

Social Etiquette in Victorian England

Reading 1: Servant Etiquette Pamphlet

Directions: Read the following text with your group and then discuss the Connection questions, making notes about your answers in your books.

This pamphlet, called 'Yes or No? (for young servants)', was created in the nineteenth century (circa 1865) for young servants to learn how to behave when they were first taken into work. The style of the pamphlet suggests that it is aimed at a young audience, whilst the content clearly outlines the lowly position of young servants in the household hierarchy.

**YES, OR NO?
Or,
QUESTIONS TO MY SOUL,
Every Night after Prayers**

Pause at each Question, and Answer honestly.

When I knelt to God and pray'd,
Did I think on what I said?
Yes, or No?

When My Mistress* ordered me,
Did I obey respectfully?
Yes, or No?

*Or Master, — as the case may be.
Have I been tidy, neat and clean—
Always fitted to be seen?
Yes, or No?

Have I with patience borne reproof,
Or, sulky, held myself aloof?
Yes, or No?

Have I been saucy, rude, or cross?
Or caus'd my Mistress hurt or loss?
Yes, or No?

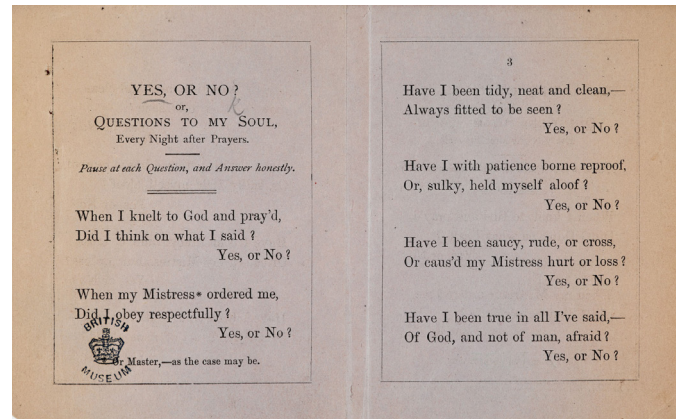
Have I been true in all I've said,—
Of God, and not of man, afraid?
Yes, or No?

Have I been honest, faithful, just—
An upright Servant to my trust?
Yes, or No?

Have I done all God bade me do,—
Lov'd Him, and lov'd my neighbour too?
Yes, or No?

O Christ my Saviour, was away
The sins and errors of this day!
For pardon and for grace I pray!

Be it so.
7 FE'65¹



Connection Questions

1. This pamphlet was created in the form of a prayer. What does that suggest about the importance of etiquette 'for young servants'? What is the implication if they do not follow the rules outlined?
2. Which phrase or sentence particularly surprises you? Explain your answer.
3. Are there any rules in this pamphlet that you think we would benefit from practising today? What makes you say that?
4. Are there any rules that are not mentioned in this handout that you would include if you were making an etiquette handout to help prepare a teenager for their first job today?
5. In 2–3 sentences, summarise the main ideas of this excerpt and then write a sentence explaining what the excerpt suggests about mid nineteenth-century society.

¹ Pamphlet for Servants' (London: circa 1865), British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/a-pamphlet-for-servants>.

Social Etiquette in Victorian England

Reading 2: The Handbook of Etiquette

Directions: Read the following text with your group and then discuss the Connection questions, making notes about your answers in your books.

As groups of people grew wealthier through the industrialisation of society, they sought to move up the social ranks. However, it was difficult for those from lower-class backgrounds to be accepted into these new superior social groups, particularly as they had not been trained in the social etiquette of the day. The following excerpt is from a book written in the nineteenth century (1860) to help those who wanted to move between classes to do so. It is aimed at the upper-end of the middle class and presumably was something people read if they wanted to be accepted into the upper-class circles. This excerpt is aimed at 'gentlemen' and concerns the etiquette of conversation.

By your conversation show your appreciation of others, and of any talent or accomplishment they may display; but avoid exaggerated and fulsome compliments. Very young men are apt to fall into the error of paying such compliments.

Never attempt to engross all of the conversation. You might as well try to help yourself to all the dinner. Each member of the company likes to have his share.

If you are learned, and converse with learned men, there is no fear of your being unappreciated; but if you choose abstruse subjects for general conversation, you weary your hearers, and appear anxious to make a vain display of your acquirements.

Recollect that the drawing-room is not a debating club, and it should never be made a field for disputants.

Do not be led into angry political discussions before ladies, and avoid controversy.

By your conversation show your appreciation of others, and of any talent or accomplishment they may display; but avoid exaggerated and fulsome compliments. Very young men are apt to fall into the error of paying such compliments.

Never attempt to engross all of the conversation. You might as well try to help yourself to all the dinner. Each member of the company likes to have his share.

If you are learned, and converse with learned men, there is no fear of your being unappreciated; but if you choose abstruse subjects for general conversation, you weary your hearers, and appear anxious to make a vain display of your acquirements.

Recollect that the drawing-room is not a debating club, and it should never be made a field for disputants.

Do not be led into angry political discussions before ladies, and avoid controversy.¹

Connection Questions

1. What does this excerpt outline as the rules of good etiquette in conversation?
2. What does the statement 'Do not be led into angry political discussions before ladies' suggest about gender roles in society at the time?
3. Which phrase or sentence particularly stands out to you? Explain your answer.
4. What are the expectations for how you should behave in society today and how do you learn them? How are they similar to the ones in this excerpt? How are they different?
5. In 2–3 sentences, summarise the main ideas of this excerpt and then write a sentence explaining what the excerpt suggests about mid nineteenth-century society.

¹ *The Handbook of Etiquette: Being a Complete Guide to the Usages of Polite Society* (London: 1860), British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-handbook-of-etiquette>.

Social Etiquette in Victorian England

Reading 3: The Handbook of Etiquette

Directions: Read the following text with your group and then discuss the Connection questions, making notes about your answers in your books.

As groups of people grew wealthier through the industrialisation of society, they sought to move up the social ranks. However, it was difficult for those from lower-class backgrounds to be accepted into these new superior social groups, particularly as they had not been trained in the social etiquette of the day. The following excerpt is from a book written in the nineteenth century (1860) to help those who wanted to move between classes to do so. It is aimed at the upper-end of the middle class and presumably was something people read if they wanted to be accepted into the upper-class circles. This excerpt is aimed at ‘gentlemen’ and concerns the etiquette of conversation.

Another far more objectionable topic of *constant* conversation is furnished by the short-comings and failings of domestic servants. As servants are human beings, their faults, like our own, are an inexhaustible theme; but the ever-recurring selection of such a theme lowers the tone of conversation, and imparts to it a bitterness that is at variance with the suavity of polite discourse; in short, these constant discussions of the foibles of servants have contemptuously been termed, “What women talk about.” Let our fair readers avoid such topics.

When you are in company, talk with the company: it is not etiquette to address your conversation principally to your own relatives, &c. Make yourself generally agreeable, and whether you are married or single, let all the ladies share in your polite attention. It is in order to secure this general sociability that etiquette disapproves of married people’s exclusive devotion to each other; for instance, going down to dinner together, or dancing together, &c.

Study to avoid provincialisms, both in dialect and pronunciation. A correct pronunciation is characteristic of the well-educated classes. Be particularly careful in all that relates to the letter *h*. Do not drop it where it should be sounded, nor introduce it where it has no right to be. Make a study of all the words in which the *h* is mute.¹

Another far more objectionable topic of constant conversation is furnished by the short-comings and failings of domestic servants. As servants are human beings, their faults, like our own, are an inexhaustible theme; but the ever-recurring selection of such a theme lowers the tone of conversation, and imports to it a bitterness that is at variance with the suavity of polite discourse; in short, these constant discussions of the foibles of servants have contemptuously been termed, “What women talk about.” Let our fair readers avoid such topics.

When you are in company, talk with the company: it is not etiquette to address your conversation principally to your own relatives, &c. Make yourself

generally agreeable, and whether you are married or single, let all the ladies share in your polite attention. It is in order to secure this general sociability that etiquette disapproves of married people’s exclusive devotion to each other; for instance, going down to dinner together, or dancing together, &c.

Study to avoid provincialisms, both in dialect and pronunciation. A correct pronunciation is characteristic of the well-educated classes. Be particularly careful in all that relates to the letter *h*. Do not drop it where it should be sounded, nor introduce it where it has no right to be. Make a study of all the words in which the *h* is mute.¹

Connection Questions

1. What does this excerpt outline as the rules of good etiquette in conversation?
2. What do you think the statement ‘Study to avoid provincialisms, both in dialect and pronunciation’ means? What does it suggest about mid nineteenth-century society’s view of language and diction?
3. Which phrase or sentence particularly stands out to you? Explain your answer.
4. What are the expectations for how you should behave in society and how do you learn them? How are they similar to the ones in this excerpt? How are they different?
5. In 2–3 sentences, summarise the main ideas of this excerpt and then write a sentence explaining what the excerpt suggests about mid nineteenth-century society.

¹ *The Handbook of Etiquette: Being a Complete Guide to the Usages of Polite Society* (London: 1860), British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-handbook-of-etiquette>.

Social Etiquette in Victorian England

Reading 4: The Handbook of Etiquette

Directions: Read the following text with your group and then discuss the Connection questions, making notes about your answers in your books.

As groups of people grew wealthier through the industrialisation of society, they sought to move up the social ranks. However, it was difficult for those from lower-class backgrounds to be accepted into these new superior social groups, particularly as they had not been trained in the social etiquette of the day. The following excerpt is from a book written in the nineteenth century (1860) to help those who wanted to move between classes to do so. It is aimed at the upper-end of the middle class and presumably was something people read if they wanted to be accepted into the upper-class circles. This excerpt is aimed at ‘gentlemen’ and concerns the etiquette of conversation.

ETIQUETTE OF MORNING CALLS.

Ladies do not expect visitors before two, nor after five.
A lady may rise on receiving the visit of a gentleman, if she wishes, on account of his age, &c., to pay him marked respect; but, generally speaking, she need not rise from her seat on the entrance of male visitors.
Ladies and gentlemen who meet at a friend's house, may, if mutually agreeable, enter into conversation without the ceremony of an introduction.
A lady has the privilege of taking another lady or a gentleman to pay a visit to a friend.

ETIQUETTE OF MORNING CALLS

Ladies do not expect visitors before two, nor after five.

A lady may rise on receiving the visit of a gentleman, if she wishes, on account of his age, &c., to pay him marked respect; but, generally speaking, she need not rise from her seat on the entrance of male visitors.

Ladies and gentlemen who meet at a friend's house, may, if mutually agreeable, enter into conversation without the ceremony of an introduction.

A lady has the privilege of taking another lady or a gentleman to pay a visit to a friend.¹

The following excerpt is from a section advising women on how to dress.

Judgment in the selection of colours that harmonise with each other, and with your complexion, goes further in promoting a good appearance than the most costly materials chosen inconsiderately.

The colours for fair complexions are light-blue, pink, lilac, and pale-green.

Crimson and orange are more becoming to brunettes; but maize, light red, and brown partaking of red, may be worn by either fair or dark persons.

If you are short, avoid very wide crinolines. They would make you look even shorter than you are, and you tempt people to say you are “as broad as you are long.”

If you are tall, flounces, and all that gives width to your robe, is sure to be becoming.

Judgment in the selection of colours that harmonise with each other, and with your complexion, goes further in promoting a good appearance than the most costly materials chosen inconsiderately.

The colours for fair complexions are light-blue, pink, lilac, and pale-green.

Crimson and orange are more becoming to brunettes; but maize, light red, and brown partaking of red, may be worn by either fair or dark persons.

If you are short, avoid very wide crinolines. They would make you look even shorter than you are, and you tempt people to say you are “as broad as you are long.”

If you are tall, flounces, and all that gives you width to your robe, is sure to be becoming.²

1 & 2 *The Handbook of Etiquette: Being a Complete Guide to the Usages of Polite Society* (London: 1860), British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-handbook-of-etiquette>.

Connection Questions

1. What do these excerpts suggest about the role of women in society? Explain your answer.
2. What does the sentence ‘Ladies and gentlemen who meet at a friend's house, may, if mutually agreeable, enter into conversation without the ceremony of an introduction’ suggest about how men and women tended to engage with each other in mid nineteenth-century society?
3. Which phrase or sentence particularly stands out to you? Explain your answer.
4. What are the expectations for how you should behave in society and how do you learn them? How are they similar to the ones in these excerpts? How are they different?
5. Write 2–3 sentences to summarise the main ideas of these excerpts and then write one sentence explaining what they suggest about mid nineteenth-century society?