

CHAPTER II. PERSONALITY.

The social world is a world of personalities. Each individual has a value and importance according to the sum total of his characteristics, physical, mental, and moral. Other and more external facts enter into his social position, but in the circle of his friends and acquaintances, in whatever grade of society he may move, his place is determined by his personality. Personality alone is the final test of a man's worth to society.

A man's worth to the business world as a doer, maker, or as any other executive, his worth to the state as an incorruptible official, his worth to his family as a devoted husband and father, his worth to literature or art as a thinker or maker,—these values are imprinted upon his personality, howbeit with almost imperceptible lines.

If a man would present a pleasing personality as his claim for recognition in society, he must not neglect his mental attitude, his appearance, his manners, or his speech. They are all true expressions of his real self, and they, together with his deeds, are all that his fellow men have by which to appraise his real worth.

Character is the foundation of all true courtesy, for manners are but minor morals, as many a writer has shown. It is not the part of a book on etiquette to tell how to keep out of prison, or to explain that one should be honorable and should do no murder. No book or person, however, can inculcate etiquette without showing that the roots of all true courtesy lie deep in the spirit of unselfish consideration for others. To master this spirit until it becomes one's own is the best fitting one can have for social achievement. Such consideration is the touchstone by which all social customs are tried, to see whether they be worthy of perpetuation or not. It is the sure test of correct conduct under all circumstances, and can be so utilized in case of doubt.

A veneer of virtue long passes as currency in no society. It is necessary to have character in order to be respected. As etiquette is founded upon certain simple virtues, it is necessary, at least, to affect the semblance of them. To be long effective they must be sincere, as a little experience shows.

Among the minor moral virtues which in social life are of major importance are those of self-control, sincerity, and unselfishness.

There is no place for anger in social life. To give expression among a group of people to any strong feeling, no matter how justified it may be, is not courteous, because you may be inadvertently treading upon the beliefs or prejudices of some of your hearers. There are times when debate and the taking of sides on questions of common interest are in order, but that is not usually in the mixed society of men

and women, who are supposedly dropping, for a time, the burdens of life for the sake of enjoyment and recreation.

Self-control is necessary not only in the constant curbing of anger and the more violent emotions, but in pushing into the background one's personal desires in order that one may do one's social duty. A bridesmaid may have assumed the obligations of that honor, and then found that, for personal reasons, they were distasteful to her. She should not, however, permit herself to fail in one iota of her duty. The always-remembered disappointment of the bride, or bridegroom, if either bridesmaid or best man should fail, at a time when life should be as full of happiness as it possibly could, should more than offset the pain of even difficult control on the part of the chosen friend, in order to carry out his or her obligations satisfactorily.

In thousands of minor circumstances the need of absolute self-command for the sake of social virtues is evident. The man and woman who can so control themselves, and think only of others, win warm places in the hearts of their friends.

It is a dreary thing to be always sustaining a sham of any sort. Sincerity has its pleasure as well as its virtue. One should seek to be sincere, as perhaps no social virtue is of greater importance than this. The possibilities of development of character and of the betterment of social customs depend upon the exercise of this virtue. For that reason it is well to follow carefully the acknowledged rules of etiquette, in the hope and expectation of growing into the attitude of mind which will make them a natural expression of one's self.

"The little observances of social life," says Dr. T. L. Nichols in his book on "Social Life," "are more important than many people think them. The outward signs or expressions of any sentiment not only manifest it to others, but help to keep it active in ourselves. This is the use of all ceremony and ritualism in religion . . . and the same principle governs all social ceremonies and observances."

Without unselfishness and a fine consideration for others, the art of etiquette would be impossible. True etiquette learns no maxims to practise mechanically. Rather, it learns all the maxims upon which it may have to draw, and practises them only as the considerate heart sees an opportunity and desires to embrace it.

Personal appearance is next to character in importance. The most important factors in this, with the average person, are not those that Nature alone is responsible for, but those that the individual himself is alone responsible for. Beauty is a pleasant thing, and not to be despised, although beauty alone is of little worth. The social conquests of history have not been confined to the possessors of beauty, and there have been many notable cases where decided plainness and even ugliness was the lot of one who nevertheless was a person of great charm.

One's figure and bearing count perhaps for most, as they give the first and distant impression, and are, as it were, the outlines of the picture.

Self-consciousness, for any reason and to even the slightest degree, is a great barrier to social intercourse and to mental freedom. It shows as often in a person's carriage as in his words or features. It should be broken down at all costs, and this can be done only by the person himself. It may be done,

usually with comparative ease, by becoming and staying interested in something. Then awkwardness, and a defiant attitude of spirit and body, will vanish. Haughtiness is usually the outward sign of a great inner self-consciousness. All of these traits, as well as their opposites, stamp themselves upon the bearing of the body, and reveal there the clearest manifestations of character.

Dress is almost as essential. By this is not meant a rigid adherence to fashion,—the stamp of a weak mind,—or even good taste, but an eye to the appropriate and fitting. First of all, dress should be subordinated to character, that is, it should be no more costly than the wearer can afford, and no more striking than modesty and good taste allow.

Good taste in dress means plain and simple styles, but material as elegant, serviceable, and pleasing as one's purse permits. It means also a few things well chosen and kept in good order, rather than many things more or less untidy; that one's wardrobe will be harmonious,—not a cheap, shabby garment to-day, and an expensive, showy one to-morrow. It means also that the wardrobe throughout, not only the external garments, is equally well chosen and well cared for.

One should not mix one's wardrobe. A coat of one suit and the skirt of another should not be worn together. A carriage parasol should not be used on a sunny promenade, nor an umbrella in a carriage, or open automobile.

It is necessary to wear a dress appropriate to the occasion in order to be well dressed. No matter how excellent one's costume may be, if it does not suit the time and place it is absurd and incongruous. Some of the major rules for appropriate dress are as follows:

Full evening dress demands one's most elaborate gown, made of silk, satin, velvet, lace, or crêpe-de-chine, as costly as one's purse permits, with décolleté effects, gained by either actual cut or the use of lace and chiffon. One should wear delicate shoes, white or light-colored gloves, and appropriate jewels, of which it is not good taste to have too lavish a display.

As hostess at an afternoon reception or luncheon one may wear an elaborate gown of the richest materials, with either long sleeves and high neck, or elbow sleeves and slightly low neck. As guest one may wear a walking suit, with pretty blouse, white gloves, and decorative hat.

The usual dress for a formal breakfast is much the same as for a luncheon,—a pretty afternoon street costume, with a dainty blouse, gloves, and "picture" hat, which is not removed. In summer, a gown of light material, such as organdie, muslin, or other soft goods, dainty and somewhat elaborate, is in good taste. Hat and gloves are invariably worn with this gown if the affair is ceremonious.

For church wear, a quiet, rather simple street dress, which does not proclaim that either money or time has been spent upon it to any notable extent, is by far the most appropriate. The suit should be becoming but inconspicuous.

Ball costume is conventionally gay and elaborate, the lightest of materials being used, especially by those who intend to take part in the dancing, and a dainty effect being sought. Any costly, rich-looking materials are used, and a wide range of fashion is permitted. The gown is cut short-sleeved and décolleté, and the dancing shoes are of satin or very fine kid. Jewels are worn but sparingly by young women in their

first season in society. The costume of a débutante at her first ball is usually white.

At an informal dinner, any pretty gown may be worn, with special attention to the coiffure.

Black should never be worn at a wedding. If one does not care to lay it aside for the time being, one should not attend.

For men, the proper costume for an early morning breakfast is the black cutaway coat with gray trousers, and other details as for a formal breakfast. In summer a gray morning suit with fancy waistcoat, or white flannels or linen, with appropriate hat, shoes, and tie, is permissible.

At a formal breakfast men wear frock coats, fancy waistcoats, gray trousers, patent-leather shoes, large ties, high hats, and gray gloves.

Afternoon dress for formal functions between noon and evening consists of a double-breasted black frock coat, or a black cutaway coat, with either light or dark waistcoat, gray trousers, patent-leather shoes, light four-in-hand tie, and light gloves.

Evening dress is the correct attire for all occasions after six o'clock. It consists of a black suit,—coat cut “swallow-tail,” and waistcoat cut low and in the shape of a “U,”—with white lawn tie, patent-leather pumps, black silk stockings, white gloves, and no jewelry but shirt studs, cuff links, and an inconspicuous watch fob. A black overcoat of some stylish cut and a silk hat or crush or opera hat is also worn.

Full evening dress is a man's costume for a formal dinner. The Tuxedo or short dinner coat with a black tie is intended only for dinners where women are not present. Although its use on other occasions is common, it is not correct, and ill accords with the elaborate gown which is usually worn at the formal dinner.

One should always have the appearance of being “well-groomed.” It is a minor matter to add to habits of personal cleanliness, which every man and woman of refinement adheres to with scrupulous conscientiousness, that attention to the little details and finishing touches of dressing, which give the impression conveyed in that graphic expression “well-groomed.” The niceties of life are always matters of small care but great moment.

The aim to be beautiful is a legitimate one, and worthy of the attention of every lover of beauty. To make the most of one's self, both for one's own sake and that of those about one, is a duty. Much can be done if good taste is consulted, and one's salient good points studied and emphasized. One can at least dress characteristically, and so bring out the ideals to which one gives adherence.