

HINTS ON
ETIQUETTE
AND THE USES OF SOCIETY



WITH A GLANCE AT BAD HABITS

HINTS ON ETIQUETTE

Hints on Etiquette, etc., was first published in 1834 by Messrs. Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longman.

This edition published in 2005 by Summersdale Publishers Ltd.

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Summersdale Publishers Ltd
46 West Street
Chichester
West Sussex
PO19 1RP
UK

www.summersdale.com

Printed and bound in Great Britain

ISBN 1 84024 456 9

Editor's Note

Originally published in 1856, this guide on how to behave in a polite and appropriate way in various social situations still has valuable lessons for the contemporary reader. Nobody likes to be considered 'improper', 'vulgar' or 'obtuse', nor the kind of person who doesn't know when it is acceptable to offer a lady a glass of wine. This Victorian handbook contains instructions on such themes as introductions ('Should you, whilst walking with your friend, meet an acquaintance, never introduce them') and dinner parties ('Eat peas with a dessert spoon; and curry also').

Indispensable reading for those wanting to act with a certain dignity in society (especially those in the country 'where the tone of society is altogether lower'), it is also a delightful diversion for the rest of us who are thankful that life is no longer so complicated.

Introduction

This is not written for those *who do* but for those who do *not know what is proper*, comprising a large portion of highly respectable and estimable people, who have had no opportunity of becoming acquainted with the usages of the (so termed) 'best society'; therefore, do not let the 'select' sneer, and say – 'Oh, everybody knows *that*; there is nothing *new* here.' Even *they* may be mistaken, and many may profit who will not choose to *own* how much they are indebted to this little book.

It would be absurd to suppose, those persons who constitute the upper ranks of the middle classes in London are ignorant of the regulations here laid down; but in the country (especially in the mercantile districts), where the tone of society is altogether lower, it is far otherwise, although country people may not feel inclined to *acknowledge* what is, nevertheless, strictly true.

If these 'hints' save the blush but upon *one cheek*, or smooth the path into 'society' of only *one* honest family, the object of the author will be attained.

London, 20 Jan. 1836

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Hints on Etiquette &c., &c.

Etiquette is the barrier which society draws around itself as a protection against offences the 'law' cannot touch – a shield against the intrusion of the impertinent, the improper, and the vulgar – a guard against those obtuse persons who, having neither talent nor delicacy, would be continually thrusting themselves into the society of men to whom their presence might (from the difference of feeling and habit) be offensive, and even insupportable.

**a guard
against those
obtuse persons**

Many unthinking persons consider the observance of Etiquette to be nonsensical and unfriendly, as consisting of unmeaning forms, practised only by the *silly* and the idle; an opinion which arises from their not having reflected on the *reasons* that have caused certain rules to be established, indispensable to the well-being of society, and without which, indeed, it would inevitably fall to pieces, and be destroyed.

Much misconstruction and unpleasant feeling arises, especially in country towns, from not knowing what is '*expected*', or necessary to be done on certain occasions, resulting sometimes from the prevalence of local customs, with which the world in general are not supposed to be acquainted.



Besides, in a mercantile country like England, people are continually rising in the world.

Shopkeepers become merchants, and mechanics manufacturers; with the possession of wealth they acquire a taste for the luxuries of life, expensive furniture, and gorgeous plate; also numberless superfluities, with the use of which they are only imperfectly acquainted. But although their capacities for enjoyment increase, it rarely occurs that the polish of their manners keeps pace with the rapidity of their advancement: such persons are often painfully reminded that wealth alone is insufficient to protect them from the mortifications a limited acquaintance with society will entail upon the ambitious. Pride often deters people from seeking the advice of the experienced, when the opportunity of receiving it is presented. It is to be hoped that the following remarks will furnish a guide through the intricacies of conventional usage, without risk to the sensitive, or the humiliation of *publicly* proclaiming the deficiencies of an imperfect education.

HINTS ON ETIQUETTE

In all cases, the observances of the Metropolis (as the seat of refinement) should be received as the standard of good breeding.



Introductions

Never ‘introduce’ people to each other, without a previous understanding that it will be agreeable to both.

There are many reasons why people ought never to be introduced to the acquaintance of each other, without the consent of each party previously obtained. A man may suit the taste, and be agreeable enough to *one*, without being equally so to the *rest* of his friends – nay, as it often happens, decidedly displeasing; a stupid person may be delighted with the society of a man of learning or talent,

**reasons why
people ought
never to be
introduced**

to whom in return such an acquaintance may prove an annoyance and a clog, as one incapable of offering an interchange of thought, or an idea worth listening to.

But if you should find an agreeable person in private society, who seems desirous of making your acquaintance, there cannot be an objection to your meeting his advances half way, although the ceremony of an 'introduction' may not have taken place; his presence in your friend's house being a sufficient guarantee for his respectability, as of course if he were an improper person he would not be there.

Should you, whilst walking with your friend, meet an acquaintance, never introduce them.

In making 'introductions,' take care to present the person of the lower rank to him of the higher; that is, the commoner should be presented to the peer, not the peer to the commoner; Dr. A. to Lord B., not Lord B. to Dr. A. Observe the same

rule with ladies – the lady (as a female) claiming the highest rank, it is to *her* the gentleman must be presented, not the lady to the gentleman.

Be cautious how you take an intimate friend *uninvited* even to the house of those with whom you may be equally intimate, as there is always a feeling of jealousy that another should share your thoughts and feelings to the same extent as themselves, although good breeding will induce them to behave *civilly* to your friend on your account.

Friendship springs up from sources so subtle and undefinable, that it cannot be *forced* into particular channels; and whenever the attempt has been made, it has usually been unsuccessful.

Never make acquaintances in coffee-houses or other public places. As no person who respects himself does so, you may reasonably suspect any advances made to *you*.

An adherence to Etiquette is a mark of respect; if a man be *worth knowing*, he is surely worth the trouble to approach properly. It will likewise relieve you from the awkwardness of being acquainted with people of whom you might at times be ashamed, or be obliged under many circumstances to '*cut*'.

A neglect of, or an adherence to, the forms of society, in others towards yourself, is oftentimes the only way in which you are enabled to judge if your acquaintance be *really* considered desirable. You will meet with professions of civility and friendship in the world as mere matters of course; and were you to act upon what people *say*, instead of what they *do*, you would run a risk of being mortified, which no person of proper pride would choose to encounter; especially if the other party *be*, or *assume to be*, of higher rank than yourself: we never knew a person, really desirous of forming a friendship with

**you would run
a risk of being
mortified**

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another, neglect, either by word or deed, the means of accomplishing such an object.

It is, however, understood in society, that a person having been *properly* introduced to you, has some claim on your good offices in future; you cannot therefore slight him without good reason, and the chance of being called to an account for it.



Letters of Introduction

If you have letters of introduction from one friend to another, do *not take them*, but *send them*, with your card of address. If he be a *gentleman*, he will return your visits as soon as possible; at any rate it will give him an option, which by taking your letters in person you *do not do*, but rather force yourself upon him whether *he will or not*. If your letters be on business only, no ceremony is necessary – take them at once. In all such matters never trust to a *second* that which may be so much better done by yourself.