

Etiquette of social life in Washington

ETIQUETTE OF SOCIAL LIFE IN WASHINGTON.

BY MRS. MADELEINE VINTON DAHLGREN.

FIFTH EDITION.

JUN No. 9002 m

PHILADELPHIA: J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.

1881.

F196 .D23 1881

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PREFACE.

We desire, in issuing this fifth edition of our little work on the "Etiquette of Social Life in Washington," anew to express our gratification at the favorable reception it has met with, and also to renew our thanks for the assurances received from many official personages, as well as others of distinction in our society here, that the views herein given are considered correct and logical, *and are accepted as authority.*

We have been repeatedly requested to enlarge this treatise on the *peculiarities* of Washington Social Life, so as to combine with it a Manual of Etiquette, and make it a text-book of good breeding. While we are very sensible of the implied compliment of supposing

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us capable of giving such large instructions as would form polished manners, yet we would be appalled at the magnitude of such an undertaking!

There is a trite saying, “that it takes three generations to make a lady or a gentleman.” While we can in no wise admit a statement so greatly at variance with the most cherished maxims of our republican institutions, which justly base all distinction upon personal merit alone, yet this axiom of the Old World has this significance for us: It implies 4 that sensibility is an innate gift which must be “born with us,” and no book or set of rules ever written or invented can confer refinement where the nature is coarse and the education has been neglected. We, therefore, hold in slight estimation all treatises purporting to form good manners, which, to be genuine, must have a deeper foundation than any book can give. But the *official* life here leads to perplexing social questions, and demands a special code of social laws to meet it; and this is the peculiar phase of life at the seat of government that our “Etiquette” is intended to explain.

We have not, therefore, materially enlarged our first work, other than to add a chapter to the Appendix with regard to “Some Points” which we had not at first elucidated with the requisite care.

It has been suggested that the rapidly increasing demands of Washington life require some change of hitherto accepted forms in order to make it possible to meet the weight of social obligation. These contemplated innovations we shall allude to.

The charming musical fragment, “ *If order is Heaven's first law,* ” was written by the great *maestro* Hans von Büllow as a prelude to this fifth edition of “Etiquette of Social Life in Washington,” and presented to us with the request to have it so published. We are happy to give it the first place, which it so well merits, and we do so with sincere thanks to this gifted artist for the graceful compliment.

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"If Order is Heaven's First Law."

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ETIQUETTE OF SOCIAL LIFE IN WASHINGTON.

If order is Heaven's first law, we should not regard as beneath careful attention the proper recognition of rules which may tend to avoid confusion in social life.

Because we are a republic we are not necessarily to be deprived of those amenities which render life agreeable and assist to cultivate good feeling.

Courtesy may be considered but as the mirror of charity, and, although it may often become an unmeaning semblance of benevolence, yet, if we assiduously cultivate, if only but the shadow, we may finally hope to gain the reality. (Thus, by placing ourselves in excellent relations towards others, we may eventually acquire that sentiment of good will which may at first have been but a mere appearance.)

That which is called good breeding is actually the Golden Rule carried into practice, and is therefore a very Christian accomplishment. Since egotism is the most dreaded bane of society, if we can learn so far to forget ourselves as to consider the just claims of others, we shall have gained a victory over selfishness. But our intention is not to moralize or present trite truisms, but to place within the scope of a few pages the true state of the present phase of Washington society life.

There are several unsettled questions with regard to which we do not, of course, expect or intend to do more than to indicate how it seems to us these points may be amicably adjusted.

Washington society life is principally official, or, rather, society here is composed in so great a degree of official personages who represent the mechanism of the state, that the social obligations and customs have become about as complex as the constitutional laws

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upon which the official are based, and yet we have no constitution or defined code which makes our social laws as clear as our political. Yet this should be the case.

No reader of history, however superficial his view, but must have noticed how constantly the gravest affairs of state have become complicated with the thousand seeming nothings of every-day life. Nor have we been at all exempt from such entanglements. On the contrary, every one at all familiar with the past social incidents of Washington is perfectly aware of various occasions in which animosities have been engendered by the omission, or the commission, of certain requirements exacted by some and not so 15 understood by others. It is, indeed, extraordinary that this subject has not compelled a more explicit understanding long ago, in view of the many embarrassments, and some of them not unimportant, that have already arisen from alternate neglect or ignorance of social observances which, in order to avoid confusion, should be well understood and carefully weighed.

Nor can ignorance of the official etiquette prevailing here be construed into any want of general society training elsewhere, because we have in Washington a very exceptional basis.

When the republic was first organized, we all know that the venerated Washington and his stately wife compelled a rigid observance of social etiquette towards the administration in its various branches. Jefferson, in consequence of his radical sentiments, introduced various innovations, but General Jackson, when he became President, first broke down the barriers of careful respect, and received all comers without any formal or special rules; and the consequence was that a disorder and rudeness characterized those receptions hitherto unknown, and which no private gentleman in the country would have tolerated in his own home.

If our stanch republicanism renders us unwilling to acknowledge that the President and his wife are the "first gentleman and lady" of the land, yet we may assuredly, without danger

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to our social independence, 16 accord them socially that respectful deference which the Constitution gives to the Executive in the exercise of his granted prerogatives. Beginning here, we may well concede to the various Departments that social recognition which is in harmony with the Constitution.

Not a winter passes but we hear the same questions asked over and over again by scores of persons entering for the first time into public life, or by strangers who come here to participate in our social festivities, who do not know what are the peculiar social requirements the official element has introduced. We may justly commence our remarks upon these peculiar exigencies by a consideration of the position of the Presidential family.

The President, as the executive head of the nation, is properly entitled to precedence. This first place is, of course, accorded to him whenever and wherever he appears in social life. His social privileges entitle him to receive all calls without being expected to return any. In conversation he is addressed as "Mr. President." Some choose to use the phrase "Your Excellency," but this is a matter of taste only. Usage has not required any special preliminary formalities in order to make the acquaintance of the President. During the session of Congress he gives stated receptions, and all persons who desire to do so may attend these levees. Upon entrance you give your name to an usher and are announced. 17 You are thereupon introduced to the President by the Marshal of the District, or, at times, by some other person who may have been designated for such purpose, and you are immediately after presented to the different members of the Presidential family who may be present. Occasionally some embarrassment has arisen because persons on entering, in place of merely giving their own name to the official who makes the presentations, stop to introduce themselves the friends who accompany them. This causes a delay, which arrests the throng of persons who are coming in, and consequent confusion ensues. In making this suggestion we refer, of course, only to the *public levees*, which are usually much crowded, and where a positive form of introduction insures equal justice to all.

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In case you are precise, you leave your card before your departure from the Executive Mansion. If the reception is held in the morning, the usual costume for morning receptions suffices. If in the evening, a full toilette is demanded. It is not respectful to appear in less than evening dress at an evening reception given by the President. Even in making an evening call, at any time, it is more proper to make at least a demi-toilette. Those ladies who are fastidious do not wear a bonnet in making an evening visit at the President's. We have seen the wives of Foreign Ministers call in full evening dress. If the President have a wife, she also receives the 2¹⁸ first visit from every one, nor is she expected to return any visits. Of course, if she desires to be especially kind, she is at liberty to make visits, although we believe it has been found a safer rule not to make distinctions. But other members of the Presidential family are allowed by custom to return visits and acknowledge civilities tendered. At the state dinners of the President the usual etiquette prevails as at other dinner-tables where official personages are entertained.

It is not permissible to decline a dinner or other invitation of a social nature sent by the President, unless in case of your own illness or that of any member of your family, or of the death of a relative. When, however, it is imperative to send a regret, explain in your note the reasons which compel a nonacceptance. Indeed, it is more respectful to state the cause rather than to send a merely formal regret, whenever an excuse of sufficient gravity may be assigned; so that it may plainly appear that your absence is unavoidable.

This may also apply to other invitations which you desire to treat with especial consideration. Any invitation of a social nature extended by the President of the United States must be considered, by courtesy, as a command; and, therefore, it is allowable to waive all other previous engagements made which may conflict with your acceptance, even if it happen to be a dinner. But in no other instance 19 may an invitation to dine, once accepted, be revoked; and even in such case you should mention the nature of the obligation which compels you.

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The United States is so vast a nation, and the requirements upon the time and attention of the President are so pressing and unceasing, that the physical possibility of meeting the demands of the exalted position becomes a serious matter. The arrangement of the Executive Mansion, assigned to the President for such various uses, would seem, in our humble opinion, greatly to add to the weight of the burden which has to be borne. This mansion, even in the present youth of this great country, is already hallowed by so many interesting associations that it has become dear to the hearts of the people, and it must ever be regarded as a place of treasured memories. But, in point of fact, the country, by reason of its immense and increasing development, now requires a more liberal provision to be made as to the surroundings of the President of the United States.

The present Executive Mansion does not exceed in size, if, indeed, it is sufficient, for *executive* and *official* purposes,—we mean for the transaction of public business and for all official acts. Belonging to *the purely official life* should be classed the public levees, the state dinners, and all formal presentations and receptions.

The present Executive Mansion should be held and assigned *exclusively* to these purposes; but there should also be erected a *home* for the President,—a spot more secure from intrusions—where, after the official round of duties has been met, he may claim and obtain for some slight portion of each day a measure of that dignified retiracy which is the privilege of every other gentleman of consideration in the land. Then, to be presented privately to the President and his family *in their home circle*, should, as in the days of our beloved Washington, require the same evidence of respectable social standing that other gentlemen of refinement expect in the choice of their special acquaintances and personal friends.

Whenever a *Presidential* Mansion, in addition to the present Executive Mansion, shall be provided, it will be found to solve many displeasing problems that now exist, and to spare much harassing fatigue now involved. As it is, the need for rest from routine and for change of air are alike so imperative, that for many years past it has grown into a

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sort of custom that the President becomes the guest of the invalid soldiers at their home during the summer. It is quite disgraceful that the nation should fail to make their elected chief magistrate their own honored guest at all times; but we are sure that all that may be needed, is to call attention to the insufficiency of the present arrangements, and point out how very incommensurate they are with the dignity of the country.

Certainly no country exceeds our own in large expenditure, ²¹ where any measure is once recognized as necessary; and here we crave permission to call attention to that apartment known by courtesy as “the State Dining-Room” of the present Executive Mansion. This room is miserably small for a banquet-hall. Its size will not permit over forty guests to be comfortably seated at a dinner; and this number can never represent the various elements that should meet at a state dinner. The nation should provide a banqueting-hall of sufficient space to entertain, upon occasions of state, the Diplomatic Corps, the Justices of the Supreme Court, the Cabinet, and the Senate at one dinner.

The President may properly be addressed in writing as “His Excellency, the President of the United States,” or as “President of the United States.” The various members of the Cabinet are to be addressed respectively, in writing, as “The Honorable, the Secretary of State,” “The Honorable, the Secretary of the Treasury,” “The Honorable, the Secretary of War,” “The Honorable, the Secretary of the Navy,” “The Honorable, the Secretary of the Interior,” “The Honorable, the Postmaster-General,” and “The Honorable, the Attorney-General;” the Vice-President and the Chief Justice as Mr. Vice-President and Mr. Chief Justice. Do not abbreviate words in sending a ceremonious note. When an official title, as in the case of diplomatic functionaries, is very long, whatever portion of the prefix you give, use the ²² entire word, and then add “etc., etc.,” in an under line, which is supposed to include all that is claimed.

All abbreviations are in bad taste in formal notes, whatever may be the title, whether civic, military, or naval. The word “Present,” written on an envelope, formerly much used, is now quite obsolete, except as confined to communications of a business nature, such

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as bills sent, and the word *Addressed* or the French words “ *En Ville* ” have superseded its use. Although we are decidedly opposed to the introduction of Gallicisms, as likely to emasculate the vigorous Saxon of our noble language, yet in matters of polite usage we may well continue to imitate our ancestors and introduce the courtly Norman phrases: they so aptly turn aside the blunt edge of much that is disagreeable in this busy, material life we lead. But we do object to that hybrid term, the “ *Republican Court*, ” which we so often hear. It is senseless, and an anomaly; or if it have a meaning, it is still more to be deprecated, as incompatible with the spirit of the framers of our excellent Constitution. We have no “Court Circle,” nor do we expect to remain a republic and at the same time ape “Court” manners. We have a social as well as a political autonomy. Let us preserve these with an equal jealous care and dignity. Our official etiquette is not intended as a personal compliment, but addresses itself to the office borne; so that it remains strictly in harmony with our republican sentiments. 23 When the incumbent loses office he becomes again only a private citizen whom the republic has honored. This is such a very beautiful provision of our legal Constitution, that we should never lose sight of its bearing on social life and manners. It is the counteracting and saving element, as opposed to all hereditary distinction, and holds each man and woman intact in the exercise of those talents by which he or she may regulate the individual destiny. The very words “Republican Court” have a fatal sound of Cæsarism; and, as we have already remarked, words become facts,—they are the expression of the soul's aspirations. We should prove to the world that republican manners are the very acme of true elegance in their unaffected simplicity.

It has always been, and still remains, a matter of discussion as to whom properly belongs the second place in social precedence, and equally accomplished persons differ on this point. This position is claimed for both the Chief Justice and the Vice-President, and so many good reasons may be given on either side that until a social congress can be convened to decide this and some other controverted points there can be no decision attained. It seems to us, however, that the Chief Justice exercises functions of such sacred importance and of such a nature that the second place should be given to him.

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He presides over the tribunal of ultimate appeal, he holds his office for life, he is placed beyond all the mutations incident to most other officials, however exalted. We have only to read the Constitution of the United States to be impressed with the immense dignity of his position. The same immutability characterizes the functions of the other Justices of the Supreme Court, who hold their positions for life, and are placed on a higher plane, and one above the political excitements of the country. These gentlemen are to be respectively addressed in conversation as Mr. Chief Justice and as Mr. Justice; and it has been usual to accord them precedence over Cabinet Ministers and Senators, for at times they may exercise a controlling influence over the Executive. At least we have seen this precedence given, although we can recall, in our earlier life, some bitter feuds on this score between the wives of Court and Cabinet dignitaries, and we never yet remember to have heard of a feminine warrior retreating when she once was committed to open battle. So these ladies may have left a legacy of contested honors to those who came after them. If so, in the name of Heaven's first law, let us have peace.

If, then,—for we tread on shaking ground,—these Justices walk in their silken robes so high, why not give the Chief Justice precedence over the Vice-President? And this we venture to suggest without any derogation to the exalted position of the Vice-President, whose chief dignity arises from his being President of the United States Senate; for, as Vice-President simply, he has no cares, no special duties, no political significance. His political importance is rather anticipatory than actual. Yet we must say that we would only rather avoid this difficulty at our own table by being careful not to invite these two high dignitaries to meet at the same time.

Succeeding the President, the Vice-President, the Chief Justice, comes the Speaker of the House, who, as well as the Vice-President, is possible successor to the Presidency, and although he may be, and generally is, a political power of the first importance, yet socially he comes in the fourth place. He is addressed in conversation as “Mr. Speaker.” All these gentlemen we have mentioned receive the first visit from all others.

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The General of the Army and the Admiral of the Navy occupy very exceptional positions. They fill stations made for them by a grateful country in recognition of special services, and the rank they hold has been bestowed upon them for life. Yet, properly speaking, they leave no successors except as the roll of fame shall proclaim these trumpet-tongued to the nation. As to the social precedence their rank entitles them to, inasmuch as they move, as it were, in eccentric orbits, they may be allowed the brilliant revolutions of luminaries which appear in the heavens and disappear without interruption to the general plan; in plain words, they are special creations, and not an essential part of the machinery 26 of the state, and leave no successors to their places. We believe they come after the four classes of officials we have mentioned, and, we suppose, relatively to each other, according to the order of the creation of the Army and Navy Departments by the Government. This rank, it seems to us, is theirs by right, and not by courtesy alone, as the General of the Army and the Admiral of the Navy represent the two arms of the Government through whom it must act directly in case of war. Some are of opinion that these special creations should hold social positions of precedence subordinate to the Cabinet and to the Senate. Regarding this, we would ask, To what dizzy height may the Senate, expressing the acclaim of the nation, and vested with the confirming power by the Constitution, raise those whom they delight to honor? Does this august body take these patriotic defenders of the republic from the gates of the Temple of Janus, which these heroes have closed, invest them with titles as with a shining raiment, and, at the same moment, limit *their own power* of conferring this lustre of renown? Does not the very precedence which may be thus assigned them—this place set apart by common consent, as in the case of the Chief Magistracy—present the utmost possible inducement the country may offset to stimulate military and naval achievement? Nor can the Senate be less in honor when it thus assists to build so high the bulwarks of the Executive in time of war; and 27 it must not be overlooked, as we have already said, that no general rule can become established here, for at the death of the incumbents the stations disappear. It will then anew require the Promethean spark of *genius aiding opportunity* to revive the rank. Until such time may again come, the Army and Navy will once more be commanded by

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the Senior Officer of the service, and, routine resuming its sway, the old place under the respective Departments will be assigned.

Among officers of the Army and Navy there exists a corresponding rank,—the Lieutenant-General and the Vice-Admiral, the Major-General and the Rear-Admiral, the Brigadier-General and the Commodore, the Colonel of the Army relatively to the Captain of the Navy, and so on *pari passu*. Upon this rule a social precedence can alone be placed whenever formal or ceremonious occasions require it. In England the Navy has precedence over the Army, inasmuch, we suppose, as the British nation in the highest degree owes its grandeur and prosperity to the perfection of its naval power and to its commercial marine. Hence every possible incentive to aim at brilliant success is given by England to the Navy. But the American nation, considering the magnitude of its seaboard and interior seas, is strangely apathetic about granting the highest form of encouragement to naval achievement, and *social honor* is recognized the world over as the very culmination of success. In 28 this matter, as in all others, the *political* uses dominate with us. It is one of the vices of our system. The soldier *votes*, while the sailor at sea makes even *this* highest sacrifice of his “birthright” for his ungrateful country. And sometimes poor Jack does not receive his “mess of pottage” in return.

We have now to consider the Cabinet; and here we must remark that so much confusion at once appears as really to make the whole subject a discouraging one.

As to the Cabinet, relatively to each other, the order observed is that priority in which these offices were created,—thus: the State, the Treasury, the War, the Navy, the General Post-Office, the Interior, and the Department of Justice. The chiefs of these Departments form the Executive Council of the Administration, but at the same time they are actual Heads of Departments of State. These functionaries alike expect to receive calls, and alike claim the same privileges; and it is only upon state occasions, such as official receptions, or formal state dinners, or other state ceremonials, that their order need be specially defined. Yet

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these situations are of not unfrequent occurrence, and no embarrassment should arise when they do present themselves.

It has been a contested point as to who should pay the first visit upon each other,—the Cabinet officer or the Senator,—but there would seem to be a growing tendency to yield to the Senatorial claim. This claim is based on the argument that the Senator represents State sovereignty, and that the dignity is, consequently, superior to that of the Cabinet officer, whose nomination the Senate confirms by its vote, and who is appointed constitutional aid and adviser of the President. Yet the Cabinet officer is something more than this; for, presiding over an entire Department of the Government, he possesses both power and dignity of function. As to his confirmation being subject to the vote of the Senate, the Senator, in turn, is subject to the State Legislature for his appointment, and this line of reasoning would place a State Senator above a United States Senator, and the Great Unwashed above the State Senator. Evidently, we cannot go back to first principles too closely in a republic in order to regulate our ceremonial.

But we do not propose to enter the domain of constitutional law, but simply to explain points, some established and others controverted, of social law, and give reasons, where any exist, for certain customs.

To our apprehension, leaving grave Cabinet Ministers and Senators to arrange questions of relative social importance,—or rather their wives to do this for them, for it is women who are social agitators in the Republic,—we really think that Senators' wives might safely yield this point to the Cabinet, when all the circumstances are considered; or if this cannot be effected, at least let a compromise be made, that certain 30 *privileges* are to be accorded by courtesy, still to be held in reserve as a *right*.

The ladies of the Cabinet have literally the public at their doors, and no one woman can possibly have health, strength, and endurance to enable her to meet the heavy burden imposed. These ladies are few in number, their residence here is fixed, central, and well

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known, while the families of Senators often come here for a short period of time only, and unless they call in person, or send their card giving their address, the utmost vigilance may not detect their momentary presence. It is true that many Senators have permanent residences here also, and even live in a superior style to Cabinet officers, yet we now speak of the general rule. The rapidly-increasing size of our society really demands that there should be some exemption allowed by custom to the higher officers of the executive, with regard to the personal notice of visits. If it were once understood that to return a call by a card sent, and afterwards acknowledge the visit received (in all cases where the person who calls has any social claims that are recognized in general society) by cards of invitation to receptions, these ladies would then be allowed some respite. To return a thousand visits in person is a hardship none can realize except those who have attempted the task. And, moreover, it becomes an utterly senseless formality. Why are these calls made by society in general? They are made as a mark of respect for the elevated station, and also in order to participate in the receptions which these functionaries give from time to time. These objects could be better met if it were permissible to send cards in recognition of visits, and if, where personal visits were made, the exceptions simply included the Supreme Court, the United States Senate, the Diplomatic Body, the General, and the Admiral, while outside of these functionaries an exception was allowed; and if *this rule* were once established, no invidious comments could be made. That which renders it so very disagreeable *now* to receive a card in place of a personal visit, is the knowledge that your call is not treated with the same respect that is paid to that of others; but a general rule could not produce ill-feeling. We see this notably in the case of the President and his wife. No one feels aggrieved because his or her visit is in no manner returned by these personages.

Again, the card receptions that Cabinet Ministers find it incumbent to give are of necessity so large that they are unpleasantly crowded for both host and guest. Why not select some suitable public hall for thence receptions, and let each Cabinet Minister hold therein one, two, or more card receptions during what is called "the season"? We know of no social

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experience so disagreeable as to make one of a dense mass of human beings literally packed into rooms of ordinary dimensions. It forms no compensation 32 that it is the “polite world” that suffocates you t Let any one, philosophically or cynically disposed, gain, if he can, a few inches of space in a corner, and become a spectator of such scenes as occur every winter at our crowded receptions, and the sheer absurdity of calling this aggregation, social life, becomes at once apparent. It is rather to be wondered at that dreadful accidents have not before now recalled society to its senses in this matter. We have entered many a hospitable door, and looking upward beheld such a surging mass of human beings on the stairway that, dismayed at the idea of wedging ourselves into this fearful crowd, we have sent our wraps back into the carriage from the door, rather than attempt to gain the dressing-room, and, only venturing far enough to pay our respects to the beleaguered host and hostess, have made a speedy exit: society, conversation, beauty of effect, were all lost, all rendered impossible, through want of space.

And this evil will go on increasing, unless some changes are effected. We understand that the Cabinet of the present administration, alarmed at the heavy burdens borne by their predecessors, contemplate making some change with regard to the personal return of visits. But it seems to us that any departure from hitherto established usage *must be made by common consent*, to be well received or effective.

This change, doubtless, could be brought about if 33 the wives of all the leading functionaries of state would publish a card defining their position in such a way as to make it evident that no personal discourtesy was intended, but rather the reverse. For if physical strength can by any device be saved for hospitable effort, the public is thereby better served. Yet this is a most difficult and hazardous experiment to make. The result would be that in some cases a card would be left in reply to a personal visit, while for others exceptions would be made.

The question arises at once—especially among people of consideration who are not in official life, and who would thus be overlooked—whether they will consent to receive so

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partial an equivalent for their visit. While it is not to be denied that official life constitutes a leading element in Washington society, yet the official, however brilliant, is after all so very ephemeral that, in real solidity of social importance, the resident society must always form an essential feature, and be classed as of the very *élite*.

Now, this resident society has reason to be jealous of its privileges, for these are securely based upon the highest respectability. The peculiar influences and cosmopolitan atmosphere of the National Capital have given it refinement and breadth, which make it too valuable an accessory to be overlooked. If ladies whose husbands occupy official positions here, fail to recognize with due consideration the resident social circle, it is to be feared that sufficient reason 3 34 will not exist to induce this society to add the charm of its life-long training to their more transitory existence. Even in Paris, where the Minister rarely makes a call in person, except upon his colleagues or upon a representative of a foreign Power, yet if the Minister wishes to accord particular respect to eminent private worth, he does not hesitate to do so. For instance, aged people of distinction or others of extraordinary merit may be called upon without any rule existing to prevent it. Certainly it is disagreeable to receive a card in return for a personal visit, and people of independent social position who have equal society favors to offer in exchange will hesitate long and perhaps refuse entirely to subject themselves to such treatment.

The fact, however, cannot be overlooked, that all of society in Washington who entertain much, suffer from the present custom of being expected to exchange visits in person. An emancipation, therefore, needed more or less by all, is the substitution of *exchange of cards for exchange of visits*. Such substitution would give more time and a fuller measure of strength *for an exchange of hospitality*. If we could ever claim this happy freedom, and an exemption be mutually accorded from the never-ceasing, never-ending, meaningless round of calls, society life in this city would reach its acme. Then the personal visit could be limited to the recognition of invitations, or as a mark of personal regard, for 35 special

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reasons. What an ocean of inane talk would be avoided, what painful, irreparable loss of precious time saved!

No great importance can be attached to the momentary morning call, other than as the formal prelude to a better acquaintance at the social reunions they are intended to precede. If society would only consent to assume that an exchange of cards was to be considered as but a complimentary prelude to a higher exercise of hospitality, the card would then be graciously received. Of course no one person will be allowed to initiate such an innovation. Our social customs, like our language, can only be altered in their polite uses by that *common consent* that makes law.

If ever a woman's parliament ought to be convened, it would be to relieve our social life in Washington from the senseless waste of time involved in the tread-mill routine of social visits. A clever woman, whom we met making a round of reception visits last winter, said to us, "You do not see my chain, but I am a galley-slave none the less!"

In the name of Liberty, who will arise to strike off our shackles?

The same controversy as to the first visit, which implies precedence, has always existed as regards the Diplomatic Body, who represent other countries near our own. We have known some ladies of the Senate who have refrained from making the first visit upon the wives of Foreign Ministers, assigning the same reason, that the Senators represented a State sovereignty, while the Minister was only an accredited functionary from a foreign power, it being held that the Ambassador or Envoy alone properly represented the sovereignty of a State, and this rank is not often sent to us. Yet the Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary certainly has a special mission, and may be said to represent State sovereignty, if not the person of the sovereign. This, of course, involves the question of relative dignity, and this in turn involves a veritable treatise on international law, and places the whole subject beyond the patience of our feminine disputants. We would make the womanly appeal, in behalf of the foreigner, *of courtesy to the stranger*. Based

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upon this sentiment, which should dominate us in their case, we would grant a Foreign Minister precedence wherever it can at all be given. In England Foreign Ambassadors take precedence of the English nobles. This precedence relatively to each other, rank being equal, is accorded to priority of residence among us. The *Dean* or *Doyen* enters upon his functions in virtue of length of stay near our Government. Yet we have witnessed very grave offence given at a dinner-table, where the host led in the wife of a Foreign Minister, the fair belligerent being the wife of a Senator who claimed the honor as her due.

Now, since it is to be presumed that the special object of every entertainment is to promote good will and not to foster ill will, it is to be regretted that no definite rule as regards social official classification prevails. A carefully adjusted ceremonial would be no more incompatible with republican institutions than the legal classification which now exists, and which must continue to endure. These have a fixedness coexistent with the republic, and our social life is their complement. Let us not undervalue its importance. Daniel Webster called a well-appointed dinner "the climax of civilization." We ought to be able to reach this climax smoothly. The breakfast, the luncheon, the kettle-drum, the four-o'clock tea, the "*matinée dansante*," the *musicale*, the *soirée conversationale*, and the assembly are all and each charming in their degree as adjuncts of social life, yet the dinner is "*the climax*."

Now, there are some dinner rules which are absolute, although we fear at times they are either misunderstood, or at all events disregarded. It seems needless to recapitulate; and yet the very fact that mistakes are so often made must serve as our apology here. For instance, an invitation to dine must be precise, and should be couched in some such formula as the following:

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MR. JONES REQUESTS THE HONOR OF MR. SMITH'S COMPANY AT DINNER On Monday, the 1st December, at 7 o'clock.

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Nov. 22, '75. R. S. V. P.

When such an invitation is received, an answer should not only be given in writing, but it should be sent at the very earliest moment at all practicable.

We knew a diplomat here, renowned for courtly manners, and for the incomparable dinners which he gave, whose answer to a dinner invitation came on one occasion so promptly that our own messenger, who also returned to us quickly, had not reached the house when the acceptance arrived. And the fine point on this piece of good manners was that this was an acceptance, too, not a regret, which is considered to demand greater expedition, even, in the sending. This gentleman entertained his friends so constantly at dinner that he understood the importance of prompt attention. In writing an answer to a formal dinner invitation we should be careful to make it as exact as the note we have received. Indeed, we should repeat this note. If our host has a 39 title,—for instance, The President,—repeat his title just as he himself may indicate to you. In answer to Mr. Jones, you reply:

MR. SMITH HAS THE HONOR TO ACCEPT MR. JONES' KIND INVITATION TO DINNER
For Monday, the 1st December, at 7 o'clock.

Nov. 22, '75.

The reason for this repetition is to show that you have perfectly comprehended the invitation, so that no error may have been committed as to time or place.

We have known awkward mistakes to occur from want of attention in this matter.

Then, again, there should be no possibility of mistake as to your acceptance or non-acceptance. Let your answer be positively “Yes,” or “No.” At any other entertainment we may perhaps avail ourselves of a reasonable uncertainty, but not so with the dinner.

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We once knew a poor little lady, “on hospitable thoughts intent,” who went to live in a small town in the West. She had been accustomed to the well-regulated dinner at home, and had been taught to consider that the highest form of compliment was to ask a friend to dinner. Wishing to be on the best terms with her new neighbors, she sent out the usual written cards of invitation to a score of guests,—a formidable undertaking in a country village,—but she was in no wise daunted, and all the preparations went on bravely. Everything bade fair to make her dinner a success, except the dreadful fact that up to the very last moment she remained uncertain as to the number of her guests. In reply to her written invitations came a score of *verbal* messages, such as, “They *hoped* to come;” “Would come if they could;” “Could not tell *exactly* if their engagements would permit;” “If well enough, would come.” But in no one case was a positive response received. So the banquet had to be prepared on this score. The hour came and passed, and, after a famishing delay which spoiled everything, two tardy guests dropped straggling in, and four rueful people sat down to a superb dinner prepared for twenty covers. This actually took place.

This grand collapse is just what may be expected where no one knows his own intentions, and society would receive its final doom did such conditions widely exist. Yet very disagreeable complications have arisen, even in Washington, from not paying due attention to the importance of a *definite answer*. Suppose, for example, there are *fourteen* covers at your dinner; and fourteen forms a pleasant and favorite 41 number, suiting very well the size of the home dining-room ordinarily. Let fourteen be all counted, and suppose one guest disappoints! He leaves *thirteen* miserable souls to tell ghost-stories and wonder if the dinner will poison them, which very likely it may do, since they were all so “blue” in the discussing of it. It must be remembered that the guests at a dinner-table must be properly placed in advance, each plate marked with the name of the expected guest written on a card, or on the *menu*, or bill of fare, and the *dinner chart* mapped out, as if by line and compass, so as to avoid all these sunken rocks and breakers we have been considering, so as to place people who will like each other in proximity, so as to

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give “honor where honor is due,” so as to keep husband and wife from treading on each other's toes, so as to please those you entertain by giving widows and marriageable young ladies desirable “*partis*” to captivate, so as to put the decanter of old Madeira near the *bon-vivant*, so as to leave the ends of your table open and unoccupied and the central places filled with your most distinguished guests. Now, how is all this, and more too, to be done—pleasure to reign, confusion to be avoided, exact distribution of this cornucopia of blessings to be showered on your blissful guests—unless there is *certainty*? Is not life miserable because of the uncertainty of all its enjoyments, and are we thus ever to be cheated of even momentary happiness? 42 A thousand times, say yes or no, and let the pleasure of this supreme social gratification be unimpaired!

The length of time preceding the dinner invitation marks the degree of formality which it is expected will characterize the arrangements. A card of invitation sent ten days in advance informs us of a state dinner. Eight days of notification is the usual time; after that even four or five days may be allowed, as simply inviting to a social dinner, or even two or three days if “*en petit comité*.” We once had the honor to be “one of seven” at such a dinner, where Seward, Stanton, and a foreign celebrity were entertained by a diplomat, the short stay in the city of the guest of the occasion, whom we were invited to meet, being the reason mentioned for the hurried summons. But the informal dinner is rather the privilege of private life, and we are now considering the official etiquette of Washington, where state functionaries are expected to invite eight days in advance. To allow so much time is certainly the highest compliment, since it more surely secures the original number selected. The time designated having arrived, *punctuality* is imperative. Dinner rules do not allow over fifteen, or at the most twenty, minutes of delay, in order to await the arrival of any guest, no matter how exalted his functions in the State may be. Courtesy to those present requires that you give the company assembled their dinner 43 before it spoils or grows cold. So pray arrive, if you can, at the precise moment at which you are invited. If you reach the house the first guest at a dinner, in place of waiting until some one else shall appear, rather pride yourself upon your superior good breeding for the nonce, and enter

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at once. Ladies attend formal dinners “ *en grande toilette*,” or “full dress,” and gentlemen in the corresponding and conventional dress suit of black, with white “choker,”—only, messieurs, do not wear *white* gloves; take lavender or any delicate tint in preference. At times officers of the army or navy prefer to show their respect by appearing in uniform; and we love this dress so well—it appeals so gratefully to our patriotism—that we are always glad to see it. Yet senior officers especially, having been “in harness,” as these old “war-horses” call it, all their lives, are not sorry to get rid of the constraint and wear the dress suit of black also. However, if the occasion is one of state, this will scarcely be permitted. Gloves must be worn upon entrance to the drawing-room, but must always be taken off at the moment one is seated at the table. A recent innovation, which, if the fashionable world could suspect was *an economy*, would probably be at once scouted, but which we like *anyway*, permits that the gloves shall not be replaced at all after their removal at the table. This, however, may be only one of those flitting fashions, worn like the glove for the moment, and then cast aside. Yet do not forget that during the serving of a dinner the waiters in attendance *alone* wear gloves! And even the waiter serves with greater elegance with the thumb of the hand wrapped in a damask napkin. Previous to the announcement that “dinner is served,” the host informs each gentleman which lady he is expected to lead in to dinner, and introduces them to each other in case they happen not to be acquainted. Indeed, we think at a dinner of moderate size the *convives* should all know each other, and should be introduced, if need be, by the host. Dinner announced, the host offers his left arm to the lady who has the highest official position present, and the hostess leaves the drawing-room last, led in by the gentleman of the first official distinction present. On leaving the table, this order is reversed, the hostess leading the way. We once knew of a lawless old diplomat who *would* lead in with the prettiest young girl of the company at his own splendid dinners; but his demoralizing course met that grave reprobation it deserved from all virtuous matrons! As a just punishment for such discreditable conduct, he fell a victim finally to an innocent and confiding young creature of seventeen, left the country, and took his American bride to his foreign home, where he lives doubtless a reformed man, if indeed he still survive!

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Thus our polite host and hostess take the central seats opposite to each other, being supported on either side by their most distinguished guests. The reason the extreme ends of a table should be left open, no seats placed there if possible, and at all events never occupied by the entertainers, is very obvious; since from a central position one can better care for one's guests, and promote conversation and a genial and measured degree of hilarity; while on the other hand, if guests are given the extreme ends, it may seem to place them "below the salt." Courtesy to the hostess requires that the guests, upon being assigned to their places, should remain standing until she is seated. Then the ladies are seated next; afterwards their escorts place themselves. As to the suitable service of a table, Washington has many good caterers and intelligent waiters, whose attendance can readily be procured, in case the home establishment needs to be reinforced—as indeed it generally does—in order to meet the requirements of a banquet. So the chief care of the host and hostess should be to forget that the dinner is being served, and try to interest their guests. As to the *menu*, or bill of fare, which it is better to put at each plate, for the information of the epicurean appetite, we would suggest not to yield implicitly to the caterer, who will be sure to prolong your dinner beyond the bounds of good taste. Especially should this be the case where a sudden acquisition of fortune gives hospitable people the means of entertaining. Such persons, quite unaccustomed to judge for themselves of what is really proper, are readily imposed upon by those whose interest it is to provide lavish feasts. A banquet must be sumptuous rather in the careful choice and quality than in the profuse quantity of the selected dishes. If you desire to spend money without stint when giving dinners, do so rather by the artistic elaboration of that which you present than by an endless repetition of courses which pall upon the taste. Do not be persuaded to exceed ten courses—it is wearisome; let the wines be delicate, and do not mix wines in which tastes conflict. The French custom (and the French are unrivalled in all matters of taste) of only presenting each wine once is excellent; it effectually prevents all inebriating excess, which is so utterly disgraceful if it happen to occur.

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A very great reform, however, has taken place in the past few years with regard to the use of wines. Doubtless the agitation kept up by temperance societies has had something to do with this; but much also has been effected by the happy introduction of light native wines among us at moderate prices. When the *vin-du-pays* becomes as cheap here as it is in France or Italy, we shall have effectually swept away the intoxicating poisons which as yet are demanded. We recollect hearing our father, the Hon. S. F. Vinton, say that when he came here in 1823, the then youngest member of the House, and a bachelor, he absolutely dreaded a dinner, on account of the social tyranny in the matter of drinking. Old English customs then prevailed at the dinner, and the calibre of a man's brain was measured at dinner by the capacity of his stomach to guzzle bumpers. For a man of exceedingly delicate nerve organization, such as Mr. Vinton had, who considered a clear head as absolutely needful for a wise legislator, this custom was torture. Let us rejoice that this enforced dissipation has given way to more Christian ideas. If we could only, when we exercise hospitality, learn to set aside such lavish luxury as sinful, and share with the poor of the Lord by dividing this excess somewhat with them, we would in this way, if only in an imperfect degree, obey the injunction to call in from the highways and the by-ways the suffering multitude. As we write of costly banquets our pen falters, and tearful visions of pale faces and of starving children rise before us. As a Christian woman, and as we hope for mercy hereafter for ourselves, we can but implore society to let the crumbs that fall from its table console the Lazarus at its door. Winter is always a time of unusual hardship for these little children of our common Father, and we wish some united action could be had to avoid waste. But we turn our saddened eyes from the cold and chill and hungry gaze without, to the light and warmth and glow within, and we again ask our pleasant hostess not to be afraid of exercising her own individual taste in the matter of adornment of her table. An original thought, if it is graceful, pleases the old diner-out, who wearies of the monotony of conventional elegance. It is too tiresome to see the same hired ornaments day after day, and to go through the same unvarying routine. Rather use a simple vase of flowers than a piece of finery hired for the occasion. Personal care bestowed is more flattering than the hired glitter. We once said to our hostess, "You have

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produced a fine effect," when we were shocked by the disclaimer, "And yet we took no pains." Now, it was for this very "pains," for the thoughtful care to please, we were thanking her.

Our dinner talk is over, the hostess rises first, and all proceed to the drawing-room, where coffee, the *demie-tasse*, cordials, and, an hour later, tea are served. The hostess usually serves the tea herself, but this is not *de rigueur*; and although we love to see a hostess exercise "*les petits soins*,"—those little acts of hospitable care,—yet we confess to being most bent upon conversation, and to our dislike of anything that interrupts the "feast of reason and the flow of soul." The after-dinner hour is precious in its genial exercise of intellect or for music. At such times a gracious play of fancy is stimulated, and even the cup of tea should be used "to cheer," and not to interfere. Yet many a gentle dame presides so gracefully at the tea-board, and dispenses the grateful beverage with such pleasant words, that none may cavil. We have in 49 our eye now one of our most honored matrons, her placid face almost hidden by the burnished silver, the hissing tea-urn, the snowy bowl of sugar, and as she handles the quaint old china we hear her say, "For twenty-five years have I made tea, seated just here, at this board,"—just twenty-five years! And "*here*," then, the monarchs of thought, who have toiled to bring about the culmination of our nation's grandeur, have sipped their Bohea. The "old families" of Washington have an interest for us which none other in the land may claim, for their social life has gone hand in hand with that of the nation. But we have not yet bade our hostess adieu,—a formality we may dispense with at a *soirée*, but not at a dinner.

The gentlemen, some of them, are still in the smoking-room. We feel sorry that they smoke so long, for charming women are here, and it is the common loss. Perhaps, like social cowards, they retreat from an apprehended captivity.

We are at liberty to leave after the coffee, but we linger still and sip our tea. However, during what is called the season, social festivities become so multiplied that one may have several engagements to meet later than the dinner. It is therefore admissible to leave as

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soon as the coffee is handed. Succeeding the dinner a visit, which the French wittily call *visite de digestion*, must be made within the week. While descanting on dinner-table topics and of entertainments in general, we would strive anew to call attention to some finer points too often misunderstood. In the first place, let it be held as a cardinal principle *that a mere outlay of money*, unless directed by refinement of taste, can never attain successful results. The dinners that marked the era of the Cæsars, the banquets, for instance, of Nero and of Caligula, have scarcely, if ever, been equalled through the succeeding ages in lavish expenditure. The gastronomic excesses of pagan days, when thousands of dollars were spent upon a single dish, were followed by the sumptuous feasts of the Middle Ages, during which the perfumed air, delicious strains of music, and an infinitude of fanciful conceits were intended to captivate and enthrall the senses.

The barbaric glitter of these entertainments has been in turn succeeded by a higher civilization, which calls for something more than gastronomic *chefs-d'œuvre*, and aims to promote festive wit. To secure this end the first consideration must be a careful choice of guests. No dinner, however superb in prandial show, can be agreeable if the *convives* are dullards. If perfection is sought for, let the guests and the courses not exceed the Muses in number. No sordid computation of dollars can buy or measure the Promethean light of conversational effect. The "glad circle," then, must have this highest requisite. When music is introduced as an accessory, it should not be *bruyante*, but must be placed at such distance as to form, as it were, an undertone to the dinner-table talk, mingling with, harmonizing, but never overpowering, its effect. This is the true musical province of an *accompaniment*.

Avoid the growing taste for dining your friends at a club-house or outside of your own house. There is no savor of hospitality of so fine flavor as that of bringing your friends into your own home. Nothing can replace the Lares and Penates. Even the heathen understood this. Strive to individualize the style of your dinner, so as to give the zest of "something new" to its elegance. In this connection the artistic hand-painted *menus* and dinner-cards now so much in vogue are to be commended. We would also like to see

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more originality in the floral decorations of the dinner-table. This ornamentation is often more elaborate than tasteful. The poets sing to us of the “*language of flowers.*” Why not speak to each guest in this style of graceful compliment? If the china-merchants, stationers, or other similar dealers would furnish *alphabetical forms in grooves*, to be filled in and hidden from sight by flowers, we could thus express with these *floral letters* ideas which would produce a new and pleasing variety.

Precedence at the dinner-table is the grand subject of social wrangling in Washington, and the need of a fixed rule is here so painfully apparent that those who have been taught to be careful by sad experience, will simply avoid asking those functionaries to meet 52 each other whose claims may conflict. Yet the Vice-President, the Chief Justice, the Speaker, the General of the Army, the Admiral of the Navy, Foreign Ministers, Cabinet Ministers, and Senators, they and their wives, ought to be able to meet and dine in peace together. Let a social congress or woman's parliament be convened, composed of these ladies, where, after all the arguments and respective claims have been duly weighed, some positive rules may be agreed upon. It is surprising what *natural aristocrats* women are. In the army and navy, for example, the wives of officers adhere more rigidly to designated and relative social rank than the officers do themselves; nor do our American women object to bear foreign titles of distinction. Indeed, in this they reason wisely; for in countries where class distinctions exist, these usually imply respectable lineage.

We would here remark that Cabinet officers are addressed as “Mr. Secretary.” We do not like this, for it designates the lowest rather than the highest functions which these officials fill. They are in one sense “secretaries” of the President, appointed by the Executive head and confirmed by the United States Senate; but at the same time they are active, if not responsible, heads of vast departments of the Government, with a power, patronage, and influence which, if it were permanent, would exceed that of many petty potentates of other countries. *Names become things* in history, and we believe if “Mr. 53 Secretary” were

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changed to "Mr. Minister," "The Premier," and so on, it would help to adjust the matter of social precedence.

Senators are addressed as "Mr. Senator," and this is as it should be. Members of the House of Representatives are introduced as the "Honorable Mr.," but simply addressed in conversation as "Mr.," that is, if a plain Mister can be found in that popular body. But we venture to say, from an intimate knowledge of our rural districts, that every man of them bears a *title* at home. He is "Squire," "Judge," "Captain," "Colonel," "General," and so through all the gamut of the key-board of possible or impossible prefixes! The republic seems to avenge itself for having made the permanency of families unattainable by piling Pelion upon Ossa during a man's natural life! And now come women who claim to be Miss Doctor and Mrs. Reverend on their own account!

With regard to women's titles, it is becoming more and more the custom to say "Mrs. Secretary," "Mrs. Senator" "Mrs. General," "Mrs. Admiral," and so on. They do this in Europe, to be sure, so that it cannot be laughed at as ridiculous. Yet, since we are a republic, we are supposed to stand on the basis of personal merit and distinction won for ourselves. But perhaps, when a woman captures a President or other dignitary, she has won the right to claim the title too. Some are said to "wear the 54 breeches," "rule the roast," be the "better half," and "captain of the ship." From our own observation at the Capital of this great nation, something more of substance than the empty title is wielded by the women who represent the country here. And we should be very sorry to see our fair and very able sisters disturbed in their privileges and right womanly prerogatives. How much nicer, for example, to be the wife of a President than to be Mr. President! for, as it is, one has a good share of the power and none of the responsibility. But of course we don't mean exactly what we say: women often do not. We think, however, that while it may be in good taste to give a lady these titular distinctions, held really by their husbands, yet it would be in bad taste to use them for one's self. Certainly it is very convenient, when introducing ladies, to give such nominal rank as may at once clearly and distinctly

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designate them in the very fact of introduction. It would often save a long explanation, or an uncertainty still more disagreeable.

Members of the House of Representatives and their wives are expected to make the first visit upon all classes of functionaries we have mentioned; but citizens of Washington, and those in private life, owe them in turn the first visit.

There is a form of government in this city, but we really can have no idea of what its social claims may be; but it seems to us, as compared to the National Government, it must stand as a separate creation and take a subordinate position. Perhaps the Commissioner's office may be exceptional to this rule.

If this mode of government continue in existence, those who write on this theme ten years hence will be able to judge better. Yet, thus far, everything connected with the management of this District has been subject to so various change that we can only exclaim, *Omne principium grave!*

The citizens of Washington form among themselves, outside of the consideration of official life, a body of society to be regulated by the same rules which dominate other societies; yet, as we have said before, Washington life is essentially official life, and we can scarcely separate the two.

When you attend a reception, do not omit to leave your card with the usher in the hall. In some houses it is the custom always to give your name to the usher, who then announces you *à haute voix*. Of course, in a society where so many strangers meet, and which is so cosmopolitan in its nature, it may often be essential to announce in this way. In public receptions it is entirely so; but we must enter a protest against the awkward usher who murders your name outright, cuts you into halves, and shows you no quarters. As to those foreigners who have a quartering to their names, they must be fearful sufferers! Let the usher be well trained to announce, or dispense with his services in this respect altogether,

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as an unmitigated 56 nuisance. A gentleman of distinction once crone into our presence with a sigh of relief as we greeted him by the well-known cognomen.

“How good it is,” said he, “to hear my name once more! I began to be uncertain as to my own identity.”

We laughed, and asked what he meant. “Well, simply this: I have been attending receptions all the morning, and have heard my name so mangled by the ushers, and have found myself repeated under so many different titles, that I am bewildered.”

Use a plain card, if you do not wish to be supposed fanciful; and never have it printed. Great men, whose autographs are precious, confer a favor certainly by writing the name on the card, but it is more convenient and more elegant for society in general to have the name engraved on the card. It is also very comfortable for old ladies who read through glasses if these letters are plain and legible.

The clergy take a signal position, and we think should always be accorded *the* place of honor when present in society. They are Envoys of a Higher Power, and have the most important and sacred mission of all. We were once at a dinner where a clergyman was present, and there were Foreign Ministers and Cabinet Ministers, Senators, and others of dignity, when the venerable *Doyen* of the Corps Diplomatique asked the hostess to assign the place at her side, for which he had been designated, to the 57 clergyman. And this wise old gentleman, who understood so well all matters of social courtesy, decided on true principles based upon that Divine law which is above human law and goes beyond it. In England, Archbishops rank with Dukes. A similar, or a greater, appreciation for the clergy is everywhere held as of polite usage.

Very aged persons, also, should be treated with peculiar respect. God has stamped upon them the majesty of years, and we must give them a deferential place. Not long since, the nation beheld a touching example of filial respect in the family of its Chief Magistrate, and it seems to us that it was a providential spectacle at a time when insubordination

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to parents is a growing evil throughout the land. Many years since, a friend of ours, the wife of a public man, was led in to dinner by the then President. The aged father of His Excellency being present, it was made a question if the President should precede his own father. *By right* as President, yes; by filial courtesy as son, no. A similar question may now also arise as regards the venerable *mother* of our present President. The nation is fortunate to have repeated the beautiful lesson of filial affection for its example. Exceptions to ordinary claims of social or even official precedence may also be allowed by courtesy to strangers of distinction who make us passing visits, to remarkable worth and merit, such as philanthropists and other benefactors of mankind 58 exhibit, or to extraordinary and acknowledged scientific, artistic, or literary excellence. Deference to these conditions illustrates the existence of that advanced state of civilization which it is our aim to acquire.

In making visits always send in or leave your card. At receptions the usher takes your card. At other times the person called upon not being at home, you turn down the right-hand upper corner of the pasteboard to indicate that you came in person; and if the visit is intended for the various members of a family, you either give several cards or leave one with the entire right side folded over. The choice is immaterial. When you go away from the city altogether, do not omit to send a card upon which P. P. C. is written on the right-hand lower corner, and if this visit of *adieu* is made in person turn down the right-hand lower corner. A prompt notice should be taken of the first visit received, and when such visit inaugurates an acquaintance, the card or call should be at once honored. An intervening period not exceeding three days marks high breeding, as it evinces your pleasure at forming the acquaintance, so that a return visit within a day or so is therefore a delicate compliment. Dignitaries of state should make *instant* return of the first visit. This also is navy etiquette. With regard to entertainments other than the dinner, one is at liberty not to send a written answer of acceptance; but in case of non-acceptance 59 it is certainly more polite to send a regret. Of course, if an answer is requested (the R. S. V. P. means the same thing) an answer should be given accordingly. When one has a small house it is important to know what number of guests may be expected, and always more pleasant

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for a hostess to be thus assured, In making calls the usual visiting hours are from two until five. This portion of the day is particularly set apart for formal calls. An evening visit implies some degree of social acquaintance, and should never be made as a first call, unless you are invited to come unceremoniously. A call of condolence should always be made on occasions of death in the family of an acquaintance. Turn down the left-hand lower corner of the card.

Persons in private life, having no official position in Washington, are in a measure exempt from the necessity of making the official round of visits or of giving large entertainments; yet any one who enters into general society here must of course conform to the official rules of precedence and etiquette. Private life here has its advantages as well as its disadvantages. It is pleasant to select your own company, even though choice extend to but a limited number; and the private citizen is free to do this. Washington will certainly become more and more a central social point of attraction to persons of wealth and refinement who can exercise freedom of selection, and who will also add to the already charming variety of society. Such persons must surely appreciate our social advantages over all other cities of the Union.

Young people amongst us have never as a common rule been allowed to tyrannize over society as they do in New York and in other cities; and the ineffable vulgarity of *coteries* presided over by young ladies, and not dignified by the presence of their seniors, has not, we believe, had much if any encouragement here. Probably the presence of so many personages of importance in the State assists to keep the young in their proper place. One may here see, what we fear is not so usual elsewhere, young ladies remain standing, as they should do, until the mother or married lady may be seated, and at all events an appearance of subordination which speaks well for the future. Our young people are not often invited to dinners, but left to participate in the simpler forms of gayety. We have heard it said that a woman did not enjoy a dinner-conversation, or play a good hand at whist, under thirty!

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On New-Year's day ladies are not expected to make visits. Gentlemen call to pay the compliments of the season, and ladies stay at home to welcome visitors.

We think our ladies make a mistake, and also fatigue themselves unnecessarily, by receiving standing. This is a great tax on the strength, and much more formal than is apt to be agreeable. In very large receptions a lady who receives can scarcely be seated; but in the usual morning at home would not our guests remain longer, and be more at ease, if seated in pleasant circles, rather than left standing in formal groups in the middle of the room? Magnetism Counts for something the world over, and stiff constraint destroys electric currents.

As to the refreshments proper to provide at a morning reception, the choice is quite optional here, as in other of our cities. A cup of chocolate is, however, usually offered, and many still preserve the old custom, and add other refreshing drinks and many tempting comfits.

The idea of writing this little pamphlet was first suggested to us by a distinguished personage here, who thought something of the kind would be well received and ought to be published. The very limited scope we have given ourselves shows for itself in the size of this little essay; for we have not proposed to attempt the history of social customs since pre-Adamic periods, nor yet to instruct in all the rules of a manual of good manners, nor to give the rounded polish of a Chesterfield, but simply to indicate certain peculiarities of Washington society.

We have heard some of the subjects we have just hinted at, commented upon from our first acquaintance with official social life here; and although we have alluded to many little matters which must seem rather puerile and perhaps unworthy of serious attention, yet these are the very questions one asks most often upon first arrival in Washington. We do not endeavor or presume to instruct, but rather desire to recapitulate mooted points, show

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how troublesome their unsettled condition makes them, and ask for a woman's congress, or "kitchen cabinet," to define them in the interest of society.

So far as we have noted some customs, we have preferred to leave as many more unnoted, on the supposition that our reader forms a "court that knows something."

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APPENDIX.

As far back as 1825 the President held a levee every other Wednesday evening, and it was customary to make the announcement in the *National Intelligencer*. The hour was at that time from 8 to 10 P.M., and it was usual to offer some refreshments, which were placed on trays, and carried about the rooms by waiters. Gentlemen then appeared in small-clothes, which was the accepted full dress of the period; and we remember hearing our father say that so great was the precision that, although some gentlemen occasionally wore boots, it was considered more proper to go in silk stockings and pumps. Of course the usual dress suit of black has long since taken the place of this more courtly, though less convenient, style of dress. It was not at first the custom to have music, except on New-Year's day, when a government hand discoursed patriotic airs; but in the time of Mr. Adams, and after the East Room was opened, in 1828, music and dancing enlivened these receptions, and splendid suppers were given. So long as such degree of exact form marked 64 these receptions as to assure only the presence of well-bred people of decorous manners, this style of entertainment prevailed; but finally such excesses took place in the greater latitude that was afterwards allowed as to make it unadvisable either to have dancing or to give suppers, except at invited entertainments; but of these we remember some very memorable and elegant receptions that have been given, on special occasions, at the Executive Mansion.

We desire to append the following letter from John Quincy Adams, written when Secretary of State, and addressed as a private communication to the Vice-President of the United

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States. It strikes us that the eminent writer is somewhat illogical when he speaks of the “whole affair” as “of very little importance,” while at the same moment he shows by the very subject-matter of his letter the “importance” then, as now, of adopting some more fixed and exact code. Until this is done, it will become more and more difficult to avoid misconstructions and unpleasant relations in a state of society where the social intercourse cannot be separated from official position and its exigencies. Even the public service requires this.

Washington, Dec. 29, 1819.

The Vice-President of the United States:

Dear Sir, —It has been suggested to me, that some of the members of the Senate, entertaining the opinion that 65 a formal visit in person or by card is due from each of the executive departments, at the commencement of every session of Congress, to every Senator upon his arrival at the seat of government, have considered the omission on my part to pay such visits as the withholding from them of a proper mark of respect, or even as implying a pretension to exact such a formality from them. Disclaiming every such pretension and every such claim on my part, I take the liberty of submitting to you the following explanation of the motives which have governed my conduct in relation to this subject.

I have invariably considered the Government of the United States as a Government for the transaction of business, and that no ceremonial for the mode or order of interchanging visits between the persons belonging to the respective departments in it had ever been established. I was myself five years a member of the Senate, and at four of the five sessions of Congress which I attended was accompanied at this place by my wife. During that time I never once received a first visit from any one of the heads of departments, nor did my wife ever receive a first visit from any one of their ladies, except perhaps *once*, when she was sick, from Mrs. Madison. We always called upon them soon after our arrival

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at Washington, not from any opinion that it was an obligation of duty, but because we understood and believed it to be usual, and because we did not think it improper. We made an exception, after the first session, with regard to Mr. Gallatin, who, never having returned my first visit, was supposed not to incline to that sort of intercourse with us.

When I came to reside at this place, two years since, I was under the impression that the usages, with regard to visiting, were as I had known and practised them ten years before,—that, as a member of the administration, I had no sort of claim to a first visit from any member of either 5 66 house of Congress, but that neither had any member of Congress any claim to a first visit from me, that the interchange and order of visits was entirely optional on both sides, and that no rule of etiquette whatsoever existed which required that either party should pay the first visit, or indeed any visit, to the other.

In the course of the winter of 1817–18, two members of the Senate, for both of whom I entertained the highest respect, and with one of whom I had had the pleasure of sitting several years in the Senate, called at my office, and informed me that there was a minute of a rule agreed upon, not officially but privately, by the members of the Senate of the first Congress, that the Senators of the United States paid the first visit to no person except the President of the United States. I observed to them that, as during five years' service as a Senator I had never seen or heard of this rule, I could hardly consider it as having been much observed; that I could, however, have no possible objection to the Senators prescribing to *themselves* any rule of visiting which they might think proper. But I asked them if they understood the rule as implying an order that *other persons* should first visit them? They answered, if I recollect right, By no means. And I suppose they viewed the whole affair as I did,—that is, of very little importance. I have, therefore, paid no visits of form to members of the Senate; and, although always happy to receive and return the visits of those who please to call upon me, and happy to invite to my house every member of the Senate, whether he had or had not paid me a visit, who would give me the honor of his company, I yet always respected the motives of those who declined paying me any visit, or even frequenting my house at all. I exacted nothing from them which they might

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think incompatible with their dignity. I presumed they would exact nothing from me not within the line of my official duty. I soon learned that, if I 67 should make it a rule to pay the first visit to every Senator at each session, the same compliment would be claimed, if not by all, at least by a large proportion of the members of the House of Representatives; and I could find no republican principle which would, to my own mind, justify me in refusing to the members of one house that which I should yield as due to the members of another. At the commencement of each session I have visited the presiding member of each house, not from a sense of obligation, but of propriety. I have not felt it my duty to pay first visits to any individual member of either house; nor has it entered my imagination that a first visit was *due* from any member of either house to me.

If there is a body of men upon earth for whom, more than for any other, I ought to cherish every feeling of attachment, superadded to every sentiment of reverence, it is the Senate of the United States. Its importance and dignity, as one of the branches of the legislature, as one of the component parts of the supreme executive, and as the tribunal of official honor and virtue, cannot be more highly estimated by any man than by me. My father had the honor of being its first presiding officer. I had, for five years, that of being one of its members; and through every successive administration of this Government, from the establishment of the national Constitution to this time, I have received frequent tokens of its confidence, which can never be obliterated from my memory, and claiming all my gratitude. For every individual member of the body I feel all the respect due to his public character; and there is not one member towards whom I entertain a sentiment other than that of regard and esteem. If, therefore, the principle upon which I have omitted to pay them first visits of form should ultimately fail of meeting their approbation, it will be serious cause of regret to me; but, at 68 all events, I hope they will impute it to any other cause than intentional disrespect to them.

I take this occasion of observing that, with my approbation and advice, my wife has acted upon the same principle with regard to the ladies connected with members of the Senate or House of Representatives, who have visited this place during the sessions of Congress,

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that I have pursued in relation to the members themselves. She has paid no visits to ladies with whom she had not the advantage of being acquainted. She has received with pleasure and returned the visits of all ladies who have called upon her, whether connected with members of Congress or otherwise. She has visited her friends on the usual footing of private citizens, without pretension to claim, and without being sensible of any obligation to pay any first visit. She would have paid, with much pleasure, this compliment to the ladies of members of Congress, had it been proper, in her opinion, to confine it to them. But she was aware that many other ladies equally strangers to her, and, though not immediately allied to members of Congress, of character and standing in society equally respectable, occasionally came to spend some time in the city; and, knowing it to be impossible that she should visit them all, she declined the invidious task of discriminating whom she should and whom she should not first visit. If, in observing this rule, she has deviated from the practice of some other ladies in situations similar to her own, she has conformed to that which she constantly observed when she was herself the wife of a Senator at the seat of government. She then always called upon the ladies of the heads of departments when she came to Washington, and always understood it to be the common practice. She lays no claim, however, to the same attention from any other lady, and, having no pretension to visits of etiquette herself, thinks herself amenable to none from others. She has invited to her house, without waiting for formal visits, every lady of a member of Congress to whom she had not reason to believe such an invitation would be unwelcome; and, while feeling it as a favor from those who have accepted her invitations, she has only regretted the more rigorous etiquette of those who have declined, inasmuch as it bereft her of the happiness which she would have derived from a more successful cultivation of their acquaintance. She would regret still more the error which should, in any instance, attribute her conduct to a pretension of any kind on her part, or to a disregard of what is due from her to others.

I have thought this candid explanation of the motives of my conduct particularly due to those members of the Senate who, it has been intimated to me, have thought there was

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something exceptionable in it. I submit it to your indulgence and to their candor, with the sincere and earnest assurance of my perfect respect for yourself and them.

John Quincy Adams.

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SOME POINTS OF ETIQUETTE.

Inasmuch as it is somewhat of a mooted point with regard to the social official precedence to which the Speaker may be entitled as the presiding officer of the House of Representatives, especially as relatively to the Chief Justice, who is the head of one of the three great Departments of the Government, it may not be unimportant to give an opinion from a source of such recognized high authority as Mr. Robert C. Winthrop, of Boston. We desire, therefore, and it has been suggested to us that it would be well, to publish some extracts from a letter we had the pleasure to receive from Mr. Winthrop, in which he says, "Your 'Etiquette' interested me not a little, and recalled some experiences of my own. On being elected Speaker in 1847, I consulted John Quincy Adams, then a member of the House, and the consequence was that I felt bound to call first only on the President and Vice-President. I believe I made an exception in favor of Chief-Justice Taney, but only as a matter of grace. There cannot be a doubt that the President, Vice-President, and Speaker stand before all others as the representatives of the Executive and Legislative branches. I remember how earnestly this was enforced upon us by Colonel Benton, a great stickler for 'etiquette,' and who said to me on one occasion, 'You may be as modest as you please in regard to any matter personal to yourself, but you have no right to waive the priority of your position and the dignity of the House of Representatives.' Everybody called on me first accordingly, except the President and Vice-President."

In addition to this very decided opinion of Mr. Winthrop, we are informed that the late Chief-Justice Chase also held that the Speaker should receive the first visit, taking the ground that the Speaker, being one of the possible contingent successors to the Chief

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Magistracy, had a prior claim of social precedence over the Chief Justice. How far the well-known preference and proclivities of the late Chief Justice for political rather than judicial pre-eminence may have shaped his judgment on this point is to be considered.

We were taught to view the office of Chief Justice as the second place in the republic; indeed, our dear father, the late Hon. S. F. Vinton, than whom the country has never had a wiser statesman, held it to be the first in true dignity, as raised far above the strife and passions that must ever mark the political career. Now, Mr. Vinton, having been a member of the Lower House for nearly a quarter of a century, 72 during which he shaped some of its most important legislation, must have been fully aware of all the possible claims attached to the position of Speaker. We know that he held this opinion in common with many other competent persons who are equally accomplished and instructed.

But, as we have already declared in this essay on “Etiquette,” our sole object is to collate various expressions on these and other mooted points, in the hope that their presentation may lead to the establishment of more dearly defined rules. We are therefore equally pleased to publish opinions of weight when presented to us, whether they may happen to coincide with any preconceived notion of our own or not.

No one can overlook the almost supreme *political* significance to be attached to the office of Speaker, especially when this place is filled by an able statesman, as the incumbent is apt to be, nor the actual dignity of the position as apart from personal ability. The Speaker is the chosen head of that legislative branch which most truly and immediately represents the people,—not the irresponsible masses, but the organized people, which is sovereign.

In England the office of Speaker of the House of Commons is, as we all know, one of signal importance, and in point of social rank takes place next to the peers of Great Britain. A very large salary is attached to the office in order to enable the Speaker 73 to hold Parliamentary levees and to give dinners to the members of the House. However, no comparison, it seems to us, may be properly instituted between the office of the Speaker

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of the House of Commons and that of the House of Representatives. The inherited successorship to the crown, we believe, gives precedence in England above all other considerations, and perhaps, in viewing the positions of the Vice-President and of the Speaker, the contingent Presidential successorship may be made to weigh in the same sense. Yet it does not strike us as a very republican view of the case, or one to which any special weight ought to be attached in determining the relative places of Vice-President, Speaker, and Chief Justice. It would be more in accordance with republican ideas to assign the *real* relative place according to their *real* functions, respectively as presiding officers of the various branches, legislative and judicial.

Although the Chief Justice is appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate, yet *once created* he becomes the grand conservative element and head of the nation, before whom the President himself may be arraigned in case of impeachment. He moreover holds his exalted station for life, so that he may do justice without fear or favor. He embodies, in fact, the ultimate human conception and governmental shadowing forth of godlike prerogatives, and should receive the highest tokens of respect. 74 We cannot too jealously guard intact such conservative force as the Constitution gives us to be used as safeguards against the aggressive tendencies of a democracy.

There is also another matter upon which much confusion exists, and that is with regard to first visits to be made between persons holding relatively the same office, as among Senators for instance. There exists a rough paper, endorsed in Mr. Jefferson's hand, concerning the etiquette of the Government, as agreed upon by General Washington, and it may serve a good purpose in this connection to transcribe it *entire*. It may assist to elucidate some other points equally unsettled at present. We have already republished the letter of John Quincy Adams, and when this paper of Mr. Jefferson is added we shall have given perhaps the only other published authority which may be brought to bear. Mr. Jefferson says:

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“In order to bring the members of society together in the first instance, the custom of the country has established that residents shall pay the first visit to strangers, and, among strangers, first comers to later comers, foreign and domestic, the character of stranger ceasing after the first visit. To this rule there is a single exception. Foreign ministers, from the necessity of making themselves known, pay the first visit to the ministers of the nation, which is returned.

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“I. When brought together in society, all are perfectly equal, whether foreign or domestic, titled or untitled, in or out of office. All other observances are but exemplifications of these two principles.

“First. The families of foreign ministers arriving at the seat of government receive the first visit from those of the national ministers, as from all other residents.

“Second. Members of the legislature and of the judiciary, independent of their offices, have a right as strangers to receive the first visit.

“II. First. No title being admitted here, those of foreigners give no precedence.

“Second. Differences of grade among the diplomatic members give no precedence.

“Third. At public ceremonies, to which the Government invites the presence of foreign ministers and their families, a convenient seat or station will be provided for them, with any other strangers invited, and the families of the national ministers, each taking place as they arrive and without any precedence.

“Fourth. To maintain the principle of equality or of *p?le-m?le*, and prevent the growth of precedence out of courtesy, the members of the executive will practise at their own houses and recommend an adherence to the ancient usage of the country, of gentlemen in mass

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giving precedence to the ladies in mass in passing 76 from one apartment where they are assembled to another.” (Vol. ix., pp. 454–55, Jefferson's Works.)

Several points are to be noted in the perusal of this paper. Foreign ministers were “to pay the first visit to the ministers of the nation” simply “from the necessity of making themselves known” to the Government near which they are accredited; nor does this visit seem to have been exacted of them in other cases. Nor yet did this necessity *extend to their families*, but the reverse.

These rules, as given by Jefferson, enforce some official distinctions for the actual incumbent of office, and at the same time “perfectly equal” social status for all when brought together in society.

Of course, in a purely social point, one must expect and receive recognition as an “equal,” or otherwise there can be, properly speaking, no social life. Yet there will arise public and other occasions of mere formal ceremony, in which the official position cannot be lost sight of, and at such times there should be no social misunderstanding.

There are *customs* which make a sort of supplementary law; as, for instance, in the case of addressing the President in writing. Here *polite usage* sanctions the address to “His Excellency,” although the legislative enactment resolved that the address should be, “To the President of the United States,” without addition of title.

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Yet the very sentiment which caused so many divers committee reports before this resolution was reached has, notwithstanding, led to the adoption of some added title of respect among cultured people. In fact, a distinguished committee of conference, originally selected by both Houses to consider this matter, reported “that, in the opinion of the committee, it will be proper thus to address the President: ‘His Highness, the President of the United States and Protector of their Liberties.’” Undoubtedly the great personal veneration in which Washington was held swayed the republican minds of these legislators

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in this instance, although, fortunately for the permanence of our freedom, we escaped the infliction of the title of "Highness," as addressed to any American citizen.

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