

Etiquette for a Regency or Victorian Ball

An evening party is often only another name for a ball. We may have as many and as weighty objections to dancing, as conducted at these fashionable parties, as to the formal dinners and rich and late suppers which are in vogue in the same circles, but this is not the place to discuss the merits of the quadrille or the waltz, but to lay down the etiquette of the occasions on which they are practiced. We condense from the various authorities before us the following code:

1. According to the hours now in fashion in our large cities, ten o'clock is quite early enough to present yourself at a dance. You will even then find many coming after you. In the country, you should go earlier.

2. Draw on your gloves (white or yellow) in the dressing-room, and do not be for one moment with them off in the dancing-rooms. At supper take them off; nothing is more preposterous than to eat in gloves.

3. When you are sure of a place in the dance, you go up to a lady and ask her if she will do you the honor to dance with you. If she answers that she is engaged, merely request her to name the earliest dance for which she is not engaged, and when she will do you the honor of dancing with you.

4. If a gentleman offers to dance with a lady, she should not refuse, unless for some particular and valid reason, in which case she can accept the next offer. But if she has no further objection than a temporary dislike or a piece of coquetry, it is a direct insult to him to refuse him and accept the next offer; besides, it shows too marked a preference for the latter.

5. When a woman is standing in a quadrille, though not engaged in dancing, a man not acquainted with her partner should not converse with her.

6. When an unpracticed dancer makes a mistake, we may apprise him of his error; but it would be very impolite to have the air of giving him a lesson.

7. Unless a man has a very graceful figure, and can use it with great elegance, it is better for him to walk through the quadrilles, or invent some gliding movement for the occasion.

8. At the end of the dance, the gentleman re-conducts the lady to her place, bows, and thanks her for the honor which she has conferred. She also bows in silence.

9. The master of the house should see that all the ladies dance. He

should take notice particularly of those who seem to serve as drapery to the walls of the ball-room (or wall flowers, as the familiar expression is), and should see that they are invited to dance.

10. Ladies who dance much should be very careful not to boast before those who dance but little or not at all, of the great number of dances for which they are engaged in advance. They should also, without being perceived, recommend these less fortunate ladies to gentlemen of their acquaintance.

11. For any of the members, either sons or daughters, of the family at whose house the ball is given, to dance frequently or constantly, denotes decided ill-breeding; the ladies should not occupy those places in a quadrille which others may wish to fill, and they should, moreover, be at leisure to attend to the rest of the company; and the gentlemen should be entertaining the married women and those who do not dance.

12. Never hazard taking part in a quadrille, unless you know how to dance tolerably; for if you are a novice, or but little skilled, you would bring disorder into the midst of pleasure.

13. If you accompany your wife to a dance, be careful not to dance with her, except perhaps the first set.

14. When that long and anxiously desiderated hour, the hour of supper, has arrived, you hand the lady you attend up or down to the supper-table. You remain with her while she is at the table, seeing that she has all that she desires, and then conduct her back to the dancing-rooms.

15. A gentleman attending a lady should invariably dance the first set with her, and may afterward introduce her to a friend for the purpose of dancing.

16. Ball-room introductions cease with the object—viz.: dancing; nor subsequently anywhere else can a gentleman approach the lady by salutation or in any other mode without a re-introduction of a formal character.

This code must be understood as applying in full only to fashionable dancing parties in the city, though most of the rules should be adhered to in any place. The good sense of the reader will enable him to modify them to suit any particular occasion.