

A TOAST TO CENTRAL.

The Telephone Girl is at Least Coming Into Her Own—What She Does for the Public.

Something new in the way of a toast was recently proposed at a gathering of business men when, after the customary sentiments in honor of civil dignitaries and the way the diners were celebrating the toastmaster proposed "The Telephone Girl."

This tribute to the telephone girl was in accordance with a custom which had its beginning thousands of years ago. Toasting had its origin among the early Romans, though the Greeks, from whom they borrowed many customs, were used to pledging their devotion to their gods as well as to one another.

The British are wont to attribute the toast, such as it is known today, to Rowena, daughter of Hengist, the Saxon king, who, while Vortigern, the royal Briton, was visiting her father, took the cup to the guest of honor and said: "Wacht hell," to which Vortigern responded: "Drinc hell." Hence the term "wassail," or health drank to someone's honor.

The actual substitution of an individual for the traditional toast, and the beginning of the modern form of toasting, is said to date from the time of Charles II. of England. A celebrated belle was disporting in the surf at Bath in the company of several admirers. One of them to show his devotion, drank a cup of the swallows in which she was standing, but this prompted another to declare that though he couldn't take the water he could take the toast meaning the fair lady, and he might have run off with her if his rivals had not been so numerous.

This episode led to many eccentricities, such as toasting a belle out of her slippers and drinking her health in two Oxford students, suitors for the hand of the same damsel, gave a rare exhibition in this line. One of them mixed scotch with his wine, and, not to be outdone, the other quaffed a goblet of ink—a heroic act which probably

left the other fellow, when he recovered, in sole possession of the field. While toasting women has been in vogue since imperial Caesar paid court to Cleopatra, the public occasions on which women of the business world have been so honored are rare indeed. It appears that the telephone girl, in this respect, is in a class by herself. There are no records showing similar honors paid to the typewriter, the social secretary or the bookkeeper. The girl at central is thus unique.

Like the toast itself, the response to "The Telephone Girl" was worthy of attention for the reason that it shed new light upon the actual—not the romantic—experience of the operator at central.

"If I go to a grocery store on Saturday night when every clerk is on the jump, and yell that I have an important engagement and demand that one clerk leave the customer he is waiting on and attend to my wants because my business is almighty important," said the speaker, "the proprietor informs me that if I have a little patience I will be waited on in my turn; and that is exactly right. Yet this same merchant will take the head of the poor telephone girl to task there are rush times during which she is unable to answer the telephone in a fraction of a minute. The butcher complains about the blundering telephone girl and makes the air smell of sulphur every time she happens to give him the wrong number, but he sings his mighty song when I tell him that I go home to find my wife in tears because she has company for dinner, ordered her meat at nine in the morning and the blundering butcher sent it to the wrong house."

"They will not give the same consideration to the telephone business," the speaker went on, "that they demand for themselves. According to them, the telephone girl has no right which anyone is bound to respect. She is responsible for the part she plays, the scribbler wants to talk to is out if one of the hundreds of screws connected with the telephone is loose, if the dress did not get home from the dressmaker's, if the fire department is not called five minutes before the fire broke out. In fact, she is to blame for everything." He concluded by asking for the telephone girl the same courtesy shown to other women in the business world.

Statistics show that for every mistake complained of by the telephone user there are many thousands of instances of the satisfactory service which passes without comment. Re- calculations made in one of the big metropolitan divisions of the Bell system showed that there was only one complaint in every 28,000 calls during the month of July. "Complaints" as far as headquarters are concerned, is one of the hardest months in the central telephone office a account of the prevalence of irritability due to heat. As the temperature rises, so does the public temper. On terribly hot days, however, the telephone girl is most fully relieved to some extent because many persons take it easy and decline to make even the slight exertion necessary in using the telephone.

When 24.99 telephone calls are handled without complaint, the trouble caused by the call which makes the number 28,000 may be said to constitute a tribute to the general excellence of the service. The case has been well compressed into a nutshell by the following illustration: When a man complains that the eggs, the toast and the coffee which from his breakfast are not properly prepared, it indicates that he ordinarily finds his breakfast satisfactory, eggs, toast, and coffee being good and appetizing. The prompt handling of telephone call is taken as a matter of course. For this reason the occasional and inevitable failures are often magnified and make the cause of complaint, even when they are due to operator is not responsible.

Among the complaints are many which have their amusing side. One of the telephone men tells the following:

"One day recently a well-known lady in New York city called up the manager of the local exchange and said she had a complaint to make. 'I am sorry to hear it, madam,' said he, recognizing the fair complainant. 'Perhaps I can assist you. What has happened?'

"Well, I must tell you that your toll operator is the most insulting person I have ever dealt with." "Greatly surprised, the manager asked for an explanation. 'Why, I gave her my number,' quoth the excited lady, 'and told her distinctly that I wanted to talk with my husband in Schenectady and she had the unparliamentary impudence to ask me for husband's name. It's perfectly outrageous. I think a girl who gives such an insult ought to be discharged instantly, and that is why I called you.'

It apparently never occurred to the oversensitive lady that a person answering the name of Capitol two-three-four, ring one, or something like that, would be difficult to locate when he happened to be away from his telephone.

The fact that many thousands of telephone calls are satisfactorily handled indicates that ordinarily the telephone girl receives the consideration to which she is entitled as a faithful and efficient member of the business community. Her employers see to it that her surroundings are pleasant. In all parts of the Bell system, central office buildings indulge rest and lunch rooms for the use of the operators, and the day is so arranged that two hours at the switch board are followed by a period when the operator's time is her own. Besides that she is careful for the work, either in the exchanges itself or in one of the many schools maintained by the companies. And in the main, the great, busy, impatient public has learned to know the value of her work and express its appreciation by courteous treatment. Cases of treatment of the other kind are the exceptions which prove the rule.

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