

## Young Lady's Book (1830)

This excerpt is from an etiquette and manners guide entitled the *Young Lady's Book*, published in 1830. In these pages, the author described the proper manner of dancing and performing a curtsy; other pages detail the art of walking itself. As American society developed and expanded, so did the market for refinement. These formalities were formerly reserved for the colonial aristocracy (and disdained in many republican yeoman households), but by the mid-nineteenth century, middle-class Americans were concerned with these refinements as well.

THE

**YOUNG LADY'S BOOK:**

A

**MANUAL**

**OF**

**ELEGANT RECREATIONS, EXERCISES,**

AND

**PURSUITS.**

BOSTON:

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DANCING.

The dress should be held between the fore-finger and thumb of each hand: it is a matter of importance to overcome both tremor and rigidity of the fingers, which should be gracefully grouped, so that the palm be partially seen in front. In dancing Quadrilles, when the lady advances with her partner, and in all the figures where the hands join, the arms should be kept of such a moderate height as is consistent with grace (Fig. 1.) It is also necessary that the arms should be properly supported, and not suffered to weigh or drag upon those of the persons with whom it may be proper to join hands in the course of the dance. To say nothing of the positive impropriety of falling into such an error, the mere act, during its continuation, is quite destructive to grace, which cannot exist where ease is not apparent. Elegance, without affectation, may be shown in presenting the hand to a partner: rustic abruptness, and childish timidity, are equally to

be avoided; a modest confidence is the golden mean to be observed in this, as in every other department of ball-room dancing. To grasp the hand of a person with whom it is necessary to join hands, --to detain it when it should be relinquished,--are faults which, we trust, our reader's good sense would prevent her from committing, even when dancing with one of her own sex; but even these offences, in the consideration of propriety and taste, are not more grave than that of display. However excellently a young lady may dance, and whatever powers of brilliant execution she may possess, she should never forget that she is in a ballroom, and not on a stage: studied attitude in presenting the hand (Fig. 2) is reprehensible, as being productive of too much effect,

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#### DANCING.

The body should be kept perfectly erect: the shoulders should be thrown back, and the waist advanced; the arms rounded, and the fore-finger and thumb occupied in holding out the dress; the other fingers being gracefully grouped (Fig. 4.) During the first attempts, the toes should not be more turned back than will admit of the body maintaining its proper balance; they must be brought to assume the correct position by degrees, until the pupil can place the feet, heel to heel, in a parallel line with each other, without affecting the steadiness of the body or arms.

The second position is formed by moving the right foot from the first position, sideways, to about the distance of its own length from the heel of the left (Fig. 5.) When the foot is thus placed, the heel must be raised so that the toes alone rest on the ground; the instep being bent as much as possible, and the foot turned so as to retain its primitive direction outward: as in the case of the first position, the foot should be brought to perform the action of the second, in a perfectly correct manner, by degrees; and the toes should be gradually thrown back as far as the pupil's power to preserve her balance will permit.

The third position is formed by drawing the right foot from the second position, to about the middle of the front of the left: the feet are to be kept close to each other (Fig. 6.) In drawing the right foot into this position, the heel must be put to the ground as it approaches the left, and kept forward during its progress, so that the toe may retain its proper direction outward.

The fourth position is formed by moving the foot about its own length forward from the third position, directing the heel outward,

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#### DANCING.

and the whole of the weight be thrown upon it. The Battements should be practised until the pupil

can make them with some degree of, what a professional dancer would call, brilliance, with either foot, unassisted by the support which is necessary when they are commenced.

Before concluding our article, we deem it expedient to describe the approved mode of performing the Curtsey; and as our aim is to improve the general deportment in society, as well as in dancing for the ball-room, to offer a few observations on walking.

The performance of the curtsey in a proper manner, proves a matter of difficulty to some young ladies; but it will be found very easy, after a little practice, to curtsey with grace, if proper directions be given and attended to. The following is the usual mode:--The front foot is first brought into the second position; the other is then drawn into the third behind, and passed immediately into the fourth behind,--the whole weight of the body being thrown on the front foot; the front knee is then bent, the body gently sinks, the whole weight is transferred to the foot behind while rising, and the front foot is gradually brought into the fourth position. The arms should be gracefully bent, and the hands occupied in lightly holding out the dress. The first step in walking, after the curtsey, is made with the foot which happens to be forward at its completion. The perfect curtsey is rarely performed in society, as the general salutation is between a curtsey and a bow (Fig. 14.)

The manner of walking well is an object which all young ladies should be anxious to acquire; but, unfortunately, it is a point too much neglected. In the drawing-room, the ball-room, or ...