MANNERS MATTER

Women and men of all ages have observed rules of etiquette or manners for centuries. It seems, however, that during the Victorian Era, women and men were more aware of these rules, and abided by a wide variety of etiquette customs. For instance, there were rules that were observed when dining, making introductions, mourning, writing letters, tending the sick, hosting a party, or visiting friends.

It is important to remember that these rules were observed in different degrees by people of different classes. The most wealthy people followed many, if not all, of the rules, while poorer people followed fewer rules.

Some of the rules that were observed during the Victorian Era are below. How many of them do we still abide by today? Can you think of any rules we follow that aren’t listed here?

From “Mrs Dunwoody’s Excellent Instructions for Homekeeping

Rules for Ladies...

A lady does not smoke, or bite her fingernails.
A lady possesses a sense of humor and can easily laugh at herself, but never at others.
A lady is never late (lest it give her suitors time to count up her faults).
A lady refrains from discussing anything unpleasant or indecent.
A lady is always concerned with the health and happiness of those around her and will do everything she can to see that they are properly attended to.

Rules for Gentlemen...

A gentleman does not talk of, or make a display of his wealth.
A gentleman does not go to a lady’s house if he is affected by alcohol.
A gentleman never fails to offer the easiest and best seat in the room to an invalid, elderly person, or lady.
A gentleman does not “sponge” off others, but pays for, or earns his own way.
A gentleman never treats his wife with disrespect in the company of others (including children and servants).
**Rules for Children . . .**

Do not whine.
Always say “please” and “thank you.”
Open doors for others.
Ask permission.
Be helpful and kind to others.

**What to Avoid When Calling on Others . . .**

Do not stare around the room.
Do not turn your back to one seated near you.
Do not walk around the room, examining pictures, while waiting for the hostess.
Do not take a dog or small child with you.
Do not linger at the dinner hour.
Do not open or shut doors or alter the arrangement of the room.

**Care of a Sickroom . . .**

Avoid loud talking or whispering; either extreme is painful to a sick person.
Never take your seat on a sick person’s bed unless requested to do so.
Darken the room to a mellow, twilight light, and ventilate the room.
Wear slippers or cloth shoes; tread lightly.