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Hospitality Is a Gentle Art...

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Homes, as well as parlors, may vary in elaborateness from the rudest peasant's two room hut, to the spacious palace of the prince, and yet either, or neither may embody hospitality. What is this much desired thing called hospitality? It is impossible to say definitely. "You must have this, that or the other," yet none of us fail to sense its presence or its absence when we enter a home.

It may be the red and white checked table cloth, a geranium blooming in the window, the crackling flames in the fireplace, a white picture frame with a gate that swings easily and quietly, or perhaps the welcoming smile of the silvery-haired lady who lives there, which symbolizes to you the elusive spirit. Whatever it may be, it implies a joyous welcome and a genuine interest in the guest, with a desire to make his stay as comfortable and pleasant as possible.

Hospitality is no modern innovation. In fact, it probably reached its height during the Medieval Age when guests visited for long periods at a time, and strangers were always welcome.

Yet we should not feel that because our means are limited, and our homes small and simply furnished that we need relinquish the pleasure of entertaining. In fact, simplicity and hospitality are inseparable. Failure is more often due to attitude than to an actual lack of necessities. Do not make the fatal mistake of apologizing, either vocally or mentally. A real joy in sharing with others, enthusiasm and innate friendliness are the secrets of success.

When a guest accepts our invitation he is bestowing an honor upon us. It is essential that not only the hostess, but her husband, children and home reflect the spirit of hospitality. The rooms should be as warmly and attractively arranged as possible, yet primness and extreme decorousness should be avoided. We do not wish them to fairly shriek, "We have our company manners on!"

Lights shining from the windows and porch, a smiling hostess at the door, with the host and children near at hand assure the guests immediately that they are indeed welcome.

The table appointments should be simple and attractive. Avoid loading the table with heavy, rich foods, in consideration for your guest who may be counting calories. The thoughtful hostess will not serve unusual foods with pronounced flavors unless she knows her guests enjoy them. Neither will she attempt to awe them by extravagant or sophisticated foods and service. The guest should be made to feel perfectly at ease, and not fearful that he is being scrutinized because of his dress, manners or speech.

The hospitable host or hostess will take a real share in the conversation, but will not by any means monopolize it. Personal affairs of friends, domestic matters and money troubles are topics to be avoided. It is best to discuss a variety of light, interesting subjects, so that everyone may contribute and it will be boring none.

If the guest is to remain over night, the suggestion to retire should come from the family. The guest room should be thoughtfully provided with coat hangers, extra bedding, towels, drinking glass, magazines and books and similar details that will add much to the comfort of the occupant. The time of the family breakfast hour may be customarily mentioned, with the suggestion that he sleep longer if he desires.

These are merely suggestions which must be modified to suit each situation. The true success of the art lies in the kindness and tact of the hostess. We need to practice the simple virtues of cheerfulness, honesty, generosity, natural grace, simplicity and charm. Having guests, whether they be close friends or passing strangers, becomes a pleasure to all concerned when company manners and everyday manners are the same.

IT WON'T be long till we'll be welcoming another leap year. Did you ever stop to think just how New Year's Day happened? Most of us haven't thought about it at all for a good many years. We've spent our time planning how to celebrate it.

Ancient barbarians began the observance of New Year's Day by celebrating "the birth day of the sun" in mid-winter. Later, Christians celebrated the birthday of the Son at the same time of the year; and Christmas and New Year's were celebrated on the same day. Now we observe two holidays.

New Year's Day is celebrated in all kinds of ways. In China the rejoicings last a week or more; and many Chinese celebrate New Year's Day on two different dates in one year. The Scottish Highlanders drink the "hot pint" and visit their neighbors, bringing gifts and trying to put "first food" in each house. In Thessaly each mother gives sweets to her children on New Year's morning to assure them a sweet career during the year. In Germany they feast on New Year's eve, and go calling the next day.

The custom in our country is to watch the old year out and the new year in, and then to celebrate the next day with a big family dinner and visiting. Lots of us are thinking right now about "watch night" parties. Can't you remember, years ago on New Year's Eve, coaxing your mother to "please, let you stay up just this once!" You expected something big to happen at twelve, and you didn't want to miss it.

Are you planning a small dance, a bridge party, or some other kind of New Year's Eve frolic? If you are, of course you'll want to serve refreshments.

For a dance, punch and wafers or ice cream and wafers is sufficient. You may serve sandwiches and salad, too. Toasted sandwiches with hot chocolate and salad are too. Toasted sandwiches with hot chocolate and salad are delicious on a cold evening. Did you ever make sandwiches of ground-up goose or chicken, mixed with broth or gravy and toasted to a light brown? Goose or chicken is usually on hand during the holidays and can be put to good use this way. Your guests will appreciate them, too.

Something nice and hot served at about twelve o'clock will taste good on a cold