

CHAPTER 17 - Etiquette At Home and Abroad

In "Etiquette At Home and Abroad," the author reflects on the consequences of neglecting etiquette in both personal and public spheres, inspired by an incident involving the Grand Duchess Olga in St. Petersburg. This contemplation reveals a broader critique of the American and, to some extent, the English disregard for the nuances of social customs, especially when compared to the ceremonious behavior appreciated in other cultures. The author argues for the incorporation of more formal politeness into daily interactions, not just with strangers but within the home and towards those considered inferiors, suggesting that politeness stems from kindness and is essential for smooth social functioning.

Highlighting the conflict between Americans' "free and easy-going" demeanor and the detailed etiquette of European and other cultures, the chapter includes anecdotes that illustrate misunderstandings and conflicts arising from cultural differences in manners. These stories range from a young American girl unknowingly offending a French concierge to a British butler uncomfortable with friendly interactions, underscoring the author's point that a lack of politeness and understanding of local customs can lead to discomfort and even alienation.

The text also discusses the shock and disillusionment Americans feel upon discovering they are not as welcomed abroad as they might have thought, largely due to their ignorance of or indifference to local etiquette. It argues for a more gracious approach toward service workers and others we might consider our social inferiors, suggesting that such behaviors not only foster goodwill but also facilitate smoother interpersonal relations.

Finally, the author criticizes the harsh and impolite manner in which children and young people are often treated within families. They advocate for the same level of respect and consideration to be extended to the young and dependent as is expected in formal society, implying that such changes in attitude could enhance harmony and understanding in personal relations. By drawing parallels between these domestic interactions and the ceremonial respect shown to the infant princess in St. Petersburg, the chapter advocates for a universal application of respect and politeness as essential components of both public and private life.