not quite the thing, "unless it is their express and unanimous desire." I seem, somehow, to have been curiously unlucky in this matter, for I never yet happened to sit among any ladies who expressed their "unanimous desire" that I should take off my coat for their amusement—or even my boots. Perhaps I am not sufficiently acquainted with the fashionable world. Another most valuable injunction that rather took me by surprise was this: "Take care not to upset or run into ornaments, or stub the toe against them." It seems so revolutionary, you see—comes on one as such a sudden revelation, after half a lifetime spent in smashing one's friends' furniture, by way of polite attention. But fashions change, it is plain, and gentlemen who have been in the habit of climbing on a lady's mantelpiece and "stopping the toe" against her ormolu clock will be grateful for the information that that fine old courtly ceremony is now considered out of date. I never do it myself—now. Also, I never go to a dance. Why? Because of the directions in this book. They don't forbid me to go to a dance, you understand, but they make the job rather formidable. When I read that I am always to "take the inside arm of a lady when promenading" I am in some little doubt as to where she keeps her inside arm, having been usually in the habit, not of taking any inside arm of hers, but of offering her one of my own outside arms—that on the right. But that

is a small thing. Real difficulties present themselves when I learn that "any step between a Boston dip and a Philadelphia glide, if used as a sort of an imperceptible, sweeping dip, will appear to great advantage on the floor." I have a horrid apprehension that any attempt of mine to compromise between a Boston dip and a Philadelphia glide (seeing that I don't know one from the other) would not end in my appearing "to great advantage on the floor," though I am pretty confident that I should end on the floor somehow. I am not sure, however, that even this trouble would deter me altogether, but there are worse. I must "never allow her"—this means the lady with the inside arm—"to approach the refreshment table." Now, I want to know how I am to prevent this if the lady insists. Must I drag her away by that inside arm, or am I expected to deter her by "stopping the toe against" her? I have a

APPEARING  
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sort of idea that this may not be exactly what is meant, and that perhaps I am desired simply to wait on the lady—a thing that is not very novel in itself, since I was shown how to do it as a small boy. But the novelty—and this is what keeps me out of the ball-room now—is in the way that waiting is to be set going. I must “repeatedly ask after her thirst”! It is charming, though perhaps not altogether a novelty, for I have heard the inquiry made in somewhat similar form at Hampstead on a Bank Holiday. And then I must “bring the glass to her on your kerchief if there are no doilies.” Now, what is my “kerchief”? It *can't* mean my neckerchief, and if it means—but, there, these modern improvements dazzle me utterly.

I have said that I have not transgressed all the rules I copied from this admirable guide to gentility; but, alas! some of them I have transgressed shamefully. For instance, “a gentleman will find it convenient and comfortable to have his own fan.” Now, I blush

must really get them some day, of course—these and a few other necessities; a nice pair of curling-tongs and a little powder-puff for the pocket, for instance, and a few bonnet-pins to hold my hat to my scalp on a windy day. Another sin I have to admit: one of the strictest of all the rules in all this strict book is that a gentleman must “never carry a parcel of any kind.” But, alas! my wife won't let me be a gentleman; nobody could be a gentleman with a wife like mine, who never leaves off shopping except on Sunday. She has even made me carry a lobster in a rush bag—a fearful tyranny. Books, also, from Mudie's, in a strap. I shudder when I remember these villainies, and all that sustains my guilty soul is a sneaking hope that the writer of that beautiful book, being in America, doesn't know what a miscreant I am.

I am not quite sure, either, that I have quite triumphantly acquitted myself in the matter of conversation. “At receptions, teas, dinners, dances, or any other entertain-



to confess that I have never had my own fan, and words can never tell how inconvenient and uncomfortable I feel—and how remorseful. But I can confidently and honestly say also that I have never had anybody else's; so that at least I can't be imprisoned for my misdeeds. But the humiliating fact remains that I have never had a fan, nor even a smelling-bottle. I

ment,” says the authority, “the topics should be select, and the oral abilities prepared to discuss them in a free and familiar way.” I am not quite sure what it all means, but it sounds rather too beautiful for me to aspire to. I am always dejected—even desperate—when I encounter that blessed word “select”; it knocks all the free and familiar stuffing out of my unprepared oral abilities. I am a



pallid coward in the presence of anything or anybody "select"; just as I am when it comes to one of those "flowered coloured waistcoats" which this lovely book tells me are the "culmination of grandeur in the

lished only a month or two ago in this country. I turned to the great and ingenious game of card-leaving first, of course, for to me the thing has the fascination of



dress of a gentleman." I am not brave enough to present myself before an admiring world in such an article.

Still, I mustn't despair; perfection is beyond the reach of the mere mortal. If I can't follow the counsels of this beautiful book to the letter I can at least make a rough sort of stagger at it, taking care not to stub the toe against anything select. And I can prevent any lady in the city from carrying my walking-stick on her outside arm, even if I shrink from "inquiring after" her inside thirst; while if my wife still cruelly insists on my carrying a parcel of Boston dips, I can at least endeavour to do it with a Philadelphia glide, so that the dips will be sort of imperceptible, and so that even in the event of utter breakdown my culminating grandeur will cause me to appear to great advantage on the floor.

I don't remember seeing another modern etiquette book quite so handsomely interesting as this; but just lately I came across a rather good one which was pub-

lished only a month or two ago in this country. I never seem to know what is trumps, so to speak, and I thought I might get a hint. But, no. I learn that if I were a young lady I should not send up my mother's card when calling on a publisher—though I find no instructions in the case of an auctioneer or even an aeronaut; and I am only left to wonder if—not being a young lady—I ought to carry *my* mother's card when I go to a publisher. The rest is whirling confusion. Cards that have to be turned down, cards that should be turned up (that sounds rather like trumps), marked cards (which seem to be allowed in this game), how many should be dealt to a widow with two daughters, which should go into the jack-pot, what should be done to a respectable dowager with five aces up her sleeve—all these things are probably there, but I have forgotten them already. What I can't forget is the instruction as to how the cards should be played on the hall-table. The "society woman," I am told, should "pop it down

like a flash of lightning." I have never seen a "society woman," or anybody else, popping down a flash of lightning, though it is easy to understand that almost any lady embarrassed by the possession of such an unaccustomed article would seize the first opportunity of getting rid of it without waiting for the pop. But, at any rate, any lady familiar with the society of flashes of lightning will now know what to do with her card.

Giving up the card game in despair I turned to "Introductions," and was gratified to find complete instructions to the unimaginative liar as to the lies proper to use after promising to introduce somebody to another body who won't have it: one suggested excuse, equally picturesque and soothing, being that the desired introduction would have been "cruelty to animals"! (N.B.—This is not a joke of mine; the words are printed in the book and can be bought—with the rest of it—for a shilling, in a nice blue cover, decorated with a blameless-looking lady and gentleman etiquetting away like anything.)

Then I learn that at luncheon mayonnaise or dressed crab should be served "instead of fresh fish." Now, this is a nice piece of information to spring on a man who has all his life been innocently partial to salmon or lobster mayonnaise and had no idea it was being given him "instead of" fresh fish! And dressed crab, too; surely the crab is fresh sometimes—just by way of accident, as it were?

I also learn some new things about weddings. It used to be the correct thing, it seems, for the bridegroom to "mope near the altar," but now it is considered preferable for him to speak to a few of his friends "near the top of the church" as they arrive. Now, the top of most of the churches I am acquainted with is a weathercock, and I am glad that I was married so long ago that I was not expected to swarm up the steeple to hail the arrival of my friends. It was the Duke of Portland, it seems, who "first made this innovation," and he is described as a "very happy-looking bridegroom, the only one I ever saw who was completely at his ease," which would seem to have been very creditable—not to say dexterous—in the circumstances. A "nicely-decorated fireplace" is recommended as "an excellent background for the bride," and if such things as backgrounds are necessary for newly-married people the fireplace would certainly seem to have advantages over the expanse of heavenly empyrean which is considered good enough

for the agile bridegroom. There is a certain order of precedence prescribed for the entry into the tea-room, beginning with the bride and ending with the bridesmaids and grooms-men—after whom, I read, "there is no precedence observed, but a general *sauve qui peut*," which looks like a hint that every guest who can should take the opportunity to escape from the premises as fast as he can go.

But the ordinary common or fireplace-and-steeple wedding is not all. I read about all sorts of weird anniversaries and how to behave at their celebrations. The first anniversary is the cotton wedding, the second the paper wedding, the next the leather wedding, and then the fourth year goes blank—I can't tell why. The fifth anniversary is the wooden wedding, and then there is another blank—though why this shouldn't be the putty wedding isn't explained. The seventh is the woollen wedding, the tenth the tin wedding, the fifteenth the crystal wedding, the twentieth the china wedding; and after that all is fairly plain sailing, through the silver wedding, the pearl, the ruby, the golden, and the diamond weddings, at the end respectively of twenty-five, thirty, forty, fifty, and seventy-five years of married etiquette. I little knew the vista of weddings I was entering on when I moped about that altar and didn't climb that steeple—what a desperate course of one-wifed, dry-goods polygamy lay before me.

I have endeavoured to express my admiration of these particular books, not because they are the most admirable in existence, but because they are all I have taken notes of. There are others just as charming without a doubt, and that is why I should like to collect them. And there are one or two very old books of etiquette, too, which have been collected and reprinted by the Early English Text Society. Several of these are addressed to children, and, indeed, the first in the collection is called the "Babee's Book." From these we learn nothing of the Philadelphia glide, and the topics are not always "select," though the author's "oral abilities" certainly seem to discuss them in a free and familiar way. For instance, we learn from the "Lyttille Childrenes Lytil Boke" that in the dark times of the fifteenth century it was not considered the correct thing, in "smart" circles, to spit over the dinner-table, or even on it.

Ne spytte thow not over the tabylle,  
Ne therupon, for that is no thing abyлле,  
is the neat and epigrammatic way in which

the instruction is put, and it is curious to note that in many old-fashioned households the rule is still observed, after all these years. The idea was not that of one writer alone, either; not merely one of those flashes of inspiration that come to one favoured person of genius, for in the "Boke of Curtasye" we find someone else of the same opinion:—

Gif thou spitt over the borde, or elles opon,  
Thou schalle be holden an uncurtayse mon.

Wonderfully particular they seem to have been in those old days, to consider a person "an uncurtayse mon" for such a trifle as that. Indeed, in regard to the table-cloth, they seem to have been altogether morbidly sensitive:—

Theron thou shalt not thy nose wype  
is one line in the moral poem called "Urbanitatis," a manuscript of about 1460. After this you are not surprised to read, in the "Booke of Nurture and Schoole of Good Manners":—

Pick not thy teeth  
with thy Knyfe,  
nor with thy fyn-  
gers ende,  
But take a stick or  
some cleane  
thyng,  
then doe you not  
offende.

This same  
"Booke of Nur-  
ture" also tells  
us:—

And suppe not loude  
of thy Pottage  
no tyme in all thy  
lyfe;

Dip not thy meate in  
the Saltceller,  
but take it with  
thy Knyfe.

A little reflection convinces us that it is the salt which you must take "with thy Knyfe." We seem to have allowed this part of the rule to lapse, so far as my observation goes; but, in our weak-kneed, halting, modern way, we have not gone boldly to the time-honoured alternative of dipping our meat in the salt-cellar, but have made a miserably timid compromise with a spoon.

Whan thou etyst, gape not to wyde  
That thi mouth be sene on yche a syde,

says the "Lytill Boke"; and I believe there is still a lingering prejudice against opening the mouth quite so wide at meals.

They were practical, too, in those times. Thus says the "Booke of Nurture" in the matter of eating soup—which the book, of course, calls "pottage":—

Fill not thy spoone to full, least thou  
loose somewhat by the way.

And even now the experienced are aware of the danger of piling soup too high on a spoon. More, this same book taught caution in another way, for when your soup was finished:—

When thou haste eaten thy Pottage  
doe as I shall thee wish;  
Wype cleane thy sponne, I do thee read,  
leave it not in the dish;

Lay it downe before  
thy trenchoure,  
thereof be not  
afrayde;  
And take heed who  
takes it up,  
for feare it be con-  
vayde.

Now, that is very excellent advice. Always be sure that the lady sitting next you does not "convey" your soup-spoon. The American book of etiquette which I began by quoting said nothing about this; and yet I should think it at least as important to see

that your friends do not steal the spoons as to see that a lady does not carry your walking-stick in the city. On the whole, though these old books of over four hundred years back may be a trifle startling in places, yet they contain many admirable teachings (I have quoted some of them, in fact), and at least they do *not* enjoin you to "inquire after" a lady's thirst.

