

**FROST'S LAWS AND BY-LAWS OF
AMERICAN SOCIETY. A
CONDENSED BUT THOROUGH
TREATISE ON ETIQUETTE AND ITS
USAGES IN AMERICA**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649473311

Frost's Laws and By-Laws of American Society. A Condensed but Thorough Treatise on Etiquette and Its Usages in America by S. A. Frost

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
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PREFACE.

For a long time the little book which we now offer to the public has been wanted in the library of the fashionable world; the customs, the etiquette, the different obligations which society imposes upon those who live in its midst, change frequently, and although the general principles are the same, although politeness and civility are of all epochs and times, nevertheless there are few persons so entirely at home in all the forms that they do not on some occasion feel hesitation as to the proper manner of conducting themselves.

Indeed, besides the broader and more essential rules of politeness, there are certain conventionalities adopted by good society, which, sanctioned by custom and absolute obligation, cannot, without some good reason, be neglected by the truly polite gentleman or lady. Every day the question is raised whether such and such a custom is adopted, received, and proper; there will constantly arise a doubt about the details of some ceremony, the proper hour for some entertainment, the true etiquette for some occasion. At such a time, there is a regret felt that there is not at hand, in one's own library, a safe guide, an experienced counsellor, who will answer such questions, so trifling in appearance, so important in reality.

A breach of etiquette, an involuntary omission of some point of politeness, may often have a serious influence upon the future of the perpetrator. None of these little details are to be scorned; they have each and every one a value.

It is to meet the want already mentioned that this little volume has been prepared. It makes no claim to originality; but its aim is to be perfectly reliable. English, French, and American authorities of weight have been consulted, and nothing admitted that was not sanctioned by experience and the customs of the best society.

Books, it is very true, have been already written upon this subject; but they are for the most part filled with useless details, and often do not contain what is of most importance. The aim of the Editor of the present work has been to avoid both extremes, to select only what was useful, reliable, and well established, and to reject only what was valueless or mere repetition.

The subjects treated are all classed that they may have easy reference, and admit of consultation at a moment's notice.

The little book goes forth with one pretension only, one ambition alone—to be useful.

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THE
LAWS AND BY-LAWS
OF AMERICAN SOCIETY.

ETIQUETTE AND ITS USES.

There are a great many people, in other respects perfectly estimable (which makes the complaint against them the more grievous) who maintain that the laws of nature are the only laws of binding force among the units which compose society. They do not assert their doctrine in so many words, but practically they avow it, and they are not slow to express their contempt for the "ridiculous etiquette" which is declared by their opponents to be essential to the well being of society. These people are probably a law to themselves in such matters; they obey in their rules of conduct those instincts of propriety and good manners which were implanted in them at their birth, and cultivated probably by their education, and therefore they have small need to study especially how to conduct themselves in their intercourse with society. In such cases, their opposition to a written code of manners is rather an affair of theory than of practice, and it seems rather absurd that they should so emphatically denounce the system which they themselves, by example rather than precept, thoroughly carry out. They would be probably as averse to committing any act of rudeness, or any breach of politeness as the warmest admirer of the primitive life of the Indian would be to living himself in a dirty tent, and eating his food, half cooked, on a forked-stick over a camp fire. For such people this little code of the "Laws and By-Laws of American Society" is not written.

There are others who are equally fierce in their denunciations of

the ridiculous etiquette above mentioned, but who have not the same natural excuse for being so. These are the rude, rough natures, whom no amount of social rubbing, or intercourse with the most refined would polish, though the professors of the art of good breeding polished never so wisely. They act in their rules of conduct on a principle wholly selfish, making their own ease and comfort the first, if not indeed the sole aim, regardless entirely of the amount of inconvenience or discomfort they may occasion to others. They are obliged to cry down, for mere consistency's sake, the system which condemns their own course of action, and which gives certain laws for governing the conduct, and certain other laws prohibiting many of the acts of rudeness which they find so agreeable, but which others may reasonably object to as offensive. Such persons, too, will of course freely express their opinion, yet their denunciations will probably produce an exactly opposite effect to the one they intend, their own conduct proving the pernicious influence of their theory. Their abuse will be, not the expression, half in badinage, of minds protesting by anticipation against the abuse of forms and ceremonies; but the ignorant invective of coarse-minded people against a principle that would tame them, and mould them into a more agreeable presence. They exclaim loudly against what they personally dislike, however beneficial it may be either to themselves or others. For them this little book of the "Laws and By-Laws of American Society" is not written.

Besides the two classes already mentioned, there is another exceedingly large class of society, which, far from being boorish by nature, yet from circumstances lacks the cultivation which alone will bring the conduct into such training as will fit it practically for exhibition in society. To the persons comprising this class, it is not only a source of regret, but of absolute pain, to be ignorant of the rules which make society cohere, which mark out the functions and duties of the various members which comprise it, and which guard alike against annoyances from the impertinent, and intrusions by the ill-bred, promoting by organized methods the formation of desirable acquaintanceship and pleasant friendships, which otherwise might never take place. Isolation from society, the want of proper instruction, the ill effect of bad example, the advice of the prejudiced, the association with the low-bred, and a hundred other causes, may conspire to prevent that intimacy with

the cardinal rules of good behavior, which decorum and good breeding have dictated for the better guidance of the community. It is for such persons, and for the many others who, though not unacquainted with the principles which should guide them in their conduct, are yet often at fault upon questions of detail, and sometimes commit errors, which are the more excusable that absolute rules, deduced from precedent and established by practice alone could set them right, that this code of Modern Etiquette has been prepared. To them it is offered as supplying a need which it is their misfortune, rather than their fault, to experience, in the hope that it will be found to contain a complete guide for them in the open paths and by-paths too of good society.

Before beginning to lay down the rules and ordinances of Etiquette, it will be well to say a few words upon Etiquette itself.

Etiquette is, in point of fact, nothing more nor less than the law, written and unwritten, which regulates the society of civilized people, distinguishing them from the communities of barbarous tribes, whose lives are hard and their manners still harder. It is to a well disciplined and refined mind the fundamental principle of action in all intercourse with society, and they are interested in maintaining it in its integrity, and bound to heed and obey its simplest as well as more formal precepts. The real law-giver is the general convenience, speaking with authority and the experience of many years; and it will be found that even in those cases, where the meaning of its rules may be somewhat obscure at first sight, there is an underlying reason for the regulation laid down.

Etiquette, like every other human institution, is of course liable to abuse; it may be transformed from a convenient and wholesome means of producing universal comfort into an inconvenient and burdensome restraint upon freedom and ease. It may become the first consideration, instead of more properly the second, as is often the case with the instrumental accompaniment to a song, and then it becomes, as does the accompaniment, an intolerable nuisance. The mere form, over-riding and hiding the spirit which should control and guide it; an entirely artificial state of things, taking the place of the natural, must inevitably produce discomfort and extravagance of behavior. Nature is thus made the slave of Art, instead of Art taking its proper place as the handmaid to Nature.