The servant's behaviour book : $b or, Hints on manners and dress for maid servants in small households

Emily A. (Emily Augusta) Patmore

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THE SERVANT'S BEHAVIOUR BOOK.

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SERVANT'S BEHAVIOUR BOOK;

OR,

Hints on Manners and Dress

FOR MAID SERVANTS IN SMALL HOUSEHOLDS.

BY MRS. MOTHERLY.

LONDON:

BELL AND DALDY, 186, FLEET STREET.

1859.

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TO MY READERS.

+My dear Girls+,

Every rule in this book is necessary to a girl entering a gentleman's family. Some of the things I shall tell you will be known to many of you, and some will seem new and strange; but all are equally important, if you wish to be well-behaved and agreeable servants. If you neglect to observe the rules I shall teach you, you will always be awkward, and fit only for common places and low wages; but if you learn and practise them, you will be able to rise higher as your domestic knowledge and abilities improve. Many a thoroughly good servant is kept all her life in inferior places, solely by the want of good manners; and many a servant of small abilities is advanced to a better position merely on account of her good breeding.

Do not think because some of these directions seem strange to you, that you will be noticed and looked at for observing them. All good servants do the things which I advise you to do, and all ladies are accustomed to see them done. You are much more likely to be watched and wondered at for neglecting these rules, than for obeying them.

I dare say some of them will seem so simple, that you will laugh, and say, "The lady need not to have told us that." Now, believe me, when you have been in place a few years, they will all seem so. They all seem so now to me; so do not suffer yourselves to fancy I am telling you to do anything uncommon, or likely to call attention to you. I have taught a great many young girls to be good servants, and they have often said to me, "Oh, ma'am, I shall be ashamed to do this; every one will look at me!" After a little while the thing has become quite natural, and they have laughed at themselves for ever thinking it

strange. One girl thought it seemed ill-tempered not to talk every time she came into the drawing-room with a coal-scuttle or a letter, and could scarcely be taught to come in quietly. Another thought it looked foolish to bring in money or letters on a tray, because conveying them in the hand was so much more simple. Another thought it sounded foolish to say “Sir” or “Ma’am” every time she spoke to a gentleman or lady. Now, I cannot tell which of my rules may be new to you; but I can only say that none are so to experienced servants, or to ladies. I know that none, however, are too simple to be useful to some of you, as I have learned which will be useful by finding out which I have had to teach to young girls in my own service.

Study them all well, then. When you find one that you already know, be thankful to your parents or other guardians who have taught you what others have had to learn from a mistress. When you find a direction that is new to you, be careful to put it into practice directly, before your employers shall have discovered your ignorance of it; and remember that every fresh rule you learn and observe, makes you a better servant.

Believe me, my dear girls, to be,

Your sincere friend,

MARY MOTHERLY.

CONTENTS.

PAGE

CHAPTER I. OF THE VOICE AND SPEAKING 11

CHAPTER II. TITLES OF RESPECT 32

CHAPTER III. STANDING AND MOVING 40

CHAPTER IV. WAITING AT TABLE 52

CHAPTER V. MISCELLANEOUS DIRECTIONS 70

CHAPTER VI. DRESS 82

THE SERVANT'S BEHAVIOUR BOOK.

CHAPTER I.

OF THE VOICE AND SPEAKING.

+Never let your voice be heard by the ladies and gentlemen of the house except when necessary, and then as little as possible.+

This piece of advice cannot be too well remembered. It is needed by almost all young girls on their first entering service, and great is the annoyance thus caused to their employers. Every girl who wishes to

live in a gentleman’s family must learn, sooner or later, to keep guard over her tongue, and it is best to begin at once, before her neglect has called upon her the reproofs of the family.

In order that you, my readers, may the better understand how to follow out this rule, I will give you a few more particular directions about your voice and speaking, which will help you in those cases where you will, without caution, be most likely to forget yourself. In reading these directions you must remember that they should guide your conduct towards any grown-up lady or gentleman who may be in the house, although for the sake of shortness, I shall generally name only your mistress.

+Never begin to talk to your mistress, unless it be to deliver a message, or ask a necessary question. Even then, do it as shortly as possible.+

Many young girls who are fond of talking will make a common message an excuse for a long conversation. I had a nursemaid once who did this, and if I tell you how she did it, you will perhaps see how tiresome it must have been, and take care not to fall into the same error.

As I was leaving the nursery one day, Mary made the following speech:--

“If you please, ma’am, as we were turning the corner to-day, round by the Red Lion, Master Willy said to me, ‘Look, Mary, Fanny has a hole in her boot.’ I thought it very odd, but when I looked, ma’am, Miss Fanny was running, and she threw up her feet behind, so I saw a little hole quite plain, ma’am, and it had let a little stone in, and don’t you think, ma’am, I might take it over to Mr. Green’s to be mended

when we go out to-morrow morning?”

Perhaps you see no harm in this; but you will understand how wearisome it was to me to stand listening to this long story, when I remind you that Mary might have said all that was necessary in these few words: “Miss Fanny’s boots want mending, ma’am; shall I take them to Mr. Green’s to-morrow?”

I will give you one more example, then I am sure you will understand how to avoid this fault of Mary’s and of so many young girls. I once asked Mary how her sick father was; she answered,

“I got a letter from mother to-day, ma’am, and she says, it is hard to write while she has so much waiting to do; but father slept a little, and she took the pen just to tell me his eyes looked a little brighter, and he had taken a little of his favourite dish,--that’s stewed beef, ma’am,--and so she thought at the time that he must be better; and before she sealed the letter, Mr. Turner,--that’s the doctor, ma’am, that comes from the club that father pays weekly--he came in, and said father was much better, thank you, ma’am.”

It was very natural for Mary to like to talk of her sick father; yet when she had been with me a few months longer she would not have occupied me so long, because I asked her a simple question. She would have remembered, that however interesting it was to her to know that her father liked stewed beef, or that Mr. Turner was the club doctor, and to dwell on all other particulars that concerned her parents whom she loved, yet, I was not the person to whom she had a right to relate all these things unasked, and would have answered simply, “Thank you, ma’am, I have heard from my mother to-day, and father is much better.”

Never preface any thing you have to say, but say it simply. By prefacing, I mean using some unnecessary beginning, as “I was going to say, ma’am,” “I wanted to ask you, ma’am,” “I have been intending several times to tell you, ma’am,” and so on. Such beginnings are quite useless, and not only consume time, but sound familiar and awkward. It is better to ask, say, or tell, at once, as “Shall I go, ma’am?” “If you please, ma’am, I want some new dusters,” &c. &c. This habit of prefacing grows so much on those who fall into it, that it becomes difficult to them to say anything simply; it should therefore be guarded against at the beginning.

Sometimes a kind mistress will ask questions, and encourage a servant to speak of her family, and her own affairs. There can then be no harm in doing so. But if this should happen to you, remember two things: first, be sure you are careful to talk only as much as you see is agreeable to your mistress, and take the first hint to stop--such as your mistress’ changing the subject, or sending you to do, or fetch something; and secondly, never think, because your mistress has chosen to have a little friendly talk with you on one occasion,--perhaps while she warmed her hands at your fire, or while you helped her to undress--that she means to throw aside all reserve, and will like you to chat on in the same way another time, without encouragement.

Suppose this conversation takes place down stairs, and your mistress goes away, and soon after rings for tea, do not, when you go up, begin the conversation again; but go in just as quietly as if she had not been talking to you a few moments before. By doing this, you will show her that she may talk kindly and freely to you when she has time and inclination, without fear of making your manner the less

respectful to her at other times.

If you are an only servant, this is the more important, as it is very dull for you to have no companion, and a kind mistress, feeling this, will like often to talk to you when she has time to do so; but should she find her kindness makes you familiar, she will soon leave off conversing with you.

I know many ladies who have repented having spoken familiarly to their servants, finding that the girls have misunderstood their kindness, and sometimes have gone so far as to begin talking about their own affairs in the drawing-room. One lady who was thus annoyed, told me that she always took up a book and appeared to read, before she rang the bell, hoping thus to keep the girl from stopping to talk when she came up. I am sure it would have been kind to tell this young creature how improper her conduct was; but the lady did not like to do so, and as even the book did not restrain her, she was sent away. I know she left two good places after this, within a few months, and then went into a small shopkeeper's family, where she was remaining when last I heard of her. It is, perhaps, scarcely fair to expect that a lady should take upon herself the trouble of teaching good manners to every servant who may come into her service; but had this girl chanced to meet with a mistress who was willing to take the trouble of speaking to her several times of this, and other similar faults, resulting from the same want of respect to those placed over her, she would not have had to go back from gentlemen's families to a common place.

I need scarcely tell you never to speak when you go in to take up coals, lay a cloth, sweep up crumbs, or dust, or to do anything else in

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