

**THE WRITING TABLE OF THE
TWENTIETH CENTURY; BEING AN
ACCOUNT OF HERALDRY, ART,
ENGRAVING & ESTABLISHED
FORM FOR THE CORRESPONDENT**

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The writing table of the twentieth century; being an account of heraldry, art, engraving & established form for the correspondent by F. Schuyler Mathews

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F. SCHUYLER MATHEWS

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FORM FOR THE CORRESPONDENT

BY F. SCHUYLER MATHEWS

AUTHOR OF THE BEAUTIFUL FLOWER GARDEN, FAMILIAR
FLOWERS OF FIELD AND GARDEN, FAMILIAR FEATURES
OF THE ROADSIDE, FAMILIAR LIFE, ETC., ETC., ETC.



WITH OVER THREE HUNDRED ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR AND THE HERALDIC
BLAZONRY OF MORE THAN FIVE HUNDRED
COLONIAL AMERICAN FAMILIES ::::: :::::



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Introduction.

THE opening of the twentieth century brings us face to face with several facts which some of us are rather too conservative, perhaps, to acknowledge with that magnanimity which is characteristic of the American. One of these facts is that we are industrially and socially a competent people, but we do not act as if we believed we were. I am aware of the fact that we do not often express this belief in general conversation, and it would be proper to admit that we are not, as a people, so overwhelmed with modesty that we habitually underestimate our own ability.

We also fail to fully inform ourselves, at times, and, as a consequence, are not wise in our judgment; this is another fact we have to face. The "Oregon" surprised us by her splendid sail around the southern continent, but I doubt whether her builders were at all surprised. The suddenness of the "Merrimac" incident, the breathless advance upon Santiago, the almost instant destruction of the two Spanish fleets, these events astonished us as much as they did foreigners; but there was no need of it, we should have remembered the old "Monitor's" brave fight, and also remembered the resolute words of Captain Coffin, who, as he was towing the remarkable craft, in the midst of a threatening storm, to her fighting ground, replied to those who advised him to put into a near port for safety, — "I'll proceed if we all have to go to the bottom together."

There is a time when an American must act independently, and must shoulder his own responsibility without listening to advice. Now this rule I firmly believe applies quite as well to our social life; we have no excuse for yielding to the prejudice and conventionalities of the Old World; the time has come when we must apparently stand by republican ideals. We are at liberty to take anything from old-world customs which may prove for our good, but we are not at liberty to appropriate anything else. Circumstances alter cases, and we must admit that our environment in America is distinctly different, socially as well as geographically, from that of the English, French, or German peoples; but this fact in no wise exempts us from certain irrefragable social rules which are founded upon simple Christian courtesy. There is no reason, for instance, why an American should curtail established formalities connected with the visiting card, and the note or card of invitation; but he does so to a surprising degree, and one wonders whether the estimable friend is suffering from an acute attack of economy or indifference. He is surely not copying foreign custom, nor is the omission characteristic of American independence, because that would discount both the quality and dignity of the latter.

There is, indeed, a lofty quality to our social as well as political independence. Our mode of life is adapted to convenience, and we do not allow ourselves to be hampered by tradition. Ours is a life in which innovation, not conservatism, is the rule. Hence, even in so small a matter as orthography, we do not propose to spell *honor* with a *u*, and *program* with *me*; we can afford to prune away all uselessness, whatever its nature; but we *never* could be justified in pruning common courtesy.

It is not true to say in excuse of such a want of courtesy that this, that, or the other thing is never omitted in "polite society"; we deceive ourselves! There are count-

less blunders committed in every separate phase of society in America, whether through ignorance or not it would scarcely be worth while to demonstrate. If we Americans do not do things as nicely *as they can be done*, it behooves us to mend our manners as quickly as possible; it is from no lack of ability that we fail to do the best, and we need not copy foreign manners.

Diplomatic etiquette in Europe appoints French as the Court language; we have no Court, and we are under no obligation to conform to Court etiquette. In that regard, at least, our national manners are independent and exempt from criticism. I hardly think we can plead correct form and fashion in support of many details of a foreign flavor which enter into our social intercourse. Sooner or later we will absorb the last thing that is good in foreign form, and then with everything else it will be remodeled to fit American needs. Ultimately we shall adopt our own form and establish our own standard, and we might as well understand now, that the intelligent social forces at work in this great republic are not likely to be guided by a clique of "four hundred," who have set themselves rigidly to the task of copying foreign conventionalities.

For that reason the following pages are marked by an avoidance of everything useless to our needs and belonging to old-world principles. It is scarcely necessary to add that the book is a plea for American originality, and an urgent appeal for the patronage of those estimable products of home industry which should properly furnish the American writing table of the twentieth century. It must also be apparent that it would have been impossible for me to gather together so much material of an authentic character without the assistance of many who took a kindly interest in the work. I am indebted to the attendants of the Boston Public Library for their most courteous attention, and for the prompt way in which valuable