

**HELEN EKIN  
STARRETT**

**LETTERS  
TO A DAUGHTER  
AND A LITTLE  
SERMON  
TO SCHOOL  
GIRLS**

**Helen Ekin Starrett**

# **Letters to a Daughter and A Little Sermon to School Girls**

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# **LETTERS TO A DAUGHTER.**

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## **LETTER I.**

### **BEHAVIOR AND MANNERS.**

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*My Dear Daughter:*—One of the greatest blessings I could wish for you, as you pass out from the guardianship of home into life with its duties and trials, is that you should possess the power of winning love and friends. With this power, the poor girl is rich; without it, the richest girl is poor. In the main, this power of winning friends and love depends upon two things: behavior and manners. Between these there is an important distinction, but one is the outgrowth of the other. The root of good manners is good behavior. Consider with me for a little what each implies.

Behavior is a revealer of real character. It has especially to do with the more serious duties and relations of life. Its greatest importance is in the home. How well do I remember a visit, made in my youth, to a school friend whom I had learned to admire greatly for her superior intellect, quick wit, power of acquiring knowledge, and ability to recite well in class. In her home she was rude and disrespectful and even disobedient to her parents; cross and sarcastic with

her brothers and sisters; selfish and indolent in all matters pertaining to the work of the household. What a disenchantment was my experience! That great and good man, who has written so many noble precepts about the conduct of life, Mr. Emerson, in speaking of and praising a noble citizen, says: "Never was such force, good meaning, good sense, good action, combined with such lovely domestic behavior, such modesty, and persistent preference for others." This was what was lacking in my school friend: lovely domestic behavior. Nothing could compensate for this deficiency.

What was needed in this young girl in order that she might have exhibited in her daily life a "lovely domestic behavior"? An almost total reconstruction of character; such a cultivation of the moral sense as would have made it a matter of conscience with her to "honor her father and mother," to be respectful to them and desirous of pleasing and serving them. Selfishness was the main cause of her ill-treatment of her brothers and sisters, as it was of her indolence, and her indifference to the performance of her share of the household duties. Her behavior in the home was such that she repelled, rather than attracted, affection. Her own personal preference, mood, feeling, were constantly allowed to control her conduct; and the deep underlying deficiency in her character was lack of a tender conscience and of a sense of duty.

Lovely domestic behavior is the natural outgrowth and expression of a beautiful, harmonious, and lovely character. In order to behave beautifully, we must cultivate assiduously the graces of the spirit. We must persistently

strive against selfishness, ill-temper irritability, indolence. It is impossible for the selfish or ill-tempered girl to win love and friends. Generosity, kindness, self-denial, industry—these are the traits which inspire love and win friends. These are the graces that will make the humblest home beautiful and happy, and without which the costliest mansion is a mere empty shell.

One more point in regard to behavior I wish to impress upon your mind as of very great importance, although it relates less to the home and more to general society. I mean that of modest behavior as distinguished from forwardness and boldness. One of the greatest charms of young girlhood is modesty; one of the greatest blemishes in the character of any young person, especially of any young girl or woman, is forwardness, boldness, pertness. The young girl who acts in such a manner as to attract attention in public; who speaks loudly, and jokes and laughs and tells stories in order to be heard by others than her immediate companions; who dresses conspicuously; who enjoys being the object of remark; who expresses opinions on all subjects with forward self-confidence, is rightly regarded by all thoughtful and cultivated people as one of the most disagreeable and obnoxious characters to be met with in society. Modesty is one of the loveliest of graces, and should be constantly cultivated.

And now you will see what I mean by saying that the root of good manners is good behavior. In other words, good manners have their time and living root in moral qualities and the Christian graces. There is a certain surface display of manners which may be acquired and which may deceive

and pass with those who do not know us intimately; but there is all the difference between such superficial good manners and those which are real, that there is between the cut bouquet of flowers which delights for an hour or two and then withers away, and the living, growing plant which constantly delights us with fresh beauty and bloom.

What are the characteristics of the agreeable and beautiful manners that are the ornament and charm of the well-behaved girl? First we should place gentleness, quietness, and serenity or self-possession. It has been well said by an observing social critic, that the person who has no manners at all has good manners. What is meant by this, and there is a deep truth in it, is that gentle and quiet manners do not attract attention at all. Their greatest charm is their unobtrusiveness, just as the charm and distinguishing mark of a well-dressed person is that the dress is not striking or obtrusive. You can infer from this how inconsistent with good manners is heat and exaggeration in conversation. It is a just complaint among refined and cultivated people that many, even of the well-educated young women of the present day, talk too loudly and vehemently; are given to exaggeration of statement and slang expressions. The greatest blemish of the conversation and manners of the young people of to-day is obtrusiveness and exaggeration. By obtrusiveness I mean a style of speech and manners that attracts attention and remark; by exaggeration I mean the too constant use of the superlative in conversation, and a certain incongruity and inappropriateness of expression which is very offensive to the cultivated taste. Such expressions as "perfectly awful,"