

PRECEDENCE: The BURNING TOPIC of the HOUR at WASHINGTON



Aroused by the Fact That Lady Pauncefote Led the New Year's Reception at the White House—Cabinet Dictates; Society Dare Not Disobey

By a Woman in Official Life at Washington.

QUITE a tempest in a teapot it was while it lasted, to certain matrons, debutantes, daughters and belles newly launched upon Washington society, and a flutter of agitation deeper under the surface than it appeared outwardly was the result of considerable nervousness that followed the first official function of the season. That Lady Pauncefote should have led at the New Year's reception in the White House seems a slight incident, but that it overthrew or waded aside the very gospel of Washington society became apparent in the not too silent attitude in which it was subsequently regarded. But it is all over now. The waves of the tempest in the samovar have subsided and the bits of lemon float serenely upon the placid surface of the brewing in eggshell cups. The new matrons, debutantes, daughters and belles may not have known it, but they need never have fluttered a single flutter or puzzled their pretty brains for a moment.

In this glorious country of ours, which we are proud to call absolutely democratic, and to whose private and semi-private social functions no rigid lines of dogmatic court etiquette are known, we have declared with vaunting vanity the social gospel of the national capital is made, hammered, riveted and clinched with fastenings more stern than steel by the chieftains who surround the President. The Cabinet dictates and society dare not disobey. More than that, the Cabinet has swayed its social scepter these many years, and is, in its turn, compelled to defer to the rigidly established rules laid down by court chamberlains in other parts of the world.

SOCIAL GOSPEL OF WASHINGTON.

"Regulations concerning precedence of diplomatic agents: "The rules on this subject which have been prescribed by the department are the same as those contained in the seven rules of the Congress of Vienna found in the protocol of the session of March 9, 1815, and are in the supplementary or eighth rule of the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle of November 21, 1818. "Article I. Diplomatic agents are divided into three classes: That of ambassadors, legates or nuncios; that of envoys, ministers or other persons accredited to sovereigns; that of charges d'affaires, accredited to ministers of foreign affairs. "Article II. Ambassadors, legates or nuncios only have the representative character. "Article III. Diplomatic agents of extraordinary mission have not on that account any superiority of rank. "Article IV. Diplomatic agents shall take precedence in their respective classes according to the official notification of their arrival. The present regulation shall not cause any innovation with regard to the representative of the Pope. "Article V. A uniform mode shall be determined in each state for the reception of diplomatic agents of each class. "Article VI. Relations of consanguinity or of family alliance between courts confer no precedence on their diplomatic agents. The same rule applies to political alliances. "Article VII. In acts or treaties between several powers which grant alternate precedence the order which is to be observed in the signatures shall be declared by lot between the ministers. "Article VIII. It is agreed that the ministers resident accredited to them shall form, with respect to their precedence, an intermediate class between ministers of the second class and charges d'affaires. "These rules have been formally or tacitly accepted by all governments, except the Ottoman Porte, which divides diplomatic representatives into three classes only, ambassadors, ministers and charges d'affaires."

the absence of her husband, the dean of the Diplomatic Corps. The suggestion that she occupy the place that Lord Pauncefote would have been in did not meet the approval of diplomats, who would as soon violate an international law as the ironclad rules of their social training and instruction. The idea that the representative of a country really does represent the reigning power is apparently quite forgotten at times in what we may call our national desire to have things "go smoothly." There is a story told of a dinner given in Washington when the wife of the English Ambassador was taken in by, or, rather, assigned to the escort of the young son of the house, the reason given being that he was the only "her apparent." Like most of the stories about precedence, this cannot be verified, but it serves as a capital anecdote to relate. It will be remembered that at the time of General Grant's funeral there was a most serious discussion as to who should lead, the English Ambassador or the Vice President, and it was said the only way to set the difficulty was to let the ambassador ride on the hearsa. The rule that the foreign ambassador who has held his office for the longest term of years is the dean, and ranks first, has simplified matters somewhat, for some can be found to cavil at so practical a rule. The rule as to the wife of each Minister is carried out in the same order. The rule that an ambassador or Minister shall always take in to dinner the wife of some one of rank is rarely ever broken, and another of the Washington stories is to the effect that one daring young hostess gave a Minister a place between two young and pretty girls, and