

## CHAPTER XXIV

# The Etiquette of the Table

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"Behavior is the theory of manners practically applied."  
Mme. Necker.

RULES of etiquette have come down to us from one generation to another. Only those that have stood the test of time are respected and observed. They have been silently adopted by the common consent of the best circles in America and Europe. The rules of etiquette as we observe them at present are not, as some people suppose, the dictates of fashion. They are certain forms of conduct, speech and manner that have been brot down to us thru centuries of developing culture. We observe them today because they make contact in social life easier and more pleasant. A greater amount of freedom may certainly be permitted in one's own house, but the key-note of a person's behavior should always be the same; self-respect and respect for others must never be forgotten. One instinctively shuns the person whose table etiquette is crude or vulgar, regardless of whether that person may be cultured in every other respect. Many times worry as to one's conduct at the table causes a social function to be most trying. This is because correct table etiquette is not understood or because it has not been practiced until it becomes a habit.

*Importance of Table Etiquette:* Too much stress cannot be laid on the importance of refinement at the table, both in manners and in the laying and service of the table itself. The habit of eating together and at stated times is one of the distinguishing marks that separate civilized men from savages, and a man's behavior at table is an indication of his social status.

Certainly there is no place where a person's good breeding and early training are more clearly shown than at the table. Conduct should be marked by serenity, and there should be no uncertainty of manner as to the use of table furnishings and the correct procedure in partaking of the meal.

### CONDUCT PRECEDING THE MEAL

*Entrance to Dining Room:* On entering a dining room to partake of a meal, courtesy requires that a man, whatever his age, wait for the women in his company to assume their seats first. A well-bred woman lingers by her chair till her hostess is seated, and a young girl pauses for senior members of her own sex, for her mother, aunt, or matron friend, to take their places before she slips into her own seat.

*Seating at the Table:* In taking one's place at the table, stand at the left side of the chair and be seated from that side.

*Position at the Table:* Many persons place themselves too close to or too far from the table and fail to maintain thruout the repast an erect posture. The waistline should be about four and a half or five inches distant from the table's edge. So seated, the diner is obliged to exercise the minimum effort in bending forward to take food from fork or spoon and in leaning back at intervals to rest the shoulders. A lounging habit when eating is not correct, nor is that of sitting upon one's half-drawn chair, which is tipped or placed sidewise at the table. An erect and correct position promotes digestion. It is important to keep the feet together and not assume awkward positions with them, or hook them around the legs of the chair, as ill-mannered persons sometimes do.

Elbows are not put on the table while one is eating. To sit with the left elbow propped on the table while eating with the right hand, or to prop the right one on the table while lifting fork or glass to the mouth is to be avoided. When cutting food, the elbows should be kept close to the body, not extended so as to interfere with those on either side.

### CONDUCT AT THE TABLE

*Dress:* The question of dress is one that should receive attention. Soiled hands, negligee dress, shirt sleeves or disheveled hair do not belong at the table.

*Reading, etc.:* Letters, newspapers or books have no place at a dinner table. Reading at the table is allowable at breakfast and when eating alone, but a man and wife should no more read at lunch or dinner before each other or their children than they should allow their children to read before them.

*Conversation:* One very bad habit in many families is the discussion of all of their most intimate affairs at the table. Table talk in good society, whether guests are present or the family are by themselves, is cheerful, light even to gayness, but never boisterous. Family friction, teasing and acrimonious discussions should be avoided. Topics particularly barred by etiquette include illness and its symptoms, death, crimes, details of the toilette, discussions of expenses or household worries, and ill tidings of any kind.

*Children:* When there are children in the home, the most simple plan is to have the child at the family table for three meals a day, from the beginning of his high-chair period, sitting beside the mother and receiving the benefit of her training and of the example of his elders. A child may be allowed to take some part in conversation during meals, but monopolization or interruption of the conversation should not be tolerated.

### USE OF THE NAPKIN

The napkin is spread half unfolded across the lap after the hostess has opened hers. Leave it there until after the hostess has disposed of hers at the end of the meal.

When a drop of gravy or juice falls on one's clothing, it may be wiped off with the napkin. It is also permissible to wipe one's lips or fingers with the napkin, but it should be done as inconspicuously as possible.

Following a fruit course, and after the hands have been dipped one at a time in the water of a finger bowl, they are wiped inconspicuously on the napkin. Finally, at the



Incorrect use of knife and fork



The correct position for holding the knife and fork while eating.



Incorrect position for silver after finishing course.



The correct position for silver when not in use.



Never wipe lips with napkin after it has been arranged preparatory to leaving table.



Correct position for silver at end of the meal.

end of a meal enjoyed in a friend's house or in a restaurant, the piece of napery is placed, unrestored to its original folds, on the table beside the last plate used. At home, or when stopping in the house of a friend where the table linen is not freshly supplied at every meal, neat and thrifty habits demand that the napkin be tidily refolded and laid beside the plate.

### THE USE OF THE SILVER

In cutting food the knife is held in the right hand, the fork in the left, tines down and handles grasped firmly and naturally. The ends of the handles rest in the palms of either hand and are never seen, the index fingers extend along the handles to steady and guide.

One should not scrape the back of the fork prongs with the cutting edge of the knife.

It is also bad form to gesticulate with the silver or handle it and draw patterns on the tablecloth.

*Knife:* Knives of steel or silver are provided for cutting food only, never for conveying it to the mouth. When the knife is laid aside that the fork may be taken into the right hand, its proper place is on the plate. When not in use, the blade-tip should rest in the center of the plate, its handle on the plate's edge. In this position, beside the fork, it should be placed when the plate is passed for a second helping and when a course or a meal is concluded. It is not correct to mash or stir food with a knife blade. It is a mistake to scrape up juice or gravy on a knife blade and pour it over a forkful of bread or potato or to dip one's sticky or greasy knife-blade into a salt cellar or to wipe a knife blade off on a piece of bread in order to take up recklessly splashed drops fallen on the tablecloth or on one's clothing.

*Fork:* The fork is used for carrying dry foods and many semi-solid foods to the mouth; also for cutting foods which are easily separated, such as lettuce and omelet. In carrying foods to the mouth, only a small portion should be carried on the fork. When not in use, it is placed on the plate parallel to the knife.

*Spoon:* The spoon is used for liquid foods, which should be taken noiselessly from the side of the spoon. With soups, the spoon should be dipped away from one to avoid

the drip. After the spoon has been used to sweeten the coffee or other beverage or to test its temperature, it is placed in the saucer and left there until the end of the meal.

## HOW DIFFERENT FOODS ARE EATEN

### *With the Fingers*

In dealing with the majority of *cold breads, crackers, dinner-rolls, sandwiches and cakes*, the fingers are employed in place of metal utensils. Iced and layer cakes are more comfortably eaten with a fork. Dry cake, crackers and dry bread are not lifted in the whole slice or square to the lips. Properly, bread, cake and crackers are broken with the fingers into suitable mouthfuls to be eaten.

Only a small portion of bread should be buttered at one time. The bread should be broken before being buttered. It should either be placed on the bread and butter plate or on the dinner plate. A small piece of bread in the left hand may be used to aid in placing foods on the fork.

*Olives, celery and radishes* are finger-foods when served as relishes, and under the head of finger-foods we may also class cheese, nuts, raisins, bonbons, olives, small individual cakes and the majority of raw fruits.

Among *hot cooked dishes, burr artichokes, asparagus and green corn* on the cob are recognized as finger-foods. However, asparagus may be comfortably eaten with the fork. Meat, bird and chicken bones may, in no circumstances, be taken up in the fingers, or is it proper to take up potato chips or straws save with one's fork.

### *With the Fork*

A fork is used to eat *cake which has a soft frosting*. If the cake may be handled without soiling the fingers, no fork need be used. *Moist cakes*, such as *gingerbread* and all *frosted layer cakes*, are more conveniently eaten with a fork. The hostess determines whether or not a fork is needed. Do not use a spoon to eat cake.

*Hominy and rice* are eaten with a fork, unless they are served with cream and sugar, when perforce they pass into the class of spoon foods.

Use a fork rather than a spoon whenever possible. Creamed vegetables may be eaten with a spoon. A fork is preferable for brick ice cream.



An *ice served with the meat course* is eaten with the dinner fork. This means that the ice must be frozen hard and served just after all the plates are served. If the hostess has provided a spoon, use it. The spoon must be left on the dinner plate when not in use.

*Leaf salad* is eaten with a fork in the right hand only, and assistance in folding up lettuce leaves is often rendered by a bit of bread held in the left hand. Lettuce, cress and chicory are never cut with a knife, but rolled upon a fork and so conveyed to the mouth.

#### *With Spoons*

Spoons are used for *grapefruit* and *oranges* when cut in halves and put upon a plate; for *soft boiled eggs*, *puddings*, *custards* and *gelatins*.

With tea, coffee, chocolate, cocoa, milk, or any other liquid served in cups or glasses, the spoon given with the beverage is intended only as an implement for stirring and tasting. After sipping two or three times from the side always, of one's teaspoon, it should then be laid in the plate or saucer, and the remainder of the liquid drunk from the cup or glass. No faults in table behavior are more glaring than those of drinking from a cup in which the spoon remains, or of imbibing the contents of a cup sip by sip from the bowl of the spoon.

If a tiny salt spoon is lacking, the helping may be taken on the tip of a clean spoon or clean knife blade and deposited on the side of one's plate or directly on savorless food.

#### *Beverages*

When lifting one's glass of water from time to time, it is essential to wipe the lips free of sweets or grease before taking any of the liquid. It is a mistake to throw back the head and turn up the cup until it rests almost on one's nose; an equally unfortunate mistake is made by the person who scrapes up the sugar from the bottom of his cup or who attempts to cool a hot beverage by stirring it violently, or pouring steaming liquid back and forth from spoon to cup or blowing over it or pouring it in a saucer to cool it. When partaking of it the mouth should be free from foods and it should be drunk quietly.

A goblet is raised by the stem and not grasped around the bowl. A tumbler is raised by taking hold of it down near the lower edge. One uses only one hand to hold a cup.

#### *Use of Various Plates and Dishes*

The plate should not be moved about while sitting at the table. The soup plate should never be tipped while eating from it. Other dishes should not be set on the dinner plate after food has been served on it. The sauce dish into which semi-liquid foods are served is placed in front of the dinner plate and should not be lifted from the table while eating from it.

Liquid (not jellied) bouillon may be drunk from the cups.

#### *Salt*

If salt cellars are not provided, the salt is put on the side of the dinner plate, never on the tablecloth.

#### *Use of Finger Bowls*

Individual finger bowls are used at breakfast if fruit is served. They are placed on the table at the left of the service plate, having been set on a small plate and being partly full of water. After eating the fruit the tips of the fingers of one hand at a time are dipped into the bowl and dried on one's napkin.

Finger bowls are also used after the dessert course. The finger bowl may be brought in on a small plate placed on the dessert plate. Each guest removes his small plate and finger bowl, leaving his plate ready for a dessert, which is served by a waitress. They may also be placed after the dessert plate is removed.

### **GENERAL DEPARTMENT AT THE TABLE**

The hands, when not occupied with the knife, fork, etc., come to their proper resting place in the diner's lap. A distressing and disturbing element at a meal is the guest who fidgets, who crumbles bread, rings fork and spoon handles together, twirls goblets by their stems, plays nervously with crumbs and salt, and uses the table as a prop for restless hands, for arms and elbows while resting the chin on the palm to talk.

Food is never placed on the tablecloth. One may do so with hard breads or dry celery if individual dishes are not furnished.

It is not in good taste to form the habit of reaching and straining across the table at arm's length for this or that or to thrust individual knife or fork into the butter or pickle dish or to use the fork as a spear for securing a potato from a dish or a slice of bread from a plate or to drop bits of chicken bones, fruit seeds and skins directly from the mouth into the plate.

A chicken or chop bone is never taken in the fingers. The meat should be cut from the bone, leaving all that does not readily separate.

One should not pick the teeth at the table. Toothpicks are always used in private.

The handkerchief is used sparingly and unobtrusively by the genteel.

Food, to be silently masticated, must be taken in moderate mouthfuls and chewed slowly without apparent effort. A careful person takes food up from the plate without unnecessarily striking either knife or fork against the china; a fork or spoon in no circumstances must be allowed to knock against the teeth.

Accidents will happen occasionally at the table. If fork, spoon or knife should fall on the floor, it must be allowed to remain there until removed. If a glass is overturned, it is best not to make profuse apologies. The hostess should never appear disturbed, and must bear herself with equanimity and not appear to notice the accident, or she may turn off the subject with a kind remark if the guest seems distressed.

If a blunder of any sort is made, from using the wrong fork to spilling coffee upon the best gown of the honor guest, remember that the importance of any mistake is in proportion to the amount of trouble it causes others, and don't be unhappy unless the offense really calls for unhappiness.

## ETIQUETTE OF ENTERTAINING OR BEING ENTERTAINED

### *Hospitality*

"When friends are at your hearth side met,  
Sweet courtesy has done its most  
If you have made each guest forget,  
That he himself is not the host."

Aldrich—HOSPITALITY

The keynote of hospitality is sounded when one has made one's guest feel perfectly at ease and able to truly enjoy himself. To accomplish this in a home, every individual in the family must learn to share his or her responsibility in making the atmosphere pleasant.

*Invitation:* An invitation to a meal may be given by word of mouth or it may be written. It should be acknowledged with acceptance or regrets at the earliest possible moment. When one has accepted an invitation he should arrive at least five minutes before the stated hour. When the hostess announces that the dinner is served, the announcement should be answered promptly.

*Duties of Host and Hostess:* Both host and hostess should strive to make the conversation cheerful and pleasant. Operations, accidents, etc., are best avoided. Political and religious beliefs are best left undiscussed before strangers. *The hostess is always served first by the host and all guests watch her for the signal to begin eating. A hostess continues eating until all are finished, lest some guest be embarrassed by finding himself the last to eat.* Both host and hostess strive to give the guest the feeling that his visit has been a pleasure which has given them no effort.

In entertaining company at the family meal, the hostess should realize that her place is with her guests as much as possible and plan accordingly so that her absences from the table may be few. She is always director of affairs. She must be always watchful of the comfort of her guests and keep the conversation directed into safe channels.

The hostess gives the signal to be seated at the table. The men should remain standing until all the ladies have taken their seats. It is customary for the host to seat the hostess or the guest of honor if a lady, and the other men to seat the ladies to their right.

*Duties of Guests:* One general rule for all eating is not to hurry thru any part of the meal. The meal is a social occasion and one should not appear impatient to be served. One should wait before beginning to eat until all at the table are served. At a very long table, guests often begin to eat when those near them are served.

At a dinner one must not neglect one's next-door neighbors. While it is often pleasanter to listen to some witty and agreeable person opposite than to talk platitudes to the person next you, still one must not appear neglectful, above all a gentleman must not. At a small dinner it is very pleasant occasionally to have the conversation become general; at a large dinner, of course, it is impossible.

If your preference is asked, state it so as to guide the one serving. One should never refuse a course. Try to eat it. and if you do not, engage the person next to you in a little more conversation so as not to have the appearance of being neglected. To refuse the last helping of anything is to intimate that you doubt the supply.

It is well to learn to eat and enjoy all foods, but if one tastes of something which he does not care to swallow, it may be removed from the mouth with closed hand and placed on the plate. This should be done silently and with as little attention as possible.

Do not forget that elderly people may have been taught differently from you, and never criticise them.

At a formal meal, a second helping is never offered or expected, but one may accept a second helping at an informal meal with perfect propriety; in fact, it is rather complimentary to the cook to do so.

A guest must not presume to rise from the table until the hostess or host of the occasion makes the first motion. Previous to leaving a meal of any formality whatsoever, it is not considered proper to clean up one's bread crumbs, gather up crusts, fruit skins, nutshells, etc., on the cloth or to rise to shake oneself free of any particles of food.

When leaving the home where one has been entertained, the guest should always shake hands with the hostess and express one's pleasure for the hospitality extended. Children should be taught this courtesy early in life.