

# Don't Kid the Waitress

Continued from page 11

invaluable. Some manual dexterity is desirable too, for you can hardly expect to do this kind of work well if you are clumsy and knock over a glass of water or a sugar bowl every time you put your hand on a table. But the quality I would put ahead of all other qualities is the simple desire to make people comfortable, to make their meals pleasant. If a girl does not take this spontaneous delight in seeing people with a happy look on their faces, if she does not automatically anticipate their desires and enjoy doing it, she may have every other quality, she may have ten years' experience and be highly intelligent, and still she will be a bad waitress.

## Memory Becomes Trained

The first thing she has to learn is not to get her orders mixed up. That is, she has to train her memory. You may doubt this, and think that any person of ordinary alertness could remember all that a waitress has to remember. But it is not quite as easy as it looks. Let me give you an illustration: In most restaurants the usual assignment for a waitress during the rush period is eight chairs, sometimes ten. Let us suppose that every seat is taken, as is frequently the case. That means, if there are eight chairs in her station, that she has eight different persons to serve. Now for every person who eats lunch there are usually five different items of food. If it is a combination lunch, say for fifty cents, there is soup, the main dish, a dessert, tea, milk or coffee, and bread of one sort or another. Five different items for eight different people mean forty items to be carried in the head for a period of twenty minutes.

Moreover, many of these items carry special directions with them. One man wants his coffee black, another wants his macaroni plain, another wants his toast dry instead of buttered, and so on. And if you think it is easy to keep all these different things straight, you should try it. When you first start out, you will come to the conclusion that playing eight different chess games at once is child's play compared with it. But after a while your memory becomes trained, so that you can keep it all straight automatically.

The next little thing you have to learn is not to wait until you are asked before you render some required service. This means that you have to train your eyes. You look at a table and all you see is four people eating. I look at the same table and see one man perfectly comfortable, another worried because his water is running low, another unable to reach the sugar, and another vaguely uncomfortable, not even knowing what is the matter with him. So I pick up a glass of water and bring it to the man who is nursing his last five drops, hand the sugar bowl to the man who can't reach it, and ask the man who is vaguely uncomfortable if he wants the fan over his head turned off. He says yes. I turn it off, and again the table is comfortable.

This capacity to take in the needs of a table at a glance is very important, and it does not come in a day. It not only saves the customer the irritation of having to ask for everything he wants, but determines your capacity to render service from a vantage point, so that you can do a number of things with one trip to the counter.

The next little thing that she learns is to avoid foolish affectation on the one

hand and perverse stupidity on the other. That is, she learns to act naturally. That may sound like a simple thing, but actually it isn't.

Then she must learn the consideration that is due her regular customers. Every waitress has a dozen or more customers who eat at her table three or four times a week, and each of these she must catalogue for their little peculiarities, to make their meals pleasant.

Most people, when they ask me about my work, get around sooner or later to one point. That is the number of men who try to date us up. A good many. While I have never accepted any of these invitations, I get the impression that most of them are honorably meant and are devoid of sinister motive.

Most men who become interested in you take a week or two to screw up their courage—you knowing all the time by previous long experience just what is going through their minds—and then stammer out an invitation to dinner, or to the theater, in a perfectly respectful way. What do we do when this happens? Well, if a girl does not want to accept the invitation, she usually makes some little excuse, and lets the thing slide along without ever really accepting or declining. For this there are several reasons. In the first place, the man may be much more interested in you than you think, and you do not want to hurt his feelings.

I remember one case of a friend of mine. An old gentleman got a violent crush on her and wanted to adopt her. One day he brought his wife in. She was an old lady and was enthusiastic about the plan too. This went on for quite a while. But presently the girl thought it was time to make an end of it and tell the old gentleman just how impractical his idea was.

"All right," she said suddenly. "I'll let you adopt me. But on condition that you adopt my husband too."

## Regulars an Asset

She hadn't told him she was married, you see. And to find it out was a terrible shock to him. He didn't say anything at all, and he never came back.

But there is another reason, too. We are human, alas, and we have found out that a great many of these gentlemen who want to date us up will grow up to be nice regular customers if they are handled with a little tact. Regular customers add quite a little to a waitress' income. Where the usual tip is ten cents, the regular customer is good for fifteen, or perhaps twenty-five.

I guess I am about done. Being a waitress, perhaps, is nothing to throw up your hat about, but I never really heard of anything in this world that was. It is pleasant enough work; it pays a girl enough to save a little money, if she wants to; it acquaints her with a business that she can sensibly go into on her own account if she feels she wants to; and, as I have said, it provides her with as many chances to get married as most girls get. In my own case, I may say it has been a great help. When I first came to America from Norway four years ago, at the age of sixteen, unable to speak English and hardly knowing right from left, I had a pretty hard time of it, I can assure you. Becoming a waitress has changed that, to some extent, and equipped me to earn my living almost anywhere I choose to earn it, and with employers who treat me very decently.