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Manners and the Home
Margaret L. Marnette

The right thing to do is to make company manners a strictly family affair. Make it a habit to treat each other as honored guests rather than just Sis or Buddy. Be personal as far as being personal can go, but don't let it go too far. Don't be overly courteous with each other. When sister has her first "date," don't tease her about it. It is natural for boys and girls to seek each other's companionship, but to make this a means of joking and teasing will rob it of all its sweetness.

Make the dinner table a place where interesting conversation is maintained. Stupid silences, gobbling of food, rushing out to play, and reading newspapers (even father sins against this rule in the mornings, but after all let's excuse him for he has so little time to read anything but headlines) have no place at the table of the well-bred family. Probably the last mentioned fact is most often found in today's family. It is hard to deprive the young boy from his night play time especially when the other boys of the neighborhood are calling for him to "hurry up." Yet might it not help the neighbor boys too, if you refused to let your boy run out immediately after eating? There is a chance that the neighbor boy would get the habit of sitting quietly until the rest of his family had finished eating, realizing his playmates were doing the same.

As to table talk: probably no one knows just what to advise someone else to talk about. Few people have the same ideas, and a general discussion of something might often lead to criticism that would do more harm than good. Yet the child should form the habit of talking at the table. Let him associate pleasant ideas with good food and watch his mind and body grow together.

Be careful about the niceties of speech. "Huh?" and "What?" may have their places in the dictionary, but "Yes, Dad," or "No, mother," sound so much nicer when used in conversing.

Probably one of the hardest things to teach a child is when not to talk back. Of course, none of us want to teach a child to be stupidly silent, yet how many times have we seen children who insist "Aw, what do you care?" when asked something. Mothers insist children are stubborn, yet our side is usually with the child when the mother does not seem to be able to keep from a one-sided debate with the child when he has disobeyed her.

Saying "please" and "thank you" are just little words. Every child can learn them. How much easier it will be for them to realize the worth of these words if we say them to the child when he does something to merit them. If we give the child a real part in the family he will come to acquire dignity and self-possession. Teach them to meet people without embarrassment. Help them to overcome shyness by allowing them a part in our grown-up conversation when guests are present. Never let a child monopolize the conversation, but encourage him to talk constructively.

Respect for one's family is far more important than respect for occasional guests. However broad a statement that may be, one must remember that by constant use of courtesy one acquires a knowledge of it that will become a part of us. By setting good examples for our family, especially for the younger members, they may imitate us, unconsciously probably, but at any rate they will become gentle mannered and gracious.