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Weber Freiligrath Ernst Frey
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Engels Fielding Hölderlin
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
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**Frost's Laws and By-Laws of
American Society A condensed
but thorough treatise on etiquette
and its usages in America,
containing plain and reliable
directions for deportment in every
situation in life.**

Sarah Annie Frost

Imprint

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FROST'S LAWS AND BY-LAWS OF AMERICAN SOCIETY

**A CONDENSED BUT THOROUGH TREATISE ON ETIQUETTE
AND ITS USAGES IN AMERICA, CONTAINING PLAIN AND
RELIABLE DIRECTIONS FOR DEPORTMENT IN EVERY SIT-
UATION IN LIFE ON THE FOLLOWING SUBJECTS:**

Letters of Introduction,
Salutes and Salutations
Calls,
Conversation,
Invitations,
Dinner Company,
Balls,
Morning and Evening Parties,
Visiting,
Street Etiquette,
Riding and Driving,
Travelling,
Etiquette in Church,
Etiquette for Places of Amusement,
Servants,
Hotel Etiquette,
Etiquette at Weddings,
Baptisms and Funerals.
Etiquette with Children and at the Card Table,
Visiting Cards,
Letter-Writing,
The Lady's Toilet,
The Gentleman's Toilet,

**BESIDES ONE HUNDRED UNCLASSIFIED LAWS
APPLICABLE TO ALL OCCASIONS**

By S. A. FROST,

AUTHOR OF "FROST'S LETTER-WRITER," ETC.

1869

PREFACE.

For a long time the little book which we now offer to the public has been wanted in the library of the fashionable world; the customs, the etiquette, the different obligations which society imposes upon those who live in its midst, change frequently, and although the general principles are the same, although politeness and civility are of all epoques and times, nevertheless there are few persons so entirely at home in all the forms that they do not on some occasion feel hesitation as to the proper manner of conducting themselves.

Indeed, besides the broader and more essential rules of politeness, there are certain conventionalities adopted by good society, which, sanctioned by custom and absolute obligation, cannot, without some good reason, be neglected by the truly polite gentleman or lady. Every day the question is raised whether such and such a custom is adopted, received, and proper; there will constantly arise a doubt about the details of some ceremony, the proper hour for some entertainment, the true etiquette for some occasion. At such a time, there is a regret felt that there is not at hand, in one's own library, a safe guide, an experienced counsellor, who will answer such questions, so trifling in appearance, so important in reality.

A breach of etiquette, an involuntarily omission of some point of politeness, may often have a serious influence upon the future of the perpetrator. None of these little details are to be scorned they have each and every one a value.

It is to meet the want already mentioned that this little volume has been prepared. It makes no claim to originality; but its aim is to be perfectly reliable. English, French, and American authorities of weight have been consulted, and nothing admitted that was not sanctioned by experience and the customs of the best society.

Books, it is very true, have been already written upon this subject; but they are for the most part filled with useless details, and often do not contain what is of most importance. The aim of the Editor of the present work has been to avoid both extremes, to select only

what was useful, reliable, and well established, and to reject only what was valueless or mere repetition.

The subjects treated are all classed that they may have easy reference, and admit of consultation at a moment's notice.

The little book goes forth with one pretension only, one ambition alone – to be useful.

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THE LAWS AND BY-LAWS OF AMERICAN SOCIETY.

ETIQUETTE AND ITS USES.

THERE are a great many people, in other respects perfectly estimable (which makes the complaint against them the more grievous) who maintain that the laws of nature are the only laws of binding force among the units which compose society. They do not assert their doctrine in so many words, but practically they avow it, and they are not slow to express their contempt for the "ridiculous etiquette" which is declared by their opponents to be essential to the well being of society. These people are probably a law to themselves in such matters; they obey in their rules of conduct those instincts of propriety and good manners which were implanted in them at their birth, and cultivated probably by their education, and therefore they have small need to study especially how to conduct themselves in their intercourse with society. In such cases, their opposition to a written code of manners is rather an affair of theory than of practice, and it seems rather absurd that they should so emphatically denounce the system which they themselves, by example rather than precept, thoroughly carry out. They would be probably as averse to committing any act of rudeness, or any breach of politeness as the warmest admirer of the primitive life of the Indian would be to living himself in a dirty tent, and eating his food, half cooked, on a forked-stick over a camp fire. For such people this little code of the "Laws and By-Laws of American Society" is not written.

There are others who are equally fierce in their denunciations of the ridiculous etiquette above mentioned, but who have not the same natural excuse for being so. These are the rude, rough natures, whom no amount of social rubbing, or intercourse with the most refined would polish, though the professors of the art of good breeding polished never so wisely. They act in their rules of conduct on a principle wholly selfish, making their own ease and comfort the first, if not indeed the sole aim, regardless entirely of the amount of inconvenience or discomfort they may occasion to others. They are obliged to cry down, for mere consistency's sake, the system which condemns their own course of action, and which gives

certain laws for governing the conduct, and certain other laws prohibiting many of the acts of rudeness which they find so agreeable, but which others may reasonably object to as offensive. Such persons, too, will of course freely express their opinion, yet their denunciations will probably produce an exactly opposite effect to the one they intend, their own conduct proving the pernicious influence of their theory. Their abuse will be, not the expression, half in badinage, of minds protesting by anticipation against the abuse of forms and ceremonies; but the ignorant invective of coarse-minded people against a principle that would tame them, and mould them into a more agreeable presence. They exclaim loudly against what they personally dislike, however beneficial it may be either to themselves or others. For them this little book of the "Laws and By-Laws of American Society" is not written.

Besides the two classes already mentioned, there is another exceedingly large class of society, which, far from being boorish by nature, yet from circumstances lacks the cultivation which alone will bring the conduct into such training as will fit it practically for exhibition in society. To the persons comprising this class, it is not only a source of regret, but of absolute pain, to be ignorant of the rules which make society cohere, which mark out the functions and duties of the various members which comprise it, and which guard alike against annoyances from the impertinent, and intrusions by the ill-bred, promoting by organized methods the formation of desirable acquaintanceship and pleasant friendships, which otherwise might never take place. Isolation from society, the want of proper instruction, the ill effect of bad example, the advice of the prejudiced, the association with the low-bred, and a hundred other causes, may conspire to prevent that intimacy with the cardinal rules of good behavior, which decorum and good breeding have dictated for the better guidance of the community. It is for such persons, and for the many others who, though not unacquainted with the principles which should guide them in their conduct, are yet often at fault upon questions of detail, and sometimes commit errors, which are the more excusable that absolute rules, deduced from precedent and established by practice alone could set them right, that this code of Modern Etiquette has been prepared. To them it is offered as supplying a need which it is their misfortune, rather than their fault, to

experience, in the hope that it will be found to contain a complete guide for them in the open paths and by-paths too of good society.

Before beginning to lay down the rules and ordinances of Etiquette, it will be well to say a few words upon Etiquette itself.

Etiquette is, in point of fact, nothing more nor less than the law, written and unwritten, which regulates the society of civilized people, distinguishing them from the communities of barbarous tribes, whose lives are hard and their manners still harder. It is to a well disciplined and refined mind the fundamental principle of action in all intercourse with society, and they are interested in maintaining it in its integrity, and bound to heed and obey its simplest as well as more formal precepts. The real law-giver is the general convenience, speaking with authority and the experience of many years; and it will be found that even in those cases, where the meaning of its rules may be somewhat obscure at first sight, there is an underlying reason for the regulation laid down.

Etiquette, like every other human institution, is of course liable to abuse; it may be transformed from a convenient and wholesome means of producing universal comfort into an inconvenient and burdensome restraint upon freedom and ease. It may become the first consideration, instead of more properly the second, as is often the case with the instrumental accompaniment to a song, and then it becomes, as does the accompaniment, an intolerable nuisance. The mere form, over-riding and hiding the spirit which should control and guide it; an entirely artificial state of things, taking the place of the natural, must inevitably produce discomfort and extravagance of behavior. Nature is thus made the slave of Art, instead of Art taking its proper place as the handmaid to Nature.

Etiquette, to be perfect, therefore, must be like a perfectly fitting garment, which, beautifying and adorning the person, must yet never cramp or restrain perfect freedom of movement. Any visible restraint will mar its grace, as a wrinkle will mar the pure outline of the garment.

Most people have heard of the gentleman (?) who was perfect in his knowledge of the laws of etiquette, and who, seeing a man drowning, took off his coat and was about to plunge into the water to rescue him, when he suddenly remembered that he had never

been introduced to the struggling victim, and resuming his coat, tranquilly proceeded upon his way.

Not less absurd are a thousand instances where a regard for formal mannerism takes the place of the easy grace that is the mark of true politeness, which being well acquired and habitual, is never obtrusive or offensively prominent. Too rigid an observance of the laws of etiquette makes them an absurdity and a nuisance.

But, because the laws of etiquette may be made a restraint under injudicious management, it does not follow that they should be disregarded or in any way set aside. The abuse of them is no argument against them, any more than gluttony is any reason for starvation. It is not the food that is in fault, but the excess of the person partaking of it. The fault must be laid wholly and solely at the door of those who misunderstand the use and intention of really sound and excellent precepts. The extravagance of an overdisplay of etiquette is really only another form of innate vulgarity, although there are instances which may be drawn from the side of over refinement, from the history of people and societies, who become extravagant in their devotion to what they deem good breeding, simply because, like the stars that looked down upon Molly Bawn, "they'd nothing else to do."

There are to be found, even in grave history – amid the records of war, treaties, conquests, administrations and revolutions – accounts given in equally grave language of deep questions of etiquette which seem to have been debated and settled with as much care and energy as the most serious questions of state affairs. Cases of this sort are announced and well founded. Whoever likes to see the extent to which attention was given to the subject can seek instances in the memoirs of public characters who lived in the seventeenth century, in the diaries of minute detailers like the Duke de St. Simon, Page to His Most Christian Majesty, Louis the Fourteenth; like Sir John Finett, Master of Ceremonies to Charles the First, and in the domestic histories of the courtiers and grandees of the Spanish and Venetian courts.

Fortunately, the time has gone by when nice questions about trifling points of etiquette served to light the flame of civil war, as once they did in France, and to set the whole of the upper class in a

kingdom in arms. We owe this, perhaps, as much to the general increase of civilization as to the working of any particular set of rules or system. But the principle which actuated the French nobility, at the time alluded to, is an inherent one in the human mind, and would be likely to repeat itself in some shape or another, not so violently perhaps, but still to repeat itself, were it not kept in check by the known laws of society.

Mr. Buckle tells us that as late as the reign of Louis the Fourteenth, the right to sit in the presence of the French king "was considered to be a matter of such gravity that in comparison with it a mere struggle for liberty faded into insignificance." There was a perpetual striving which should be accounted greatest. According to the old code of etiquette, a duke's wife might sit in the French queen's presence, but no one under that rank could do so. A combination of marquises, counts, and other nobles was formed and wrung from the hand of Louis the Fourteenth, this concession that the ladies of the house of Bouillon might sit in the presence of the queen. But this was fuel to the fire of the combined noblemen's anger; two hostile parties were formed, and the question of etiquette was nearly being decided by the sword. It required all the tact and statesmanship of Mazarin to prevent this, and in the end the right was conceded to three of the most distinguished ladies of the lower aristocracy, to sit down in the presence of the queen. Upon this, the superior nobility summoned their adherents to Paris, and really a severe struggle followed, which ended in the last mentioned concession being revoked; and so great was the importance attached to the revocation that nothing would satisfy the nobles short of the public withdrawal being drawn up in a state paper, signed by the queen's regent, countersigned by the four secretaries of state, and conveyed to the assembly of nobles by four marshals of France.

The French memoirs of this period (the seventeenth century) abound with references to just such questions of court etiquette; who might use an arm-chair at court; who was to be invited to the royal dinner; who might be kissed by the queen; what degree of nobility entitled a man to be driven to the Louvre in a coach; whether all dukes were equal, or whether, as some thought, the Duke de Bouillon, having once possessed the sovereignty of Sedan, was superior to the Duke de la Rochefoucauld, who had never pos-

sessed any sovereignty at all; who should give the king his napkin at dinner, and who might have the honor of assisting at the toilet of the queen. The question whether the Duke de Beaufort ought or ought not to enter the council chamber before the Duke de Nemours, and whether, being there, he ought or ought not to sit above him, caused a violent quarrel between the two dukes in 1652, a quarrel which, of course, ended in a duel, and the death of the Duke de Nemours. The equally grave question, whether a duke should sign before a marshal was violently disputed between the Duke de Rohan and one of the marshals of Henry the Fourth, and the king was obliged to interfere in the matter.

These, of course, are but so many instances of the principle of etiquette carried to an extravagant length, and simply prove the danger there is in allowing things of less importance to supersede or take the precedence of those of greater weight. They serve to explain, and in some measure to excuse the denunciatory expressions which many thoroughly well-bred people use against etiquette, such expressions being, as before suggested, merely protests uttered in anticipation of a repetition of the absurdity which over-attention to ceremonies is liable to introduce.

But such cases are really no argument against etiquette itself, without deference to which it would be impossible to live in anything like freedom from annoyance from persons naturally impertinent, or in the full enjoyment of that social liberty which every one has a right to expect.

Good breeding is, as Lord Chesterfield well says, "the result of much good sense, some good nature, and a little self-denial for the sake of others, and with a view to obtain the same indulgence from them." Lord Bacon, in his admirable essay on Ceremonies, says:

"Not to use ceremonies at all, is to teach others not to use them again, and so diminisheth respect to himself; especially they be not to be omitted to strangers and formal natures; but the dwelling upon them, and exalting them above the moon is not only tedious, but doth diminish the faith and credit of him that speaks."

To quote again from Lord Chesterfield, who says:

"Good sense and good nature suggest civility in general; but in good breeding there are a thousand little delicacies which are established only by custom."

It is precisely these "little delicacies" which constitute the difference between politeness and etiquette. Politeness is that inborn regard for others which may dwell in the heart of the most ignorant boor, but etiquette is a code of outward laws which must be learned by the resident in good society, either from observation or the instruction of others.

It is a poor argument used against etiquette that it is not truthful, and that uncouth manners are more frank and sincere than polished and refined ones. Is truth then a hedgehog, always 3 bristling and offensive. Cannot truth be spoken in courteous accents from a kind, gentle impulse, as well as blurted out rudely and giving pain and mortification? It is true that roughness and sincerity often abide together, but would it destroy the honesty to polish away the roughness?

Etiquette, it is sometimes urged, is used to cloak what is hollow, unmeaning and false, yet may it not also drape gracefully what is true, sincere and important?

True politeness must come from the heart, from an unselfish desire to please others and contribute to their happiness; when upon this natural impulse is placed the polish of a complete and thorough knowledge of the laws of etiquette, the manners must be perfect and graceful.

Etiquette added to natural politeness is as a beautiful jewel upon a tasteful dress. Ruskin thus defines a gentleman:

"A gentleman's first character is that firmness of structure in the body which renders it capable of the most delicate sensation, *and of that structure in the mind which renders it capable of the most delicate sympathies*—one may say simply fineness of nature. This is, of course, compatible with heroic bodily strength and mental firmness; in fact, heroic strength is not conceivable without such delicacy. Elephantine strength may drive its way through a forest, and feel no touch of the boughs, but the white skin of Homer's Atrides would have felt a bent rose leaf, yet subdue its feelings in glow of battle,

and behave itself like iron. I do not mean to call an elephant a vulgar animal; but if you think about him carefully, you will find that his non-vulgarity consists in such gentleness as is possible to elephantine nature; not in his insensitive hide, nor in his clumsy foot, but in the way he will lift his foot if a child lies in his way; and in his sensitive trunk, and still more sensitive mind, and capability of pique on points of honor....

"Hence it will follow, that one of the probable signs of high breeding in men generally will be their kindness and mercifulness; these always indicating more or less firmness of make in the mind."

Undoubtedly the first law of good breeding is unselfishness, that thorough forgetfulness of one's own wants and comforts, and thoughtfulness for the happiness and ease of others, which is the Christian gentleman's rule of life; which makes him yield the easy chair to another older and weaker than himself, and sit upon a narrow bench, or perhaps stand up; which selects for another the choicest portions of the dishes upon the table, and uncomplainingly dines off what is left; which hears with smiling interest the well-worn anecdotes of the veteran story-teller; which gently lifts the little child, who has fallen, and comforts the sobbing grief and terror; which never forgets to endeavor to please others, and seems, at least, pleased with all efforts made to entertain himself. Place the code of politeness beside that of vulgarity and see if the one does not contain all virtue, the other vice. Is not good temper virtuous and polite, bad temper vicious and vulgar? Is not self denial virtuous and polite, selfishness vicious and vulgar? Is not truth virtuous and polite, scandal vicious and vulgar? Take every principle in the conventional code of the perfectly well-bred, and so define it, and not a virtue is rude.

True etiquette, as we have said before, is not politeness, yet it is founded upon the same basis. An English author says:

"Etiquette may be defined as the minor morality of life. No observances, however minute, that tend to spare the feelings of others, can be classed under the head of trivialities; and politeness, which is but another name for general amiability, will oil the creaking wheels of life more effectually than any of those unguents supplied by mere wealth or station."

To be truly polite, one must be at once good, just and generous, has been well said by a modern French writer:

"True politeness is the outward visible sign of those inward spiritual graces called modesty, unselfishness, generosity. The manners of a gentleman are the index of his soul. His speech is innocent, because his life is pure; his thoughts are direct, because his actions are upright; his bearing is gentle, because his blood, and his impulses, and his training are gentle also. A true gentleman is entirely free from every kind of pretence. He avoids homage, instead of exacting it. Mere ceremonies have no attractions for him. He seeks not only to say civil things, but to do them. His hospitality, though hearty and sincere, will be strictly regulated by his means. His friends will be chosen for their good qualities and good manners; his servants for their thoughtfulness and honesty; his occupations for their usefulness, or their gracefulness, or their elevating tendencies, whether moral, or mental, or political. And so we come round again to our first maxims, *i.e.*, that 'good manners are the kindly fruit of a refined nature.'

"And if this be true of mankind, how still more true is it of womankind! Granted that truthfulness, gracefulness, considerateness, unselfishness, are essential to the breeding of a true gentleman, how infinitely essential must they be to the breeding of a true lady! That her tact should be even readier, her sympathies even tenderer, her instinct even finer than those of the man, seems only fit and natural. In her politeness, prevcyance, and all the minor observances of etiquette, are absolutely indispensable. She must be even more upon her guard than a man in all those niceties of speech, look and manner, which are the especial and indispensable credentials of good breeding. Every little drawing-room ceremonial, all the laws of society, the whole etiquette of hospitality must be familiar to her. And even in these points, artificial though they be, her best guide after all, is that kindness of heart which gives honor where honor is due, and which is ever anxious to spare the feelings and prejudices of others.

"Every mistress of a house, be it remembered, is a minor sovereign, upon whose bounty the comfort, and happiness, and refinement of her little court depends. She must take especial care that her

servants are capable, well trained and reliable, and that her domestic arrangements are carried on as noiselessly and easily as if by machinery. In a well ordered house the machinery is always in order, and always works out of sight. No well-bred woman talks of her servants, of her dinner arrangements, or the affairs of her nursery. One feels these matters to be under her *surveillance*, and that fact alone is a guarantee of their good management. The amusements and comforts of her guests are provided for without discussion or comment; and whatever goes wrong is studiously withheld from the conversation of the drawing-room. And let no lady, however young, however beautiful, however gifted, for one moment imagine that the management of her house can be neglected with impunity. If she is rich enough to provide an efficient housekeeper, well and good; but, even so, the final responsibility must still rest upon her, and her alone. No tastes, no pleasures must stand in the way of this important duty; and even if that duty should at first seem irksome, the fulfillment of it is sure to bring its own reward.

"The very atmosphere of the house proclaims the mistress. The servants wear a cheerful air, and meet you with candid and friendly faces; the rooms are tastefully furnished; an irreproachable cleanliness and neatness reign around. The unexpected guest finds an orderly table and an unembarrassed welcome. In such a house, scandal finds no favor, and conversation never degenerates into gossip. In such a home, peace and plenty and goodwill are permanent household gods."

The most perfect law of politeness, the safest and surest guide in all that pertains to the true definition of a gentleman or lady is, after all, the Christian rule:

"Do unto others as you would others should do unto you."

No one with this for a guide can ever fail in true, genuine *politeness*, and that politeness will soon lead him to learn and remember all the prevailing rules of established *etiquette*.