

11th May 2021

Please

“The art of pleasing consists in being pleased.”

William Hazlitt, The Round Table (1817)

Writing about “thank you” yesterday brought to mind a well-rehearsed story. A little child, being taught to be mannerly, is offered a treat, grabs it and says nothing. Not happy at this behaviour, the mother remonstrates with the child: “I’ve told you over and over again that manners matter. Politeness is the sign of a well-brought-up child. So, when I give you a treat, what do you say in return?” The child doesn’t respond but looks suitably ashamed. “Come on,” says the mother, “I’ve told you about this before. What’s the magic word?” At which point the child breaks into a beaming smile and says, “Abracadabra!”

And, yes, something similar *has* happened to me when I’ve been trying to teach my children manners. The magic words? “Thank you” (though, technically, that’s two words and should never be written as one ... but we’ll leave that there for now) and “please”. Please and thank you, thank you and please, marks of politeness in a mannerly society, and signs that little children are indeed brought up well.

I like William Hazlitt’s take on “the art of pleasing”. At his Round Table – or anywhere else, for that matter – pleasing, being pleased, saying please, are all mixed up together. One gives birth to the others. Good manners breed good manners. Say “please” and you give pleasure – and you’re likely to be pleased by what you get in return.

The 17th century English poet, writer and dramatist, John Dryden, wrote in *Absalom and Achitophel*:

*Whate’er he did was done with so much ease,
In him alone, ‘twas natural to please.*

Would that it was in us all to be “natural to please”. Maybe using “please” as a magic word more than we do is a good place to start.

A prayer for today

Please love me, Lord. “I do that already.”

Please forgive me, Lord. “I do that already.”

Please help me to be grateful. “Ah. Now you’re onto something.

But that’s for you to get round to. So, get on with it – please!”

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