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THE
ART OF CONVERSATION,

GIVING

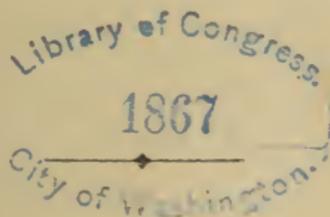
Hints, Suggestions and Rules

FOR

CULTIVATING AND PROMOTING PLEASANT
SOCIAL INTERCOURSE.

BY

ROGER BOSWELL.



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P R E F A C E .

CONVERSATION forms so large and so important a part of our lives, that some kind of guide or manual on the subject can scarcely fail to be useful.

Our greatest writers on common life, Bacon, Swift, Johnson, Chesterfield, Pope, Cowper, the British Essayists, and more modern authorities, such as the Quarterly and other Reviews, have, by their remarks, and their many hints and suggestions, shewn their high appreciation of the value of conversation, their sense of the frequent errors committed in it, and of the necessity for some care and study to enable us to conduct it with taste, propriety and advantage. In this, as in every thing else we do, innumerable faults occur, from which much enjoyment and many opportunities of instruction and improvement are lost; while, very often, bad feeling is created. No apology seems necessary, therefore, for an endeavour to set forth, in a brief, yet systematic form, a few rules and suggestions, which, if attended to,

may, at least, point out what to avoid, and assist in rendering conversation pleasant and harmonious. In the absence, so far as the author knows, of any popular work specially devoted to the Art of Talk, he ventures to submit the following, which he hopes may prove of service not only to the young, who should cultivate the graces of conversation for purposes of their own advancement and the uses of society, but also to many of maturer years by whom the various matters suggested in this small volume are too frequently overlooked or disregarded.

R. B.

JUNE, 1867.

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THE ART OF CONVERSATION.

INTRODUCTORY.

It is unnecessary to expatiate on the uses, advantages, and pleasures of conversation. These are obvious, and are universally felt and admitted. Conversation renders lightsome and pleasant the intervals of rest from the fatigues and cares of business, that would otherwise hang heavy on our hands, and be rather a burden than a relief to us. We are comforted and gladdened by the kindly glance, the winning smile, the friendly tone, the joyous laugh, the sympathy and encouragement of our fellow-creatures. Accounts of mutual friends in whom we are interested, the news of the day, anecdote, narrative, curious traits of character, sallies of wit, humour, or sprightliness, jest and repartee, with occasional useful information acquired, and discussion of a solid and improving character, supply a mental cordial that "cheers but not inebriates," and makes the time fly quickly and agreeably.

To numbers conversation is, in truth, a most valuable medicine, preventing the mind from preying on itself, and distracting the thoughts from unnecessary brooding over cares, troubles and anxieties. By the interchange of our several stores of knowledge, varying according to our tastes and opportunities, we mutually instruct and are instructed. The friendly conflict of mind with mind

sharpens our faculties, expands our views, corrects our crude notions and prejudices, enlightens us, and excites thought by the new ideas, new aspects of things, and fresh material for mental action which are brought before us. All this is obtained without cost, without trouble. Conversation is truly the balm of life. Like mercy, it is twice blessed—it blesses him who gives and him who receives, and is one of the most beneficent products of civilisation. Every one's experience must have taught him that pleasant intercourse with others in conversation is one of the greatest and best of the enjoyments within the reach of civilised man.

Yet how often does it happen that conversational intercourse is anything but pleasant; that it does not amuse, interest, instruct, or gratify us, but fatigues or displeases us; that we come from it wearied, disappointed, irritated, out of humour with ourselves or others, often with both! Upwards of a hundred years ago one of the British essayists declared roundly that the conversation of most men is disagreeable, while another complains that the company of half mankind is rather tedious than amusing. Dean Swift speaks of his "indignation to reflect that so useful and so innocent a pleasure, so fitted for every period and condition of life, and so much in all men's power, should be so much neglected and abused." A Quarterly Reviewer remarks—"We feel intensely the social misery which a single Bore, with a powerful memory and a fluent tongue, can inflict on a large and respectable private circle." Every one has had ample experience of social intercourse, from which he had anticipated much enjoyment, yielding only disappointment or disgust—of conversations which he expected to be cheerful, harmonious and agreeable, proving unpleasant, discordant and jarring. Nay, further, at times we fall in with people whose chief aim in conversation appears to be to render themselves disagreeable and the company uncomfortable.

We might suppose that when a number of persons, having escaped for a time from the cares, troubles, and irritations of business, meet together for relaxation, and to enjoy each other's society, we should have a sort of social Paradise, each doing his best to please and entertain the others. But we know that not unfrequently, though under the mask of a formal politeness, a social meeting turns out a kind of Pandemonium, where "envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness" are engendered and exhibited—where intolerable pride, arrogance, spite, conceit, scandal, bearishness, loquacity, pugnacity, silliness, selfishness, egotism, and crotchetyness, meet to have a "field day." At other times, an intolerable dullness pervades the conversation; people will neither speak themselves nor show the interest and attention necessary to encourage others; each ventures only on vague, empty generalities, coldly received by the rest; the company seem at once jealous and afraid of each other, and, instead of an enjoyment, the social meeting becomes an oppression, and we breathe freely and rejoice when it comes to an end. Or, we are fatigued by some dull, heavy proser, who will talk; or by some voluble chatterbox, who cannot be quiet a moment; or annoyed by some snappishness, or bearishness, that creates an unpleasant feeling. The number of rude, disagreeable, inconsiderate things said in conversation is, indeed, extraordinary; and that not only by the young and inexperienced, but by persons of maturer years, who have had the best opportunities for being "well-bred."

Pride and selfishness—two leading elements in human nature—play a prominent part in conversation, leading to many foolish and unamiable exhibitions of ourselves, and to disregard of the feelings, tastes, wishes and rights of others. The prime object of many in conversation is to elevate themselves and exhibit their superiority over others—to show their cleverness, wisdom, information, high position, influence, wealth, grandeur, and great

general importance. But this is not all: some are positively mischievous and malignant, take deliberate pleasure in annoying and mortifying others, and are especially gratified when they can let any one see that they look down upon him—that they consider him beneath them. Others, without being malicious, are pugnacious, and, having no other field of action in these peaceful times, go into company to work off their pugnacity. Numbers talk too much, having such an itch for speaking that they will rather say any silly thing than be silent and let others speak; while there are a few who can with difficulty be got to talk at all. In conversation, as in life, there is much tyranny, the strong and unscrupulous invariably overpowering the weak and retiring; hence the necessity for something like a code of well-understood rules to protect the weak from such oppression, just as laws are required in national and social communities for a similar purpose.

THE NECESSITY FOR STUDYING THE ART.

INDEPENDENTLY of the desirableness of rendering conversation—from which we anticipate, and should derive, so much of our happiness—as pleasant, instructive, and useful as possible, there is another consideration which should lead all, especially the young, to study carefully the exercise of the art—this is, the effect our behaviour in conversation may have on our interests: no doubt, a view of the subject connected with an inferior class of motives, but still too important to be altogether passed over.

The influence on our welfare of what passes in conversation, even in the most easy and careless discourse, is much underrated, often never thought of at all. Yet what we say, and how we say it, are really matters of the utmost importance, especially to young persons who have to make their way in the world. In mingling in conversation in society we come under the observation of numbers whose influence on our future condition may be great. We not only desire to enjoy ourselves for the present, but if we have common sense, we should wish to impress with a favourable opinion of us those we meet. They may contribute to our present or future enjoyment, or be of advantage to us in some way, or it may be, they may do us an ill turn, if they are so inclined. As Christians and as gentlemen, we should be courteous and conciliatory to all; and the same line of conduct is urged by considerations of a more selfish and worldly character, which, without laying too much stress upon them, should not be altogether neglected. One under the influence of the higher class of motives will act rightly, without reference to motives of an inferior class; the latter alone operate upon certain natures, and should be brought under their notice.

A tree is judged by its fruit. What we say, and how

we say it, are the conjoint product of our information, intellect and disposition, and people judge of us on these vital points from the words to which we give utterance, and the manner in which we utter them.

It may seem unnecessary to dwell upon the importance of acquiring the love and good opinion of those we meet. But though we may be quite sensible of this, admit it fully when put to us, and even act upon it generally, all are apt to forget it at times, and, it may be, thoughtlessly and without intending it, to offend and excite ill-will. Without referring to the case of any who deliberately design to wound and inflict pain (for there are some who take a pleasure in this), we yet do so unintentionally from a variety of causes. We desire to talk, to show off, to be foremost; we push others aside in a cavalier way, or interrupt or contradict them brusquely. In the hurry and excitement of conversation, we are often tempted to say sharp things that we think clever, to exhibit our superior wisdom or information, in a harsh peremptory manner. We are apt to express ourselves impatiently when opposed, to show contempt for notions that we consider weak or foolish, to put people down in an imperious, dogmatic style, to pooh-pooh in a scoffing way opinions that differ from our own. Many a one has made an enemy by a careless word or look, exhibiting contemptuous indifference or disrespect; not that any one is to be at all justified in so lightly taking up a violent prejudice against another for a rash, hasty word; but the undoubted fact is that people do so, and we must take mankind as they are, not as they ought to be.

By a fine instinct, in which few are deficient, we are on our guard in our behaviour towards clever, rich, or influential persons, and treat them with much courtesy, deference and respect: that is, persons whom it is an honour to reckon among our friends, who may promote our interests, who give good dinners, or invitations to pleasant country seats, or even the Bear and the Bully,

whom we desire to propitiate, whose hostility we deprecate.

On the other hand, we are very apt to neglect or slight those whom we consider to be without talents, wealth or influence—in short, nobodies. This is the greatest mistake. In the first place it is selfish, ungracious, unkind, unchristian. These unfortunate nobodies, though deficient in the qualities that usually attract—wealth, station, talents, good looks—have feelings, and deserve our kind consideration, all the more in being unable of themselves to excite admiration or interest. They are often sufficiently conscious of their insignificance, inferiority, and general disadvantages, and it is cruel and ungenerous to add to their mortification by slights that might be spared. A truly Christian and unselfish spirit would lead us at times to be at a little trouble to notice and entertain such nobodies, instead of shrinking from them, grudging every moment we are obliged to spend with them, and ever greedily running after those who entertain us, or do us honour by their notice, or reward us—that is, who pay us in some way for the attention we give them. There is a mercenary spirit in this. It is often sickening in society to see the general rush after the “somebody,” and the general rush from the “nobody,” all so keen to get, and so unwilling to give, unless sure of a return. In social intercourse, as in trade, we are anxious for a good per-centage on what we lay out. This is human nature, but rather an unamiable part of our humanity, that a generous spirit would endeavour to keep in check.

Besides being a wrong it is a blunder, a short-sighted selfishness. We can never be certain that a present nobody is always to remain so. Remember the fable of the “Lion and the Mouse.” The most insignificant person in the world may have it in his power to aid us or to injure us—may, in the odd turns of life, be able to be of great service to us; this he can hardly be expected to do, if we have slighted him, or in any marked way neglected him.

However ungenerous or like savages it may be, nothing is more certain than that the great majority of people take revenge, when they can get an opportunity, even after a long lapse of years from the giving of the offence. Revenge, says Bryon, is sweet, especially to women. He might have added, had it suited his rhyme, that the sons of women are somewhat given to the enjoyment of this luxury. A prudent person will view every one he meets as a possible friend or possible foe, and so far as he can without any degrading cringing, will endeavour to secure him as the former, to avoid doing or saying anything that may turn him into the latter. Of course, much better motives can be suggested for being kind, courteous, affable to all whom we meet, even to dull, insignificant persons, than a prudential regard for our own interests. There are numbers to whom it is useful to keep both kinds of motives in view.*

These considerations, which are, in reality, a sort of A, B, C of social intercourse, are yet repeatedly neglected or forgotten, especially by the young and inexperienced, in their ignorance of the world, and too great confidence in their own strength—two rocks ahead, against which the young should ever be on their guard.

HINTS FOR TALKERS.

We shall now proceed to give a few hints or rules for the guidance of talkers, each as shortly expressed as possible, attention to which is strongly recommended to all young persons, as well as to some of maturer years, if it were possible to persuade such that they have anything to reform. No doubt, many will soon find out such rules for

* This was forcibly insisted on by that acute and experienced man of the world, Lord Chesterfield. He says, "Letters to his Son"—"There are no persons so insignificant and inconsiderable, but may, some time or other, have it in their power to be of use to you, which they will certainly not, if you have once shown them contempt. Wrongs are often forgiven, but contempt never is; our pride remembers it for ever."

themselves ; but some do not so readily appreciate such matters, and all are the better for having their attention directed to special study of the subject of conversation, and of having their memories refreshed—there are so many temptations to forgetfulness and breach of the laws requisite to be observed for pleasant social intercourse.

1. *Previous Preparation is necessary for Conversation.*

Do not imagine that, without ever thinking, or taking any trouble about it, you can have grown up a proficient in the art of conversation. Some, doubtless, have wonderful tact and talent, by which, almost instinctively, they say whatever is pleasantest, cleverest, “wisest, discreetest, best.” This is a rare and precious gift, possessed by very few indeed. Do not suppose yourself one of the highly favoured few. It will be safer (if you can muster up humility enough) to consider yourself one of the great majority, ignorant, impulsive and blundering ; apt, on the spur of the moment, to make mistakes, and say what had better been left unsaid ; and, therefore, needing to qualify by previous preparation for bearing your part well. The preparation necessary is—

1. Careful observation of, and reflection on, the conversation of yourself and others.

2. The study of that which has been written on the subject.

3. Storing up suitable knowledge.

Conversation, indeed, is an art, like playing, singing, or drawing. A few, with extraordinary endowments, excel naturally ; while the great majority, less favoured by nature, require much and careful cultivation to render themselves proficient. Even the most highly-gifted may improve themselves greatly in conversation by some study of its principles and rules.

We are apt to think too lightly of the subject of conversation, to neglect thinking about it at all, to suppose that it requires no thought or preparation, that every one

is provided by Nature with sufficient conversational gifts, and will easily find out any rules necessary for his guidance. While we devote the greatest time and care to considering what we shall eat and drink, and how we shall dress, we spend no thought whatever on the mental dress in which we are to appear, but rush into society utterly unprepared, excepting in so far as Nature may have been kind to us in this respect. Because speech comes to us without any effort or trouble that we are conscious of, we tacitly assume that the right use of speech comes to us in the same easy way, and take for granted that we grow up spontaneously, perfectly fitted to play our part properly in conversation.

But we must be convinced that this is a serious mistake when we notice the errors in conversation into which so many persons fall, who, from education and the sphere in which they move, should be what is called "well-bred." Some of these faults, doubtless, can with difficulty be avoided, arising from an excessive development of pride, self-conceit, selfishness, and an energetic self-will. But in the most numerous cases they arise from mere haste and thoughtlessness, or from the above qualities in a less incurable state, and could easily have been avoided had the art of conversation been made the subject of reflection and preparation. Where we must answer on the moment, and perform at once the double operation of speaking and framing the thoughts to follow next, it is evident that as much previous preparation as possible must be advantageous in the exercise of such an art. Indeed, if we think on the extreme complexity of the moral and intellectual machinery that produces what we say; on the imperfections and irregularities to which everything human is liable; and on the difficult, compound, and irritable nature of the material on which we operate—the minds and feelings of others—we must be satisfied that our conversational powers, like every other power we possess, may be very greatly improved by some study of

the nature of conversation, and some preparation to qualify ourselves for its exercise. A well and variously-stored mind, with observation and reflection on the various forms and styles of conversation we witness in society, will assuredly render us more able to perform our part in discourse with ease, propriety, and effect.

One of the old British essayists remarks, in the *Guardian*, that "it may be no ill policy sometimes to prepare yourself in a particular manner for conversation." The *Tatler* observes, "The hours which we spend in conversation are the most pleasing of any we enjoy; yet methinks there is very little care taken to improve ourselves for the frequent repetition of them." And Dean Swift says, "Nature has left every man a capacity of being agreeable, though not of shining in company; and there are a hundred men sufficiently qualified for both, who, by a very few faults that they might correct in half an hour, are not so much as tolerable."

The following extracts, which are taken from excellent articles in the *Quarterly Review*, are also well worthy of notice:—"Good conversation flows from a happy union of all the powers. To approximate to this, a certain amount of painstaking is necessary; and, though artifice is detestable, we must submit that talk may be as legitimately made a subject of care and thought, as any other part of a man's humanity, and that it is ridiculous to send your mind abroad in a state of slovenliness, while you bestow on your body the most refined care." (Vol. XCVIII.) "There is a certain faculty in which all nations of any refinement are great practitioners. It is not taught at school or college as a distinct science, though it deserves that what is taught there should be made to have some reference to it; nor is it endowed at all by the public, everybody being obliged to exercise it for himself in person, which he does to the best of his skill. But in nothing is there a greater difference than in the manner of doing it. The advocates of professional learning will

smile when we tell them that this same faculty which we would have encouraged, is simply that of speaking good sense in English, without fee or reward, in common conversation. They will smile when we lay some stress upon it; but, in reality, it is no such trifle as they imagine." (Vol. VI.)

It may be objected by some of our readers that we enter society for relaxation, and to be at our ease, not to be studying everything we say, and standing perpetually on our guard; that we want to be easy and natural, etc. With many, to be natural is to be very disagreeable; and it is a useful check on such persons to have their attention turned to the study of the subject of conversation, and their offensive ways brought under their notice, and held up to reprobation,—to know that conversation is made a subject of study, and that their conduct will be marked. With others, to be natural is to be awkward, embarrassed mutes, when, by some little care and preparation, they might qualify themselves to take a part in conversation at times, and so enjoy themselves more in company, and also contribute to the general entertainment. The Jabberer, the Proser, and the Punster, are very natural—too natural—and it is the general wish that they would study the art of conversation, and be a little less natural. The fortunate person who is gifted by Nature with conversational tact and talent, is at once agreeable, easy, and natural; that is his peculiar privilege.

2. *Prepare for Conversation by laying in a stock of Caution, Self-Control, Patience, Forbearance, Good Humour, Kindly Feeling, and, if possible, a little Modesty.*

Every one knows that it will not do to blurt out whatever rushes into the mind. A thousand things occur to us which should not be said. The fast speaker, the hasty, impulsive rattler, who forgets that caution and self-control are necessary, flings them out recklessly, in the conceit that whatever comes into his head is right. If a man were to walk down Regent Street, and say out aloud everything

that occurs to him as to the passers-by, he would be knocked down before he had gone far. We are all aware that *others*, at least, speak hastily, and often say what they should not say; and hence we may reasonably suspect ourselves of, at least, some tendency of the same kind. We must, unless we consider ourselves as perfect models, admit the possibility of our incautiously dropping something that may either make ourselves ridiculous, or give offence to others. It is best to make up our minds that we are short-sighted, fallible mortals, and that in conversation, as in everything else we engage in, caution, circumspection, and self-control are necessary. Indeed, they are the more essential in conversation, because we get little or no time to consider; we must reply immediately, and think while we are spoken to. This rapidity of action renders caution at once especially necessary and especially difficult. Hence, it is of great advantage to pause and consider before one speaks, if possible, and *to get into a habit of speaking with slowness and deliberation*. This gives time for consideration, a little of which would prevent many a rash and foolish saying. Caution and reserve seldom do any harm; haste and forwardness are full of danger. Besides, with a slow, deliberate mode of utterance, our words make a greater impression. Most great orators speak in a calm, slow, impressive style; and this is particularly recommended by Lord Bacon. He says:—"In all kinds of speech, either pleasant, grave, severe, or ordinary, it is convenient to speak leisurely, and rather drawlingly than hastily; because hasty speech confounds the memory, and oftentimes (besides unseemliness) drives a man either to a nonplus or unseemly stammering, hanging upon that which should follow; whereas a slow speech confirmeth the memory, addeth a conceit of wisdom to the hearers, besides a seemliness of speech and countenance."

Good humour and kindly feeling are the sunshine of conversation, as they are of life. They give birth to that

friendly token and assurance of welcome, the genial smile, the sunshine of the countenance, which makes people feel that you are pleased with them and desire to please them, and the want of which is so cold, stiff, and freezing. They prompt the wish to oblige, which leads us to pay attention to what is said to us, to take an interest in it, to put a favourable construction upon it; to treat all, even the humblest we meet, with courtesy, consideration, and respect. Good humour and kindly feeling, in short, lead to *a pleasure in promoting the happiness of those you meet*, which manifests itself in a thousand agreeable ways, and which, combined with *observation* and a little *good sense*, forms the foundation of true politeness, the grand desideratum for agreeable social intercourse.

There are persons, unfortunately, deficient in kindness and good nature; who mar pleasant conversation, and render themselves very disagreeable and others uncomfortable. We can hardly expect them to assume these virtues; that is rather difficult; but it is well that such persons should know the general estimation in which these qualities are held, and how much the opposite qualities are disliked, as some check upon their manifestation of the latter. In others, not deficient in these amiable and agreeable qualities, their action is suppressed or checked by pride or vanity, two great disturbers of social harmony.

Next to good humour and kindness, perhaps modesty—humility—is one of the most valuable qualities for conversation. Humility is one of the rarest of the virtues. If at any time there ever was much of it, it seems to be nearly banished in the present age of liberty, equality, and universal enlightenment. Were this virtue more cultivated, how many foolish and mischievous pretences would be prevented!—airs of superiority to others, keeping those asunder who might otherwise enjoy each other's society; assumptions of importance, or learning, and a thousand other shams, that only excite ridicule. Above all, a proper humility would check that over-confidence in our own

opinions that impedes our enlightenment and makes us hug our errors and prejudices, and would restrain that style of rude, dogmatic assertion, contempt for the opinions of others, and cavalier behaviour towards them, that excite angry feelings and ill-will, and embitter social intercourse.

3. *Do as you would be done by.*

Do you like to talk? So do others. Do you like to shine and show off, and display your cleverness or information? So do others. Do you like people to listen and attend to you; to take some interest in what you say; to agree or sympathise with you? So do others. Do you dislike to be out-talked, not attended to, interrupted, contradicted, confuted, put down, extinguished, ridiculed, quizzed? So do others.

This, the grand rule of life, is also the true guide to proper conduct in conversation. It is often neglected by the thoughtless, and sometimes even by the more considerate, in the excitement of talking, from their eagerness to prove a point, say a clever thing, or improve a triumph. The golden rule is more frequently broken by the selfish and overbearing, who take advantage of their strong voices and strong wills to tyrannise over others. These cannot be expected to pay respect to this great rule; but it is the clear interest of the majority to procure a general observance of its indications, which are sufficiently obvious, and to aid as much as they can in discouraging those who would violate a rule so manifestly for the general good.

4. *Remember the proper Objects of Conversation.*

These are, to make the time pass agreeably, for others as well as for ourselves.

To make people like us and think well of us.

And, when suitable opportunities occur, to instruct and improve ourselves and others.

The proper objects of conversation are *not* to turn it to our own selfish purposes, to make it merely a means of

displaying our cleverness, learning, greatness, or of satisfying our vanity, bad temper, spite, and captiousness. The great faults of conversation arise from selfishness, and indifference to the likings and dislikings of the rest of the company, each pursuing his own game without any attention to that of others. But, as conversation is entered into for the mutual advantage of all the company, there is a tacit obligation on each to respect the rights, wishes and feelings of the others; and it is a breach of good faith in any one to turn it all to his own advantage, and ignore the objects for which others entered into the temporary social partnership with him.

5. *Gather Material for Conversation.*

To be wise, witty, humourous; to indulge in lively sallies of fancy, to give forth pointed and pungent sayings, to make good jokes, even to describe in a pleasant and entertaining manner the sayings and doings of others (that very general basis of conversation) are gifts of only a few; and even these must have some other conversational stock else they will be soon exhausted.

Prepare, then, for conversation by storing the mind with interesting matter on subjects calculated for general discourse. Amongst the principal of these are, History, not forgetting the history going on at the present time Biography, particularly of living and recent celebrities Anecdotes and curious traits of human nature; Remarkable Crimes and Trials; Adventures; Voyages and Travels Manners and Customs of different Nations; Antiquities Geography; Curious Facts in Physical Science; Natural History; Commerce and Manufactures; Inventions Statistics; and, above all, a knowledge of the Lives Works, Opinions, and Sayings of the Great Men of all ages. One who is well informed on a few of the preceding will, with the ordinary chit-chat, be able to contribute a respectable share in general discourse.

Do not attempt too much; each will have one or two

favourite subjects: full information on these, with scraps from the others, will furnish him sufficiently. But, for conversation, let your knowledge be *minute* and *accurate*. Loose, half-learned notions are of little use for any purpose; in society they only bring you into trouble, and render you, sorely against your will, an easy prey to the Bear or the Differential.

Many conversational powers, including the highest, come by nature, and cannot be acquired. It is only a few who are able to be lively, witty, eloquent, or brilliant, to indulge, within proper limits, in good-humoured, playful badinage, to interest by their singular power of description, or to amuse by light, agreeable nothings. Few and far between are those on whom has been bestowed the wonderful power of turning to gold all they say (including a good deal of common-place) by a fascination, partly of style, partly of a magic power of eye and voice, in virtue of which they keep their hearers enthralled in a sort of mesmeric trance, to whom all willingly give ear, and think it natural and right that they should reign supreme in discourse. These are gifts of nature, not to be purchased by any amount of study or force of art.

But, even those so highly favoured by nature in conversational power cannot always "live upon their wits." For ordinary uses they must be supplied with some common material for conversation, and the great majority who are not endowed with these natural talents, but are not content to be listeners only, must live entirely upon this common material. What shall it be?

Samuel Johnson, in the *Rambler*, about the middle of the last century, remarks—"He who has stored his memory with slight anecdotes, private incidents, and personal peculiarities, seldom fails to find a favourable audience."

This is very like what we call "Gossip," or what may be termed by a more dignified expression, "Personal News." Gossip about the sayings and doings of others will always hold its place as a prime element in conversa-

tion. In old times there was little else for people to talk about. We find this from the memoirs, letters, etc., of the early part and middle of the last century, and had we not known it from this source, might have inferred so from the limited area of knowledge then accessible, the paucity of events of interest then going on, the comparative rarity of travelling, books and journals, and the general slowness of the age. We have a specimen of the entertaining discourse of the times in Swift's lively sketch of Fashionable Conversation, and may gather some idea of it from Pope's lines—

“In various talk the instructive hours they passed:
Who gave the ball, or paid the visit last;
One speaks the glory of the British Queen,
And one describes a charming Indian screen;
A third interprets motions, looks, and eyes,
At every word a reputation dies.
Snuff, or the fan, supply each pause of chat,
With singing, laughing, ogling, *and all that.*”

But conversation in the last century (and at times even now) was often a very dull affair indeed. Oppressive, awkward pauses, arising from an unlucky gathering of “sullen spirits and barren brains” were frequent. The art of arranging parties was not understood. Large parties, where people do not settle long in one place, but can rise and move about, and where the guests break up into ever changing coteries, were less common. In such meetings, people who like and understand each other can get together; those who have exhausted each other can move off and find new hearers for old stories, thus making a small amount of wit or information do wonderful service; while the small divisions greatly promote freedom and ease, and remove that restraint and stiffness which prevail in a large circle, where one hears nothing but the sound of one's own voice, and has to address a dozen or more silent, solemn, awe-inspiring critics. The stiff, heavy entertainments, where one was chained down to the same

place and the same neighbours the whole evening, were more common in the last century, though, sad to say, they still linger in country places; and those who gave such entertainments (surely so called ironically) sometimes took not the slightest pains, by providing music, pictures, cards, or by bringing suitable people together, to arrange a pleasant evening for the guests, to many of whom it was a perfect penance. Cowper has described such a party in a once-celebrated passage, which should not be allowed to be forgotten—

“The circle formed, we sit in silent state,
 Like figures drawn upon a dial-plate;
 ‘Yes, ma’am!’ and ‘No, ma’am!’ uttered softly, show
 Every five minutes how the minutes go;
 Each individual suffering a constraint
 Poetry may, but colours cannot paint;
 As if in close committee on the sky,
 Reports it hot or cold, or wet or dry;
 And finds a changing clime a happy source
 Of wise reflection and well-timed discourse.
 We next inquire, but softly and by stealth,
 Like conservators of the public health,
 Of epidemic throats, if such there are,
 And coughs and rheums, and phthisic and catarrh.
 That theme exhausted, a wide chasm ensues,
 Filled up at last with interesting news:
 Who danced with whom, and who are like to wed,
 And who is hanged, and who is brought to bed.
 But fear to call a more important cause,
 As if ’twere treason ’gainst the English laws.
 The visit paid, with ecstasy we come,
 As from a seven years’ transportation, home,
 And there resume an unembarrassed brow,
 Recovering what we lost we know not how:
 The faculties, that seemed reduced to nought,
 Expression, and the privilege of thought.”

These were poor times when people had so little to converse about beyond the weather, or the affairs of their neighbours—limited subjects, and the most lively of them so apt to degenerate into scandal; when social meetings

were rendered entertaining by coarseness or practical jokes ; when men, to kill time, had recourse to hard drinking, tiresome sentimental toasts, or boisterous buffoonery for hours together. We are more fortunately placed now. There has been a great advance since the time of Samuel Johnson, and in few things has there been greater improvement than in the material and style of conversation. Vast stores of interesting knowledge have been opened up to us that were sealed books to our forefathers. Innumerable curious things are daily going on around us that yield fertile sources for observation and discussion. The more extended information, superior education, increased intelligence, and softened manners of modern times have given a rich, solid, varied, refined character to conversation that could not exist formerly. All creation, whether we take the universe of nature, or that other world of art that man has created, is open to our view, and teems with delightful subjects of discourse ; and the general diffusion of education, and of books and journals, places this knowledge within the reach of all. All have risen in the intellectual scale, and multiplied their points of contact with the wonderful world around them. Among those numerous fields of knowledge, some may be found suited for each class of mind. All this enables a far greater number to take part in conversation, to which it also imparts a more elevated character. The familiar chat of two "lean, unwashed artificers" is learned and polished compared with that of the great middle class of old ; the easy talk of two boys resting from play has a solidity and interest in it beyond what the majority of the squires of the last century could obtain. In such favourable circumstances conversation should frequently be solid and instructive, as well as entertaining, and there are few who may not, by a little pains, qualify themselves occasionally to join with others in discourse in a pleasant and creditable manner.

There can be little doubt that the most interesting kind

of conversation to the mass of mankind is that about the characters, affairs, adventures, absurdities, drolleries, fortunes and misfortunes of their friends, acquaintances and neighbours. Some have a talent for that, and contrive to make it very entertaining. It is apt to degenerate into scandal, and is hardly suited for a mixed company. But all about human passion, feeling, trials, has a special fascination for us; the natural history of people is extremely interesting, and next to that of people we know, or know about, is that of notables of the present or recent times. This is always a popular subject of conversation, and any one who has stored his mind with accurate information as to the biography, family history, writings, sayings and doings of the men of mark of his own day or the previous age—the nearer our own times the more interesting—will generally be able to make himself acceptable in company, and find a willing audience. Besides, for one's own private reading, there is nothing more agreeable and instructive than the lives of eminent persons. It was said of a late nobleman, who was described as a remarkably agreeable man in conversation, that one leading accomplishment which enabled him to be so, was his "perfect acquaintance with the histories of the most distinguished persons of his own age, and that which preceded it."

This will, perhaps, be called "Gossip about Great Folks." It may be so, but it is certainly what every one likes, and is undoubtedly more dignified than that great staple of conversation—gossip about nobodies. It must always be more or less mixed up with public transactions, great questions, the works, thoughts, trials, difficulties of eminent men, entertaining anecdotes, discussions of their character, conduct, writings and sayings, which make at once an agreeable and instructive *melange*. It is a vast field, the cultivation of which is both interesting and improving, whether for our own study, or for use in discourse with our friends.

As man individually is always an attractive subject, so man in communities is likewise interesting. Accordingly, history—a vast field, both instructive and entertaining—the manners and customs, laws and institutions, languages, dialects, race, characters, &c., of different peoples, form delightful topics for general discourse; and he who has his mind well stored with such knowledge will seldom fail in resources for entertaining his friends, and maintaining his ground in conversation.

The novelties of the day, in literature, science, the fine arts, inventions, &c., are favourite topics of discourse, and those who are provided with accurate and minute information on the more notable and interesting of these, will seldom be at a loss for materials for conversation. This, too, is an instructive, improving, elevating kind of knowledge; and he who pays some systematic attention to such subjects, carefully eschewing mere smatterings, benefits himself by the study, as well as by the resources for conversation provided, while he also benefits such of his friends as have sense enough to enjoy occasionally a little rational discourse.

It is quite unnecessary to pursue this subject further. Of course, every branch of knowledge may, at times, be an appropriate topic of conversation. The preceding have the advantages that they are eminently attractive, and such as every one is supposed to know something of, so that they may be entered on without pedantry, or parade of learning.

Those who are not endowed with ready and retentive memories will do well to keep a scrap-book, or commonplace book, in which they should enter all sorts of "Materials for Talk," facts and figures, anecdotes, quotations, &c. Frequently the "title" of the article will be sufficient to recall the whole to memory. Such a book will, ere long, become very entertaining and instructive. It should be frequently referred to, and care should be taken to go on adding, that the mind may not stagnate, fall behind

the times, and weary other minds with only the old stories or old ideas over again.

Try to elevate the conversation occasionally, so as to bring out some useful information or profitable discussion when you find yourself supported by a few reasonable people. Generally, people prefer light, lively, amusing conversation, humour, jest, entertaining anecdote, gossip. Now and then an opportunity occurs for something higher. Turn it to account, when you can without boring people, or trying to force the company quite against the grain. So much good may be derived, at times, from a rational conversation, that, when circumstances are suitable, you should try to lead people's discourse into something higher than the ordinary small-talk.

6. *Do not monopolise the Conversation, nor talk long at a Time.*

“A civil guest

Will no more talk all than eat all the feast.”

Remember, as a general rule, with exceedingly few exceptions, that people like to talk, and enjoy no music so much as the sound of their own voices. Any one who takes all the talk to himself, and prevents others getting in a word, is sure to make himself disliked. He is looked upon as unfairly depriving others of their expected share of the entertainment. Perhaps he thinks that because he enjoys hearing himself, others equally like to hear him, quite forgetting that the right inference is that others must like to *hear themselves*, not him. Do not suppose that all is right because you succeed in silencing others and getting a monopoly of the conversation. Numbers of modest, unobtrusive persons, who are able to converse pleasantly and well in a quiet, easy style, give way to loud, rapid, boisterous talkers, who haste always to snatch the first word, but hate them all the while. Speak freely and often, when you feel sure that your doing so is acceptable to the company, but never long at a time; never without allowing and encouraging others to take their turn, and

frequently pausing to give them opportunities. Say what you have to say briefly and concisely, avoiding especially tediousness and prolixity, or a multitude of words. This leaves time for others to speak, and lessens the chance of your being set down as a Jabberer or Proser.

Generally, unless particularly requested, avoid reading to the company. This effectually stops every mouth except your own, which is very offensive and should be done but seldom. Only very short passages with some really good point should be inflicted on a company in this monopolising way.

This is an old complaint. Dean Swift remarks:—
“Nothing is more generally exploded than the folly of talking too much, yet I rarely remember to have seen five people together where some one amongst them has not been predominant in that kind, to the great constraint and disgust of all the rest.”

Most persons imagine, or behave as if they imagined, that in conversation all they have to do is to please and amuse themselves. They like to talk, and to see people interested in what they say; but can dispense with the latter so long as they are allowed to talk, and coolly go on as if the rest of the company had assembled merely to form an admiring audience before which they may exhibit. They quite forget that others most likely have the same wish to talk, and to have the pleasure of seeing that they interest their hearers. A moment's reflection must convince us that this is a narrow and selfish view of the purpose of meeting socially. The least sense of fairness will show that there must be reciprocal benefits, that we must give as well as take, that we are bound to do something to please those with whom we converse, as well as to please ourselves, and that for this end we must remember that they have tastes, wishes, likes, and dislikes which we must consult as well as our own.

Now there is nothing more certain than that a very great number of people like to talk, and that, in most

companies, any one who monopolises the discourse is taking an unfair advantage of his strength of voice, or strength of will, or of the good-humoured forbearance of others, to deprive them of part of the pleasure they expected and had a right to ; and he who does so, though he may succeed in silencing others, will surely be looked upon by them as selfish and obtrusive, and acquire their ill-will.

There may be occasions when you are beside persons who have no talent for conversation, or who perceive that the company prefer to hear you, and, having the good sense to refrain from obtruding themselves, give way to you. On such occasions, of course, talk freely. You are gratifying others, and offending no one. Your conversational powers are of material service in relieving the company from positive dulness, or awkward pauses. They will feel obliged to you, as they ought, and if you carry yourself in a modest, becoming manner, you will have the satisfaction of pleasing every one, including that important person, yourself.

Even when you are beside persons deficient in conversational power, and know that the company would prefer to hear you, do not take advantage of your position. Pause occasionally and give opportunities for others to take up the ball of discourse. Though they may defer to your acknowledged superiority, there are generally a few who will like to show that they can put in a word now and then, and are apt to be mortified at playing the part of entire dummies.

All this is pretty obvious when one thinks upon it, but so very frequently neglected and forgotten, that it can hardly be too much insisted upon, that overtalking by some to the exclusion of others disturbs that social equality which should be carried out as far as possible, and is the great bane of conversation. To impress this still further, it may be well to refer to a few high authorities, to show how important they considered attention to this point.

Lord Bacon says:—"Let him be sure to leave other men their turns to speak; nay, if there be any that would reign and take up all the time, let him find means to take them off." The *Tatler* remarks:—"Every man in the company has a right to speak as well as themselves.* They are invading another man's property when they engross to their own private use the time that should be divided equally among the company." And Lord Chesterfield tells his son:—"Talk often, but never long; in that case, if you do not please, at least you are sure not to tire your hearers. Pay your own reckoning, but do not treat the company, that being one of the very few cases in which people do not care to be treated, every one being fully convinced that he has wherewithal to pay."

7. *Do not speak on every Subject started, or, at least, be not first to seize on every new Topic.*

It is not necessary or becoming to thrust in one's word on every subject that turns up. It looks presumptuous, forward, and very conceited to be officiously pushing ourselves before others as universal oracles. It is well to be silent for a little now and then; or, at least, to wait a little, and not always haste to seize the first word. Doing so proclaims that we consider ourselves the most competent to speak on every subject, and that we believe that the company also thinks so, and would prefer to hear us first.

8. *Try to say something Interesting, and do not imagine that Everything that ever happened to you, Everything you have seen, heard, or done, is of Interest to Others.*

Many great talkers render themselves very great bores

* "Rights" are very troublesome matters. Expediency or desirableness is much more manageable. A Jabberer or Proser has not the same right to speak as a man of talent, information, and discretion; but it is desirable that even the Bore should speak a little, and undesirable that the man of talent should monopolise the talk entirely.

by pouring out a flood of discourse describing a thousand very small and uninteresting events which have come under their notice. They have no reticence, no discrimination, but must pour out everything. This is a great mistake. It is only part of what we see and hear that is worth telling, and, if we do not wish to be conversational nuisances, we must take the trouble to separate the grain from the chaff, the gold particles from the masses of quartz in which they are embedded. We must submit patiently to be listeners when we have no grain or gold ready.

9. *Try to take an Interest in what is said to you, or, at least, to appear to do so.*

It is a long time since Rochefoucauld remarked that the reason why so few persons are agreeable in conversation, is that each thinks more of what he intends to say than of what is said to him. To give a courteous and earnest attention to what is said to us, is a fundamental rule in conversation, and, if we neglect it, we shall fail to please, and be set down as stupid or rude, probably both. We expect this from others, and must give it in our turn. It really is rude to appear to take no interest in what people say to you, to coolly pass it by quite unheeded, and rush on to what interests yourself, *as so many do*. It is unfair and unhandsome to be ready to accept benefits from others, and unwilling to make any return; and this is the conduct of those who expect attention to be given to them, and some interest to be taken in what they say, but who will not reciprocate to others—a pretty numerous class. Even the Jabberer, the Proser, the Egotist is entitled to some share of your attention. Granted that they are bores. Bores have their rights and feelings as well as others. They do not, usually, know that they are bores; they do not mean to weary or offend. You cannot expect in conversation, more than in anything else in this world, to find all smooth and pleasant, and quite accord-

ing to your liking ; you must bear with people, and try to please them, even though it may be difficult. Besides, you are going to make use of the Bore ; you expect that he will attend to you, and be interested in what you say ; and he is entitled to his *quid pro quo*. You wish to turn him into one of your admiring audience ; then, conciliate him ; he has rights and feelings : respect them.

10. *Do not interrupt any one (unless in some extreme case); and when any one interrupts you, bear it with Patience and Good Humour.*

Every one dislikes being interrupted, and this never should be done unless for a necessary explanation or correction that could not be delayed till the speaker has finished. The cool audacity of some interruptions is really wonderful. The following is not uncommon:—A is speaking ; he is suddenly interrupted by B, who breaks in with—“Oh ! that reminds me,” etc.; and, having quite stopped A, he proceeds to tell something which could have done perfectly well when A had finished. Sometimes (not always) B is so gracious as to say when he concludes, “But, I beg pardon, I interrupted you.”

On the other hand, do not be annoyed at an interruption. It may be useful. Or it may mean, “I am tired of you, or of what you are talking about”—not very amiable, nor polite, certainly ; but then, you should be glad to be relieved of an unwilling listener. You do not wish to force yourself upon any one, and it is quite possible you may have been just sliding into “the Bore.”

11. *Never correct or contradict any one as to Trivial Matters, and do so as seldom as possible on any Point whatever.*

People dislike very much being shown to be in the wrong, and they always like to finish what they have to say without having the thread of their discourse snapped asunder. It is teasing, and must certainly be regarded

as conceited and rude, as well as unnecessary, to correct any one's statement—or contradict him—as to trivial matters of no importance to the point at issue. You know well that you yourself particularly dislike being contradicted—that it puts you out of tune, and that at the least you would wish to be allowed to get peaceably to the end of your remarks; when, in most cases, it is quite time enough to discuss any little mistake, if necessary to notice it at all.

12. *Seldom Argue.*

“Ye powers who rule the tongue, if such there are,
 And make colloquial happiness your care,
 Preserve me from the thing I dread and hate,
 A duel in the form of a debate.
 The clash of arguments, and war of words,
 Worse than the mortal brunt of rival swords,
 Decide no question with their tedious length,
 For opposition gives opinion strength,
 Divert the champions prodigal of breath,
 And put the peaceably disposed to death.”

Though arguments and discussions are at times suitable, pleasant, and profitable, in general they should be avoided, as having a tendency to lead to irritation, violent altercation, angry feeling, rudeness, and the exaltation of one party at the expense of another. They are unsuitable for mixed companies for another reason: they tend to confine the conversation to a few, and mortify the others, who are reduced to the position of passive listeners.

People, as well as popes, like to be considered infallible, and would rather not be shown to be in the wrong, as to either their facts or their reasonings. The search after truth is lovely in theory, but in practice people admire most the opinions they have already adopted; and we have formed opinions on all subjects, a state of ignorance or of philosophic suspense on any question being quite inadmissible! Accordingly, with opinions thus fixed, we all prefer those who think as we do, whom we consider as pleasant, sensible, and very intelligent persons; while we

generally regard those who differ from us as odd, wrong-headed, or stupid ; and if they confute us in argument, we set them down as rather disagreeable. People are so touchy and opinionative, that disputation is quite unsuitable for mixed companies, for which light, lively discourse, witty, playful, or simply descriptive and anecdotal, not exciting opposition, is best adapted.

On this subject it should be observed that some persons are so irritable and fiery, so ready to explode, so hot and rash in speech, and violent and even rude in manners, when they encounter any opposition, that one should never enter into argument with them at all if it possibly can be avoided.

There are few who cannot look back with pleasure on delightful conversations, consisting almost entirely of discussions or arguments, when we have been gratified at once by the ability and courtesy of our adversaries, by the fair opportunities we ourselves have had of stating our views and showing our parts, by the information we have acquired, and by the more thorough acquaintance with the pros and cons of the questions at issue we have obtained from the doubts, difficulties, and arguments of others. On certain occasions, and with suitable persons, argument is not only allowable, but desirable and profitable, and really is the kind of conversation best adapted for the circumstances. When discussion can be conducted temperately and courteously, when all, or most, can join a little, and the company do not become divided into two or three noisy disputants and a number of mutes, or when some one has original views that the others wish to hear and discuss, then, of course, arguing may be both agreeable and useful.

But such occasions and such persons are not often met with. More generally arguments tend to excite disagreeable altercations and wrangling, or to confine the conversation to a few, the majority being thrown out, which disappoints them, and should be avoided.

Not unnaturally we like those who think the same way as ourselves—living witnesses to the soundness of our views, and excellence of our judgments. On the other hand, being shown to be in the wrong mortifies us in itself, and places those who confute us in a position of superiority, which is unpleasant. Also, persons of an argumentative turn are rather apt to acquire a positive, dogmatic, somewhat disagreeable manner. Generally they are not popular. For the most part we prefer fun, and facts which are entertaining and easily understood, to opinions and arguments which require thought, do not amuse, and are often given out with a lecturing, confuting air of superiority.

In a conversation recorded in the life of Johnson, Boswell remarks, "May there not be very good conversation without a contest for superiority?" Johnson replies, "No animated conversation, sir; for it cannot be but that one or other will come off superior." "Superiority of parts and knowledge will necessarily appear," and he adds, that those shown to be inferior are lessened in the eyes of others. Again, Boswell remarks that he "dined at a splendid table without hearing one sentence of conversation worthy of being remembered." Upon this Johnson says, "Sir, there seldom is any such conversation." Boswell rejoins, "Why, then, meet at table?" to which Johnson answers, "Why? to eat and drink together, and to promote kindness; and, sir, this is better done where there is no solid conversation, for when there is, people differ in opinion, and get into bad humour; or some of the company who are not capable of such conversation are left out, and feel themselves uneasy." Chesterfield advises his son, "Avoid as much as you can, in mixed companies, argumentative polemical conversations, which, though they should not, yet certainly do indispose for a time the contending parties to each other; and if the controversy grows warm and noisy, endeavour to put an end to it by some genteel levity or joke."

It is true there has been a very great improvement in

the tone of conversation and in manners since the time of Chesterfield and Johnson. Solid conversation is much more frequent; people are less violent and have more temper, and do not so often "get into bad humour," or become "indisposed to each other" when they engage in an argument. Still, the advice of these great masters of common life is sound, and applies now as well as in their times, though, perhaps, to a somewhat less extent. All like to be amused, entertained, or can even put up with being instructed (if done in a quiet, modest style); all dislike to be confuted—few are ever convinced. Narrative, description, anecdote, gossip, are acceptable to all persons at all times; argument is suitable only on occasions, few and far between.

13. *When you do interrupt, correct, contradict or argue, soften it as much as possible by Apologies and a gentle gracious Manner of doing it.*

This is a most important rule, very often neglected, and the breach of which leads to much unpleasantness and bad feeling. No one, with any common sense, will care about what they may say being disputed; but they cannot but be displeased if this is done in a rude, rough, dictatorial manner. Some are so sharp, harsh, and proud of their superior knowledge, that they dispute or correct a statement in a manner as if they had been ill-used, and had reason to be indignant at anything being stated that they could not concur in!—or in a scoffing, contemptuous tone, indicating that they despise any one who thinks so, or does not know better. While you maintain your own views firmly, do so temperately, and let your style in any argument or discussion be modest, polite, gracious, conciliatory, which will dispose people to agree with you, if possible, while a sharp, arbitrary manner inevitably excites opposition and resentment. Always try to compensate,

by the *suaviter in modo*, for the unavoidable disagreeableness in setting people right. As Cowper says—

— still remember, if you wish to please,
To press your point with modesty and ease.

Or, in Pope's well known lines—

'Tis not enough your counsel still be true;
Blunt truths more mischief than nice falsehoods do.
Men must be taught as if you taught them not,
And things unknown proposed as things forgot.
Without good breeding, truth is disapproved;
That only makes superior sense beloved.

This is really one of the most important rules for proper conduct in conversation. Lord Chesterfield insists much upon it, and recurs to it repeatedly. He remarks of *suaviter in modo* combined with *fortiter in re*, "I do not know any one rule so unexceptionably useful and necessary in every part of life." As might have been supposed, Dr. Johnson did not lay equal stress upon "*suaviter in modo*." Boswell records the following curious conversation:—

Johnson.—"What harm does it do to any man to be contradicted?"

Boswell.—"I suppose he meant the *manner* of doing it, roughly and harshly."

Johnson.—"And who is the worse for that?"

Boswell.—"It hurts people of weaker nerves."

Johnson.—"I know no such weak-nerved people."

It was hardly to be expected that the great conversational dictator should feel for his victims.

The following appropriate extracts are from the British Essayists:—

"There is another defect."—"The peremptoriness and warmth that are employed in modern conferences. Indeed, whether we write or converse, the haughty

manner, the self-sufficiency, and the contempt of our opponent, that we mix with our arguments, have considerably prevented the advancement of truth and conviction of error."——

"Softness of manner mitigates the roughness of contradiction, and allays the bitterness of unwelcome truth."——

"Never maintain an argument with heat and clamour, though you think or know yourself to be in the right; but give your opinion modestly and coolly, which is the only way to convince."——

"All the purposes of impression and persuasion might be answered without the aid of noise and vehemence; true force of expression and language does not depend upon exaltation of tones and turbulence of manner, but on a certain judicious balance and proportion in the terms and phrases we adopt, on a nice and masterly poise of words, and on fine and appropriate distinctions in our emphasis, figures and allusions."

14. *Avoid being positive, very confident, dogmatic.*

A positive, dogmatic tone is, in reality, defiant and contemptuous. It indicates that you think that no sensible person can possibly differ from you; which is very conceited, as regards yourself, and very offensive to others. All are liable to error; you fully believe this of others; have a little reasonableness and modesty; admit its possible application to yourself, and do not assert with too confident a tone. This will be more conciliatory and respectful to others, and will let you down more gently, should it turn out for once that you have been mistaken as to a fact, or that your judgment has not been infallible. A prudent general always secures as safe a retreat as possible.

A positive, peremptory, violent tone of asserting or disputing is the great bar to solid and rational conversation. It either indisposes us altogether to converse with him who adopts such a tone; or excites our pride and oppo-

siveness, when angry and disagreeable altercation is sure to follow. Could people be reasonable, courteous, and tolerant in manner, a thousand delightful and profitable conversations might be entered on that are avoided, because we are so dogmatic and confident, and thence are apt to be irritable, overbearing and rude when opposed.

Tone and manner are the result of the state of the mind within; a dogmatic defiant style of assertion, and the roughness and harshness to which we tend when in argument, result, mainly, from a presumptuous overconfidence in the correctness of our information and soundness of our opinions.

Such confidence, making us feel quite satisfied with our existing state, is a constant bar to the acquisition of more correct knowledge and to our further improvement and enlightenment. The proper spirit of enquiry after truth should lead us into society, not to hear what we already know, to meet people who think just as we do, and so become more confirmed in our ignorances and prejudices, but to encounter those who think differently, and learn something we did not know before.

This too confident conviction that we are in the right induces the conclusion that those who differ from us are careless as to their information, and inferior to us in their reasoning powers; and this leads to a kind of conceit in our own superior wisdom, and an arrogant contempt for the understandings of others, which are very apt to escape from us in some manifestation of word, tone, or look, and give offence. In fact, this excessive confidence in our own infallibility begets intolerance and consequent persecution—for it is persecution to treat any one with indignity, by sneer, ridicule, contempt, or even simple pooh-poohing, because his opinion is different from our own. If we can acquire a little modesty and humility, and shake off the cool conceit with which we assume that all our facts are unquestionable facts, all our reasonings sound and sure; if we can get rid of the idea that we must certainly be in

the right, and that every unprejudiced person of common capacity must come to the conclusion at which we have arrived, we have made a great step towards what is so much wanted in society—that perfect toleration which treats difference of opinion with courtesy and respect.

This perfect satisfaction with our own knowledge and opinions is very natural, and, by constitution, strongly implanted in some; yet, it ought to be rigidly kept in check. A little observation and reflection may satisfy any one as to the folly and presumption of over confidence. What is the whole history of opinion but a tale of errors?—of premature judgments, committed by the wisest and most learned? Each age reverses the judgment of the preceding. On almost every important subject (except in the mathematical sciences) opinion is eternally changing. At this day we see the most sincere, able, learned men wide as the poles asunder on social, political, religious subjects; we see long established dogmas shaken to their foundations, and mankind sent into doubt and difficulties where they thought they were sure and safe. We see the best and wisest changing their views, deserting their old principles and adopting new ones: there are very few that have not, as years rolled over them, found reason to alter their opinions on a variety of subjects. We have seen, in the present century, learned and experienced judges, acute lawyers, and impartial juries unite in dooming the innocent to death. Even within the last twenty years, when undoubtedly men have been more careful and more merciful when life was at stake, we have witnessed several instances of public opinion, acting through the government, rescuing from death those whom over-confident judges and juries had left for execution. These considerations should lead all, and especially the young, to caution in forming opinions and moderation in expressing them—to a sense of the possibility of our being mistaken, and consequent polite and respectful reception of opinions and statements different from our own.

Connected with this, there is another very common error—supposing that we are bound, or ought, to have a decided opinion on every subject. Hence we come to hasty judgments on matters on which, properly considered, we have not materials for forming a judgment at all. There is one thing very needful to be done, as to a great many subjects, and yet very difficult to do,—to suspend our judgment. There are points on which we should be content to remain in doubt. But many are too proud to imagine any difficulty to be beyond their power to surmount ; or too fast and impatient to remain in a state of cautious philosophic indecision ; and so rush to give their minds repose in some conclusion—any one rather than none at all. We do, at times, meet with wonderful people, who have no doubt or difficulties about anything, but have their minds made up to decided conclusions on every possible subject. But if we have a proper logical spirit, not overborne by excessive conceit in our own powers, we must be conscious, and ought frankly to admit, that there are many things which we do not know, and many questions to a decided judgment on which we really do not see our way.

15. *Do not obtrude Opinions, nor give them out uncalled for.*

Do not hasten, whenever any subject is mentioned, to give the company, unasked, your opinion upon it. This exhibits not a little conceit, in assuming that the company desires to be favoured with your views. It is also a hostile challenge, a sort of defiance, quite uncalled for, of those who may think differently, which is, in some degree, presumptuous. Also, it tends to lead to discussion and argument, which are often undesirable. If you wish to raise a discussion on any particular subject (circumstances being suitable) it would be more becoming, and more courteous and respectful to others, to begin by asking their opinion. Besides, you may be in the wrong ; or

though in the right, there may be present a better wrangler than you are, and you may experience a fall on ground of your own choosing. Caution and courtesy alike urge us not to be forward in declaring opinions: rather defend than attack.

16. *Never quiz, ridicule, nor make game of any one.*

This is unkind, and it is the way to make enemies. It may be clever, and amusing to the lookers-on; but it is extremely unpleasant, often painful to the subject of your ridicule, and is certain to make him dislike or even hate you. The others, though they may laugh at the time, will think ill of you, for wantonly amusing yourself at another's expense, and wounding his feelings, and will regard you as a dangerous person, rather to be avoided. "He that hath a satirical vein," says Bacon, "as he maketh others afraid of his wit, so he had need to be afraid of others' memory." Of course, there is a light, playful, good-humoured banter, which is allowable; but even this is very apt to be carried too far; few can do this with perfect tact, and know where to stop. Wounding us in the most sensitive point, our feeling of dignity and self-respect, ridicule, sarcasm, quizzing, are dangerous weapons. The man whom you have put in the humiliating position of being laughed at seldom either forgives or forgets.

"Parts may be praised; good-nature is adored;
Then draw your wit as seldom as your sword,
And never on the weak; or you'll appear
As there no hero, no great genius here."

17. *Exercise the greatest Caution in saying, hinting, or agreeing to anything unfavourable of Persons absent.*

This is scandal. It is unhandsome, unfair, ungenerous—what you yourself would most certainly not like. You may do a serious injury that you never intended, and would be sorry for, by aiding to depreciate any one, and thus deprive him of the good opinion of others. The

public doings of public men are fair topics for discussion ; private character should not be touched.

Besides, scandal—or slander, as it should be termed—is unsafe. It is almost sure, sooner or later, to be repeated to the person ill-spoken of. Almost every one tells—blabs. Few can be trusted. The spirit of gossip and tittle-tattle is overpowering, even, it must be confessed, amongst those discreet persons, the lords of the creation. Be cautious ; a word once gone forth cannot be recalled. If there be anything you would wish not to be repeated to others, your only secure plan is to keep it to yourself.

18. *Look, Tone, Manner, are of the utmost Importance.*

Try to be easy, affable, and good-humoured.

It is difficult to over-estimate the effect of look, tone, manner. They are very expressive, and are generally believed, however we may distrust words. Of course, they depend mainly on the feeling within, but they are in some degree under our control. The same words, which said in a pleasant manner, are acceptable, or at least harmless, accompanied by a peculiar look and tone, may be very offensive. If we wish to create a favourable impression of ourselves, and to contribute to the enjoyment of others (two prime objects in conversation), we should endeavour, as to expression of countenance and tone of voice, to be pleasant, gracious, and sunshiny. Avoid the following styles :—

The overbearing and dictatorial,
 The haughty, contemptuous, and scoffing,
 The sharp, snappish, and sarcastic,
 The cold, stiff, and freezing,
 The patronising and condescending,

all of which are disagreeable and offensive, impede pleasant social intercourse, and make enemies.

19. *Avoid Affectation and the Use of hard, learned Words.*

Be natural—be yourself. Never attempt to be some one

; it is a character very difficult to maintain. Pretending to be what we are not is easily seen through, and invariably excites ridicule, and what is worse, distrust. There is something about affectation which conveys a painful impression of being false, and thus chills and repels us. An affected person never has a cordial friend. Cowper has given forcible expression to what is a strong and very general feeling—

“In man or woman, but far most in man,
 * * * * * in my soul I loathe
 All affectation.”

Use plain, simple, familiar language, and introduce “learned words of thundering sound” only when unavoidable. Those who are frequently using out-of-the-way, pedantic expressions, subject themselves to two serious disadvantages—they are seldom understood, and generally laughed at.

20. *A certain Deference in Tone is always considered due to Females, to the Clergy, to those considerably more advanced in Years than ourselves, to our Superiors in Rank, Station, Learning, to our Host, and to our Guests.*

In this levelling age, deference seems oozing away; every one considers himself as good as another,* or behaves as if he did. A modest humility seems passing away to amongst the things that were. On this side of the Atlantic, however, the idea that we may have superiors still lingers; respect for station, age, goodness, learning, are still natural, becoming, and expected.

* A stump-orator in the United States, declaiming to his audience on the rights of all to be equal, asked, “Is not one man as good as another?” “Av coorse he is,” cried an enthusiastic Paddy, “an’ a dale better, too.” This was going rather farther than the orator desired, but illustrates pretty fairly the levelling ideas of many.

21. *In mixed Companies avoid Subjects interesting to only one or two, Religious Questions, Party Politics, and any Topic likely from particular Circumstances to be painful to any one present. Also, especially avoid Subjects of which you know little or nothing, unless you can be content to be a patient Listener and Learner.*

22. *Study to acquire a good Conversational Style.*

A tale should be judicious, clear, succinct;
 The language plain, and incidents well link'd;
 Tell not as new what ev'rybody knows,
 And, new or old, still hasten to a close.

The talker, like the poet, is born, not formed by art. Still, a good deal may be done by one who will take pains to examine his own talk and that of others, to improve his style and render his conversation more acceptable and more likely to be attended to. The same thing, told in one way, takes effect, and is listened to with interest; told in another way, it falls dead on the ear of the hearer. Brevity and clearness are the essential points; these, with the use of plain familiar language (the homely Saxon rather than the latinised English), and a distinct, impressive manner, will succeed when there really is anything in what you are going to say; if there is not, you had better not say it. But the study of brevity may be pushed too far—to bareness. As Bacon remarks: “To use many circumstances ere you come to matter is wearisome, and to use none at all is but blunt.” There is a happy medium between brevity and tediousness which you should endeavour to acquire. Above all, come soon to the point, and without digressions. It is difficult to say anything very definite on this subject. But it is very certain that you may avoid certain defects and improve your conversational style by careful observation and reflection on the various styles, good and bad, that come under your notice, including your own.

CONVERSATIONAL BORES.

Men's characters are so infinitely varied that the species and varieties of the conversational bore are almost innumerable, running into each other, and not always capable of being easily defined or separately distinguished. Yet, without asserting that they are often to be met with pure and unmixed, the following may be recognised as exemplifying at once some leading species of conversational nuisances, and some leading errors into which we are all apt to fall if not upon our guard.

First and chief of all conversational pests, we have

THE BEAR.

This is usually a grim-visaged, stern-looking personage, with frowning brows and a firm, compressed mouth that seems incapable of relaxing into a smile. It must be allowed that the poor man cannot help the cut of his physiognomy; but what he says, and how he says it, are in some degree under his control; and if he could be persuaded to study a little the subject of conversation, he might be led to mitigate his natural ferocity in some degree. He does not talk much at any time, and, when he is not amongst his own congenial set, sits generally silent and sulky till some unlucky wight says something that he thinks he can sneer at, ridicule, confute, or cut up. Then the bear is "down upon him." He bursts out with a dogmatic, oracular growl or snarl, which it is evident he considers to have quite settled the point, and relapses into grim repose till another opportunity occurs for him to be severe or sarcastic. To be "putting down" some one appears to be his mission; to ridicule or snub any one gives him peculiar pleasure. Once, on a night journey, a young lady, who had been introduced to him, and recommended to his attention, by way of a friendly overture

to the Bear, remarked (Sirius being peculiarly brilliant), "What a beautiful star that is!" Prompt and sharp, the Bear, who had not previously addressed a single word to her, replied, "Did ever you see an ugly star?" They relapsed into silence, and she did not court another bear's hug. He has destructiveness and self-conceit largely developed, with no benevolence, and so delights in smashing some one, and inflicting pain. His chief enjoyment is to say something offensive, or in an offensive way, and seldom opening his mouth but to snarl or bite, one might almost suppose that, but for unpleasant consequences that might ensue, he would rather enjoy committing murder. Repulsive and inaccessible to strangers, few care to address him. He never condescends to small talk, nor to talk to small people, and seems to imagine himself to be divinely appointed to correct the errors and reprove the follies of mankind. In some companies of quiet, peaceable people, not disposed to wrangle, he creates a sort of terror or gloom that represses all pleasant freedom of conversation. He is a conversational "dog in the manger"—does not talk himself, and makes it unpleasant for others to speak. It is not difficult to say sarcastic things, and turn to ridicule whatever is said; the chief requisite for this is not cleverness, but ill-nature, which is the Bear's peculiar quality. He is a supremely disagreeable person, and is a good deal avoided. The wonder is that he gets admission into society at all; but he has brains: he does say a good thing now and then, and puts down some other nuisance; and each invites him in the expectation that he will cut up some one else, and have sufficient tact to spare his host.

The Bear is not without an instinct of self-preservation, and judiciously refrains from attacking clever people, whose retort he dreads, or influential persons whom it is his interest not to offend. The Bear, in a variety of modifications, is pretty common. There are few who have not had one or more bears among their ancestors, from whom something of their savage nature has been trans-

mitted to their descendants, which crops out occasionally; and even among well-bred, polished people, the inherent, though usually dormant, bearishness tends to burst out at times, and needs to be carefully guarded against. When we meet the Bear, pure and simple, we are, of course, quite shocked at the behaviour of the uncouth animal. But we are too apt to forget that we differ amongst each other in the degree only, not in the nature of our component elements; that we are all nearly related to the Bear, and are very apt to exhibit, now and then, some of the family characteristics. We readily perceive and condemn faults, when they present themselves in extreme, well-marked forms, and in others; but are constantly forgetting our essential community of nature with all, even the worst of the human race, and our undoubted tendency, in unguarded moments, to exhibit something of what we recognise as so offensive in others.

Allied to the Bear, but still a distinct species, we have

THE BULLY.

He is a more sociable sort of person, likes to talk if he is allowed to be the chief talker, and does not take a cool, malignant satisfaction in exposing people's mistakes or false reasonings. But he has a loud voice, a fluent tongue, an authoritative, dictatorial air, a capacious memory, a strong will, and a perfect conviction that all his information is accurate, all his conclusions infallible. He is his own Pope, and would like to force himself as such on other people. His greatest pleasures are to lay down the law on every subject, and to be looked up to as an oracle. He has such a strong sense of his own talents, importance and general superiority, that, without being really ill-natured, he loses all consideration for the rights or feelings of others. He is the true conversational Turk, "who can bear no brother near the throne." If you are so rash as to differ from him, or even to attempt to speak when he

desires to hold forth, he puts you down in a tone of indignation, or in the angry style of a schoolmaster provoked by some gross negligence. He cannot bear to have his statements questioned; when opposed or thwarted, he becomes—if he thinks he dare do so—rude, violent, and scoffing, and exhibits a great deal of the Bear. With a respectful, admiring audience, who listen and believe, he is gracious and benevolent. However one must regret to say so of a man of great talent and learning, and unquestionable goodness, there can be little doubt that Samuel Johnson, as exhibited by Boswell, was a conversational bully. A good many bullies are to be found among rich people and official persons, who consider that their wealth or positions of influence and authority should give weight to all they say, and entitle them to lay down the law with a magisterial air, and to be exempted from having their decisions called in question.

Of course, the Bully is not a fool: he could not maintain his position without having something in him; and so it is the more difficult to put him down. Now and then he meets with his master, and has to be silent, or, at least, play a modest and second part. This is painful to him, and he usually tries to keep out of the way of such persons, and choose company amongst whom he feels great and reigns undisputed dictator. Then, he is an undoubted "power," and must be propitiated. The victims of the Bear and the Bully should unite and present to them some such petition as the following:—

"Good Messrs. Bear and Bully,—We, the undersigned, very respectfully beg your favourable consideration of this our humble petition. We acknowledge your power, wisdom, and great and accurate information, and are willing to admit that you are generally in the right. Still, we think you are hard upon us. It is excellent to have a giant's strength, but tyrannous to use it like a giant. We should like to be allowed, now and then, to state a fact or give an

opinion, without being snubbed, and set down as ignoramuses or noodles ; and when your strong sense of truth, logic, and clear statements compels you to correct us, we humbly entreat that you would be content with the superiority manifested in setting us right, without knocking us down and kicking us at the same time. We beseech you, dread sirs, to let us sometimes have out our little say in peace, which would gratify us very much without hurting you ; and your petitioners will ever pray, etc.

(Signed) "SMITH, BROWN, JONES, AND ROBINSON,

"For ourselves and thousands of quiet, commonplace people, whom we represent."

Next in order to the two conversational bores already described, we have a very peculiar genus which we may call

THE DIFFERENTIAL.

The leading characteristic of bores of this class is that they cannot agree to anything. The following extract from *Hudibras* describes them admirably :—

"A sect whose chief enjoyment lies
 In odd, perverse antipathies ;
 In falling out with that, or this,
 And finding somewhat still amiss ;
 More peevish, cross, and splenetick
 Than dog distract, or monkey sick."

You never have the pleasure of hearing the Differential bore approve of, or heartily concur in, anything you say. Even though you may be echoing his own facts or opinions, you are wrong in your way of putting them ; your representation of them needs some correction or modification.

“ The mark at which my juster aim I take,
Is contradiction for its own dear sake.
Set your opinion at whatever pitch,
Knots and impediments make something hitch ;
Adopt his own ; 'tis equally in vain,
Your thread of argument is snapt again.”

His prominent faculties are self-conceit, oppositiveness, and a certain captious, morbid acuteness, which, in the absence of any real solidity or breadth of intellect, lead him to catch at numbers of “infinite littles”; and, as mankind really often are in the wrong, as there are so many legitimate differences of opinion, and the imperfections of language lead to so many loose modes of expression, the Differential is never at a loss to find tares among the wheat of conversation, and so to get opportunities of exhibiting his superior correctness of information, or greater precision of thought and expression ; or at least of indulging his taste for contradicting and opposing. He cannot admit that the sun rises ; it only appears to rise ; it is the earth that really moves. He objects to its being said that any one is of an old family ; we all come from Adam and Eve, one family is as old as another. Nothing that any other person has seen or heard is worth much. If you speak with admiration of some celebrated piece of natural scenery, it is nothing compared with something else that he has seen. If he cannot dispute that it is very fine, he asks if you saw it at such and such a time, or under such and such circumstances ; if not (and you may as well say “No” at once, he can never admit that you saw it as he saw it), then you did not see it to advantage ; you should have seen it some other way—that was really something worth seeing. He is the oddest mixture of captiousness and egotism. He was once travelling in Belgium, and, running short of money, was detained a long time at Louvain till he got remittances, and had only a hurried glimpse of other places. Ever afterwards, with him, Louvain was almost the only place

in Belgium worth seeing. Had you been *there*? What a pity you missed it! You might have exhausted Brussels Antwerp, Bruges, Ghent, and Liege; these, he admits, are well enough, but you should have seen Louvain. Mind that, the next time you are on the Continent. His peculiar talent is, differing from every statement he hears. It is painful to him to find that any one is altogether in the right, and has said nothing that can be objected to. Cowper must have had some teasing Differential in his eye when he wrote—

“ Oh! thwart me not, Sir Soph, at every turn,
 Nor carp at every flaw you may discern;
 Though syllogisms hang not on my tongue,
 I am not, surely, always in the wrong:
 'Tis hard if all is false that I advance;
 A fool must now and then be right by chance.”

He is ever arguing, wrangling, proving or disproving something, and lives happy only in an atmosphere of contention. By no means ill-natured, nor disagreeable in manner, he is still a very cross-grained, troublesome sort of person, rendering conversation continually jarring and jolting, like travelling over a rough country road in a vehicle without springs or cushions. If you can take it coolly, avoid being irritated by his “frivolous and vexatious” objections and difficulties, and resolve to amuse yourself with him, the Differential is really a curious subject of study in the Natural History of Talk. A good many Differentials are to be found among Scotchmen and lawyers. “The Looker-on” mentions one of this class, who “had fallen into a hostile practice of perpetual contradiction.” His friends taking counsel how to deal with him, resolved, in speaking to him, to say nothing but self-evident propositions; “to address no observations to him that contain any propositions above intuitive certainty or universal notoriety, so as effectually to preclude him from any share in interesting, dignified, or useful conversation.”

One might expect to dispose of the Differential by the judicious practice that has often been recommended—assenting readily to great talkers. But this would fail with him. He will not agree with you, even when you agree with him. He cannot live without differing. The only ways of doing with him are, to steer clear of him altogether, or, as the old essayist recommends, to stop his mouth by stating to him only axioms, or other perfectly indisputable propositions. It is only Euclid that baffles him, so, unfortunately, he has a wide field of action.

The Differential is urged mainly by self-conceit, and a consequent desire to show his superiority; sometimes, less by these than by an excessive development of the spirit of contradiction and wrangling. Not unfrequently, we find still another cause of this captious fault-finding turn—a malignant pleasure in giving annoyance; for there are persons who take a positive delight in giving pain, and are happiest when they can mortify some one, wound his feelings, and render him uncomfortable.

The Bear, the Bully, and the Differential are serious impediments to pleasant conversation. They at once doom to silence that very large class of persons not fitted, or not inclined for resistance, contests, and wrangling; and with the more sturdy they excite altercation and angry feelings, unpleasant to both listeners and those who are taking part in the discussion. They are rough, square persons, out of place in the smooth round holes of social intercourse; nuisances that may be tolerated, or submitted to from the mere force of their loud voices, energy, and self-will, but are still disliked and avoided, as disturbers of the public peace. Their style is disagreeable in itself, and objectionable as depriving the company of the conversation of mild and gentle natures, who shrink from turbulence and strife, but are well fitted to please in a quiet, harmonious intercourse, where their contributions to the general entertainment would be listened to with interest, and accepted with good-will in a friendly sympa-

thising spirit. Conversation is pleasantest when it moves quietly onwards in a smooth, easy flow, like the gentle stream gliding placidly through the meadow, or at most with not more than a ripple and a soft murmur when it passes over a pebbly bed, "making sweet music with the enamelled stones." But it becomes harsh and unpleasant when it resembles the angry and boisterous torrent, driven hither and thither by encountering obstacles every moment, rushing wildly down the rapids, dashing against the rocks with turmoil, vehemence and uproar; and this is the style of conversation which the above amiable trio tend to produce. Examine yourself well! if you find anything of the Bear, Bully, or Differential in your composition, root it out if possible, else you will be sure to be disliked, and spoken ill of when your back is turned, however your talent or energy may lead people to appear desirous of cultivating your favour.

Another well-known conversational pest is

THE JABBERER.

His tongue exemplifies perpetual motion, and it is very difficult to stop it. He rattles on without the slightest conception that there is neither sense, information, humour nor playfulness—but only *words*—in what he says. He is all tongue and no brains, and talks "an infinite deal of nothing, more than any man in all Venice;" not lively, entertaining nothing, such as some excel in, but dull, empty, frivolous nothing, which wearies out the soul of the unfortunate listener. Whatever subject may be started the Jabberer has something to say upon it, with which he rushes in before others can say a word, very often not of the least interest or at all to the point, and to the exclusion of modest unobtrusive people, who really could say something worth listening to, if they were not pushed aside by this conceited chatterbox. The infinitely small trash he pours out with the most perfect complacency

is astonishing ; it is strange to find any one gifted with such an enormous faculty of talk without a particle of sense to guide it. He is not rude, nor offensive ; on the contrary, he is often rather good-humoured, but he is wearisome—a perfect *bore*. Nor is it from mere selfishness he talks to excess, but frequently from the combination of an inordinate (diseased, in fact) power of talk and thoughtlessness. He has no repose in his character, nor in his tongue, and allows none to those who are in his company. Although it wounds the author's feelings of gallantry to say so, truth compels him to declare that the Jabberer is sometimes of the fair sex. Loquacia appears to be quite a charming young lady, good-natured, obliging and pretty, and people are disposed to like her, if she would let them—that is, if she would be quiet, or at least speak in moderation. But she talks incessantly, bores and fatigues people, and thereby neutralises the effects of her charms. She is hardly clever, not learned, nor witty ; and, although, in such a multitude of words, a good thing may turn up occasionally, nine-tenths of her talk is wearisome being made up of the smallest stuff imaginable, which she fancies must be interesting to others because it has come into her foolish little head. She cannot be at peace ; silence for a single moment fatigues her, and she rushes forwards in restless haste with her say on every topic that may be started ; not that she knows anything about it, but simply because the demon of chatter has possessed that fair form. She has not been able yet to discover that elders do not like to be talked down or extinguished by young people, nor gentlemen (lords of the creation, as they consider themselves) by ladies. She seems to labour under the amiable delusion that she is saving other people trouble by doing all the talk for them, and that they feel obliged to her for so doing ! She has a snug little fortune, which, with her good looks, would long since have established her, but her admirers, after a nibble or two, turn away, alarmed by the dreadful flood of talk, injudiciously

exhibited too soon. A hundred years ago, Sterne wrote an epitaph for her—"On such a day, in the —th year of her age, Loquacia became silent!"

Another description of bore, whose presence at a social gathering invariably proves a dreadful infliction on the assembled guests, is

THE PROSER.

This is a man of slow genius, or rather no genius, who yet likes to hear himself talk. With an imperfectly developed language faculty, and a confused intellect, he is quite unconscious of his own proper vocation, which is that of a listener, who should limit himself to uttering at the right time an intelligent "Really!" "Indeed!" "You don't say so!" etc. But he is dissatisfied with the position which Nature has assigned to him; is ambitious of shining and being listened to, and will have his word in as well as the others. He begins with due solemnity, draws out what he has to say in the most tiresome manner, and usually in a dull leaden tone of voice, itself oppressive; pedantically affects a minute logical subdivision of his subject, hums and haws frightfully, gets into the most tedious digressions, expands upon fifty minor points of not the least importance to his story, deliberately pauses, and keeps the company waiting till he can call to recollection some trifle of no consequence, such as the street, or the number of a house, often does not appreciate the real point of his argument or narrative, but misses it, or slurs it over confusedly, and ends (when he does reach that blessed stage of his maundering) with some most lame and impotent conclusion. With a happy obtuseness and conceit, and an energy, determination, and perseverance that might be admired in a better cause, he pursues the even tenor of his way, perfectly unconscious that he is the biggest of bores, and quite regardless of inattention, indifference, and interruptions (which are

not judicious). When he has got over the interruption, he begins his discourse again with "Where was I?" and you may be glad if he does not give you a recapitulation. Nothing but the strongest measures can put any check upon him. People in general are good-natured and polite enough to let him go on, and calmly resign themselves to their fate. Only the Bear or the Bully can rescue them, and he gives these an opportunity of proving that, like other noxious animals, they are not without their uses.

Allied to the Proser, but still a distinct species, is

THE RIGMAROLE,

a very curious species of talker. He has not a particle of logic in him, but delights in reasoning, and particularly in some rather refined and subtle argument. He is almost incapable of knowing anything accurately, yet is always parading his information, perhaps on some scientific subject, and has rather a fancy for statistics. He has a speculative mind, with some imagination, and catching hold of a corner of a subject (he never gets further), he rejoices in explaining and illustrating it, and in bringing out some original view of it, which has not been noticed by others. This he does in the most rambling, incoherent way, as if his thoughts had been shaken up together in a bag and drawn out at random. He is a sort of "button-holder," who is very fond of thus expounding his theories, which are generally nonsense, or sense with a twist. He is one of those unlucky mortals who, by a curious arrest of development, have the taste, without the capacity, for learning and thinking, and are endowed with enough of conceit to prevent them ever becoming aware of their defects. Many such half-formed minds are to be met with. It is almost impossible to give any minute account of the Rigmarole; he is indescribable. It is in vain attempting to set him right; he is fast in a groove, from which you cannot extricate him. All you can do is to politely give

him your attention ; extract, if possible, the grain of truth that may be mixed up with his dreams ; preserve your gravity, and avoid, the best way you can, committing yourself to agree with him.

THE PUNSTER

is a sort of *lusus naturæ*, sometimes amusing, more frequently an annoyance. Like the calculating boy, or the infant musical prodigy, or the man who can repeat the whole of the Psalms or the new Testament, by a caprice of development, he has run to excess in one narrow direction. He has a morbid memory for varieties in the meanings of words, and the English language, unfortunately, affords him ample scope. With this one little talent, infinitely conceited about it, without any real wit, without logic or earnestness in his composition, he cares little for the *sense* of what is said to him ; only the *sounds* of the separate words interest him, and, drawn aside by anything that admits of a verbal twist, he unscrupulously perpetrates any rudeness, that he may thrust in a pun or play upon some word used. As half an egg is better than no meat, so the inveterate punster, when he cannot think of any pun upon a whole word, is glad to put up with a play on some part of a word, rather than miss a chance of exhibiting his fine perception of similarity of sound and variety of meaning. If, in the course of your story, you happen to say that a paper was destroyed, or some mischief done by a *rat*, the punster sees and seizes his opportunity, and interrupts you to remark, "I suppose you arrived at that conclusion by a process of *ratiocination*." And if he writes a book, whatever the subject may be, he contrives to introduce something to enable him to show off this miserable fraction of a pun.* His peculiar word-faculty is almost a monomania with him, and becomes a nuisance to others. You see by his manner that he

* This example is taken from a book.

does not take the least interest in what you are saying, but is on the watch for anything that suggests a pun or verbal quirk, with which he ruthlessly interrupts you, even although you may be at the most telling or interesting part of your story, and forthwith bursts into a roar of laughter, as if he had really said something excessively clever. Now and then he says a good thing, on the strength of which he bores one with twenty wretched attempts, so bad that, if one does laugh, it is at the downright silliness of them, or, out of mere compassion not to disappoint him. Such are the mere punsters, or word-catchers, unfortunately a numerous class, feeble imitators of the man of sterling wit, who sometimes, in a quaint, original way that delights one, makes his point turn upon a pun; whereupon, those who can achieve a pun—and nothing more—conclude that therefore they are witty, set up as Hooks or Jerrolds, expose their own folly, and afflict their friends.

THE JOKER,

another imitator of the man of real wit and humour, like the punster, has a great tendency to become a bore. He is perpetually straining at being funny, and very often is not funny at all, but only tiresome; mistaking for a good joke, and laughing loudly at, something that has only the form, not the substance of a joke. His humour has a great tendency to personality; in his habit of extracting ridicule or jests out of everything, he is often, without intending it, offensive; at the least, inconsiderate, and very apt to go too far. He has generally only one style, the joking one, and pursues it recklessly, regardless of everything, so that *he* can raise a laugh; that being his great end and aim. He considers himself alone, utterly ignoring two important points: first, regard for the feelings of others, and next, that "a jest's prosperity lies in the ear of him who hears it." Like the punster, he conceives himself entitled to interrupt and break in

with his little jests at any moment; and by these interruptions alone, to say nothing of the frequent bad taste of his jokes, makes himself a conversational nuisance. Occasional and appropriate jests are pleasant, and give a zest to conversation; a regular joker becomes wearisome, besides being rather dangerous.

THE MONOTONE

has his thoughts absorbed by one all-engrossing subject, which fills his mind, to the exclusion of everything else. He takes no interest in any other subject. In season and out of season, he drags it into every conversation, and dilates upon it *usque ad nauseam*. He contrives to connect it with everything, and like the ingenious paragraph advertisements, that begin with whatever may be the most exciting topic of the day, and end with Somebody's Antibilious Pills, or the Finest Starch ever made, so the Monotone, whatever topic may be started, contrives to turn the conversation to his favourite subject. He never observes that his friends step away from him (if they can) when he mounts his hobby-horse. If they cannot escape they are irresistibly tempted to turn it to ridicule. He can stand that, considering himself as a sort of martyr. He is a kind of fanatic or enthusiast; selfish enough, however, to care only for his own nostrum, and to be impatient of the crotchets of others. It is best to keep out of his way; and if you cannot do that, to let him have full swing till he exhausts himself.

THE EGOTIST

like the Monotone, is full of one all-engrossing subject—that is, himself. Self-glorification is the only kind of conversation that interests him. He fatigues people and provokes their ire by his continual reference to his own wonderful sayings and doings. He has always something to tell indicating his talents, his successes, his influence, his great general importance. He never wearies of

relating how he foresaw everything, foretold everything, advised or managed everything; how much people honoured, respected, consulted, deferred to him. You are led to wonder how ever the world got on before he was born, and how it will do when he shall have passed away. Within certain limits he is generous to others. All *his* friends and relations are remarkable, eminent; each is the very foremost man in his peculiar sphere. If they are merchants or bankers, they are millionaires, and their transactions regulate commerce and the money market; if they have salaries, they have twice as much as others of the same class; if they are authors, their works lead the age, they get fabulous sums from their publishers, and are read by millions; are they legislators, it is they that rule; are they soldiers, it is they that win the battles. Whatever he has seen is quite superior to whatever any one else has witnessed. No one ever saw so fine a sunset, so grand a storm, or such big hailstones. His watch is perfect, and keeps better time than any other. Everything with which he is in any way connected becomes invested with an atmosphere of greatness and superiority. He never failed or was baffled in anything he undertook. Whatever may be the subject of conversation, he has some special information upon it, not accessible to ordinary mortals. He is very sensitive to ridicule or banter, when he can be brought to think you have dared so far, and you need not hope that he will ever forgive you. There is only one way to get on with him, and that is on the principle that it is better to flatter fools than to fight with them.

Allied to, often united with the Jabberer or Egotist, yet sometimes distinct, we have

THE SELF-SEEKER.

He delights only in subjects that he is conversant with, and which give him an opportunity of display, or at least

of taking a prominent part in the conversation. He takes little interest in anything but what he himself says. When others speak, he may condescend to listen, if they assent to, approve, or corroborate what he has said; otherwise, he pays little attention, appears absent or careless, exhibits a restless impatience and ruthless disregard of what they say, and breaks in abruptly with something that he is interested in, setting aside, with little ceremony, what others may care for. With more sense and less empty volubility than the mere Jabberer, he still greatly prefers his own talk or own subject, and being in nature hard, rude, and selfish, coolly exhibits that preference almost offensively. He is perfectly satisfied that every and the smallest thing he ever saw, heard, or did, are extremely interesting; that the company must be edified and entertained by an account of them, and would greatly prefer to listen to him, and to converse on the subjects that he chooses. The Self-seeker is frequently to be met with in good society, amongst those who ought to be "well-bred" people—even the fair sex afford occasional specimens. With the most easy assurance—or cool impertinence, as it may be termed—he thrusts aside any who are mild and forbearing enough to yield to him, and has even been known to boast of such performances.

THE EXCLUSIVE

is one of the greatest of obstructives to pleasant social intercourse. He cannot stoop to be civil to every one he meets in society. The company one meets now-a-days is so mixed, he is, unfortunately, often brought into contact with persons who are quite beneath his notice, of no importance, not worth wasting his precious time, words, and thoughts upon. He endeavours to maintain with such persons a dignified reserve. If he cannot avoid shaking hands with them when introduced, he holds out two fingers; never favours them with more than a stiff "Yes" or "No," and tries to make them feel that it is a presump-

tion in them to address him. He opens out only to distinguished persons, or to his own set; to others he is cold and stiff, surrounding himself with an atmosphere of repulsion, to protect himself from their intrusion. Stuffed full of pride and conceit, utterly deficient in kindness and geniality, he shuts himself up in his supposed dignity, and wonders that common people dare approach him familiarly. When one Exclusive meets another of his own set, they enter into a tacit offensive and defensive alliance, cut the rest of the company, ignore any remark that another may make, and contrive to let it be seen that they consider themselves "high on a throne apart" from ordinary mortals. It may be pride of birth and rank, of station, of wealth, of talents, of science and learning, of moving in superior society, of a stiff, frigid nature, upon which he plumes himself, and feels authorised to be unsocial and make himself disagreeable. He not only mars free, pleasant intercourse, and so makes others uncomfortable, but loses many agreeable and instructive hours that he might himself enjoy if he could unbend and forget his empty dignity for a little. But, puffed up with conceit, he has got into the habit of despising mankind in general as quite beneath him, and retreats into his cold, hard shell of lofty reserve till he meets with persons worthy of his time and attention. His conduct is a striking example of Shakespeare's complaint that "Not a man, for being simply man, hath any honour." He does not coincide with that learned, shrewd, genial, and really great man, Sir Walter Scott, that from every man you may learn something; nor does he sympathise with the grand, broad humanity of Burns, when he exclaims, "A man's a man for a' that." Only a select few are "men," in his fastidious eyes; the rest are "rabble." A morbid creature, doubtful and jealous as to his position, puny in soul and deficient in broad sympathies, he is inflated with some fancied superiority, except to a select few of his own clique, to whose society it would be for the general good that he should confine

himself. A good many Exclusives may be found among literary and scientific men, and members of learned societies.

THE MUTE

is not a very common character. The most of men, as well as of women, are gifted with considerable powers of "talk." Excess is the more common fault. When the general silence of the Mute results from singular deficiency in language-power, or in readiness of mental action, like Ethelred the Unready, so that the right thing to be said occurs to him just a little too late, or when it arises from downright dulness, there is no help for it. We may be thankful that he knows his defect, accepts the position nature has evidently designed for him, and has the good sense not to attempt—to the annoyance of his friends, and his own discomfiture—what he is quite unfitted for. Would that the Jabberer or Proser had as much discretion! When you fall alongside of a Mute, do not run away. That is shabby; you cannot expect always to get prizes in society. Do not suppose he is sulky or dislikes you, because his answers are brief. He is, perhaps, only a little embarrassed, knowing his defect, and perceiving that you are a "master of discourse." Make up your mind that you will have to entertain him. Exert yourself a little; be generous; give for once where you can get no return, and be content with the triumph of having accomplished a rather difficult feat. Further, as a good Christian, run to the rescue when you see two unlucky Mutes trying to entertain one another.

Some are eminently qualified to take an active part in conversation; others are adapted to be listeners. Generally, each should stick to his vocation. But there are Mutes who need not be so. Swift asserts that nature has given to every man a capacity of being agreeable, though not of shining in company. To say this of *every* man is perhaps going too far; but certainly it is true of the most

of men. To some, however, the gift has been coupled with the condition that they shall take some pains to render it available to them. First, they must be at some trouble to overcome unnecessary bashfulness or timidity. This they will find very superfluous indeed, when they reflect on the uncommonly small talk that passes current in conversation; the observation of which should help them to get rid of that excessive diffidence and humility, and encourage them to venture out in little nothings as their neighbours do. Others are silent from excessive pride; they will not speak unless they have something clever, important, or really superior to say, worthy of the exalted ideas they have of themselves. The pride is not so easily managed; the timidity will soon be got rid of by practice in hearing the sound of their own voices, and constant perseverance in efforts to take a part in conversing when opportunities arise. In a debating society, many who were afraid to speak for a time, and when they did begin were confused, blundering, and stammering, by perseverance got over these defects, and, without exactly turning out orators, became perfectly able to express their ideas with tolerable fluency and force in an unembarrassed manner. So it is in conversation, which is a sort of debating society on a small scale. Those who find a difficulty in keeping up discourse, must be at a little trouble to observe and study the ways of others—some to imitate, some to avoid. By observation and reflection of the various styles of talk that come under their notice—by consideration of their own nature and powers—they will soon learn what style suits them best, what they are capable of, and what is beyond their reach; how to adapt their conversations to the different characters they meet, how to please, how to avoid giving offence. And, further, they must be at some trouble to lay in stores of information, which will be a valuable resource, in many cases highly acceptable to those with whom they converse. If, as is the case with so many, people find themselves not

gifted naturally with ready powers of conversation, still they must not settle down as Mutes without an effort. They must try to supply the deficiency by art, which, though it can never equal nature, will, with care and attention, afford a tolerable substitute—at all events, infinitely better than being shut out of social intercourse by ignorance, timidity, or false pride. Sometimes one meets a kind of sullen Mute, not incapable of conversation, but not inclined to talk, from a dull, cold, phlegmatic temperament; who will neither speak himself, nor give others any encouragement. As speedy escape as possible from such a companion is quite justifiable.

If you cannot succeed in getting the Mute to enter into conversation on general topics, find out some subject on which he is informed, and encourage him to talk upon upon that. If it be professional, or what is called “shop,” you have then a chance of acquiring much exact and curious information; for every occupation has connected with it much that is interesting and instructive, and that can be learned accurately only from those who have made it a business. The common prejudice against a man’s talking about his own business, is sometimes pushed too far. It is certainly in bad taste for a man to thrust it forward himself; but when circumstances are favourable for a little rational and instructive conversation, it seems unreasonable to reject those topics on which we can obtain the most extensive and accurate information. The physician, the lawyer, the engineer, the merchant, the naturalist, the seaman, are each in possession of curious and exact knowledge on most interesting topics, a selection from which would delight all hearers. Still more should we bring out professional information when we come across one who has not the gift of general discourse.

Such are a few of the leading varieties of Conversational Bores, briefly sketched, as beacons, to indicate to my younger readers some modes and styles in discourse

which they should try to avoid, and intended to excite them to observation and reflection on what comes under their notice in society. Careful observation, and thinking on what they observe, will do far more than any book to improve them in the art of conversation, if they have fully realised the great truth of the common nature of all mankind, and hence (mortifying though the admission must be) their own liability, if not very watchful of themselves, to be guilty of what they deem so offensive in others.

CONCLUSION.

By attention to the hints or rules we have given, a good many faults that impede pleasant social intercourse, and are injurious to yourself or offensive to others, may be avoided. They will not enable you to shine in conversation; that is the gift of Nature; but the errors they indicate are very frequent, and, it must be allowed, are very natural, and therefore, the more needing special consideration and attention to guard against them. What hurts others and hurts ourselves in the estimation of others, is certainly deserving of our careful examination, as to the means of avoiding it. Recognised rules in conversation are valuable, even though often broken; their tendency is to protect those who are mild and gentle from being overborne by the rough, strong, and unscrupulous. Further, it may be seen how right conduct on the part of others, and a little painstaking on their own part, may enable many not naturally endowed with great powers of discourse, to take a respectable share in general conversation—a very desirable object.

To conclude, if you desire to enjoy yourself in conversation, and to make an agreeable impression, you must, above all, consult and respect the wishes and feelings of others as well as your own. You must listen patiently to others, attend to them and show some interest in what

they say. You must yourself speak occasionally, suggest or originate something, or some remark on the subject in hand, as your contribution to the general entertainment. If you neglect the wishes and rights of others, you are unfairly gratifying yourself at others' expense, and are guilty of a breach of the implied contract which brings people together to converse. If you do not take some trouble to speak now and then, you are receiving without giving anything in return, and must lay your account with being set down as sullen or dull. Never forget that besides some little power of talk, there are two grand desiderata for conversation—a kindly regard for the wishes and likings of others, and a stock of suitable information. Selfishness and ignorance are serious obstacles to success in society. Kindness and courtesy you owe to others—a well furnished mind to yourself. With these you can hardly fail.

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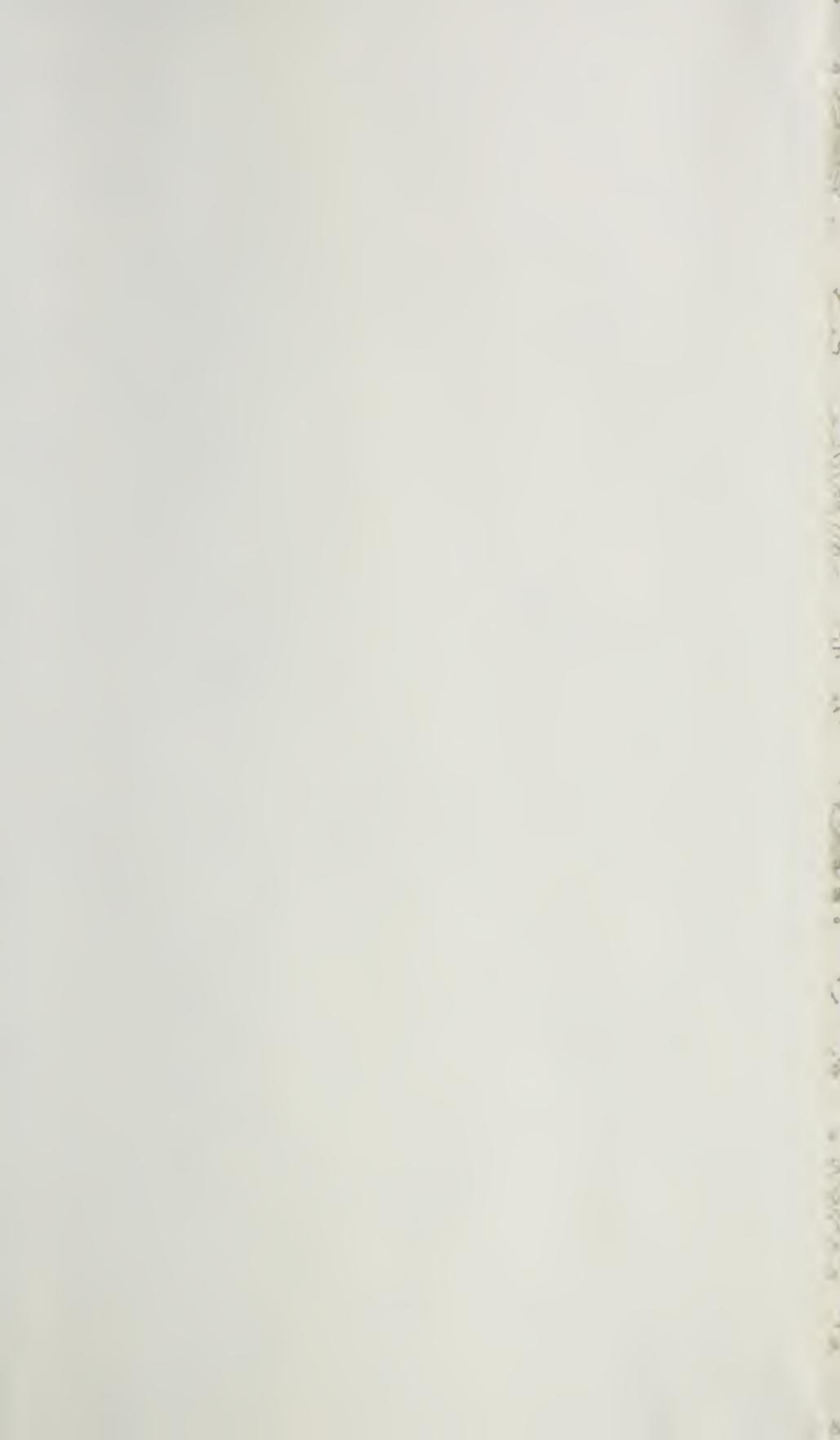
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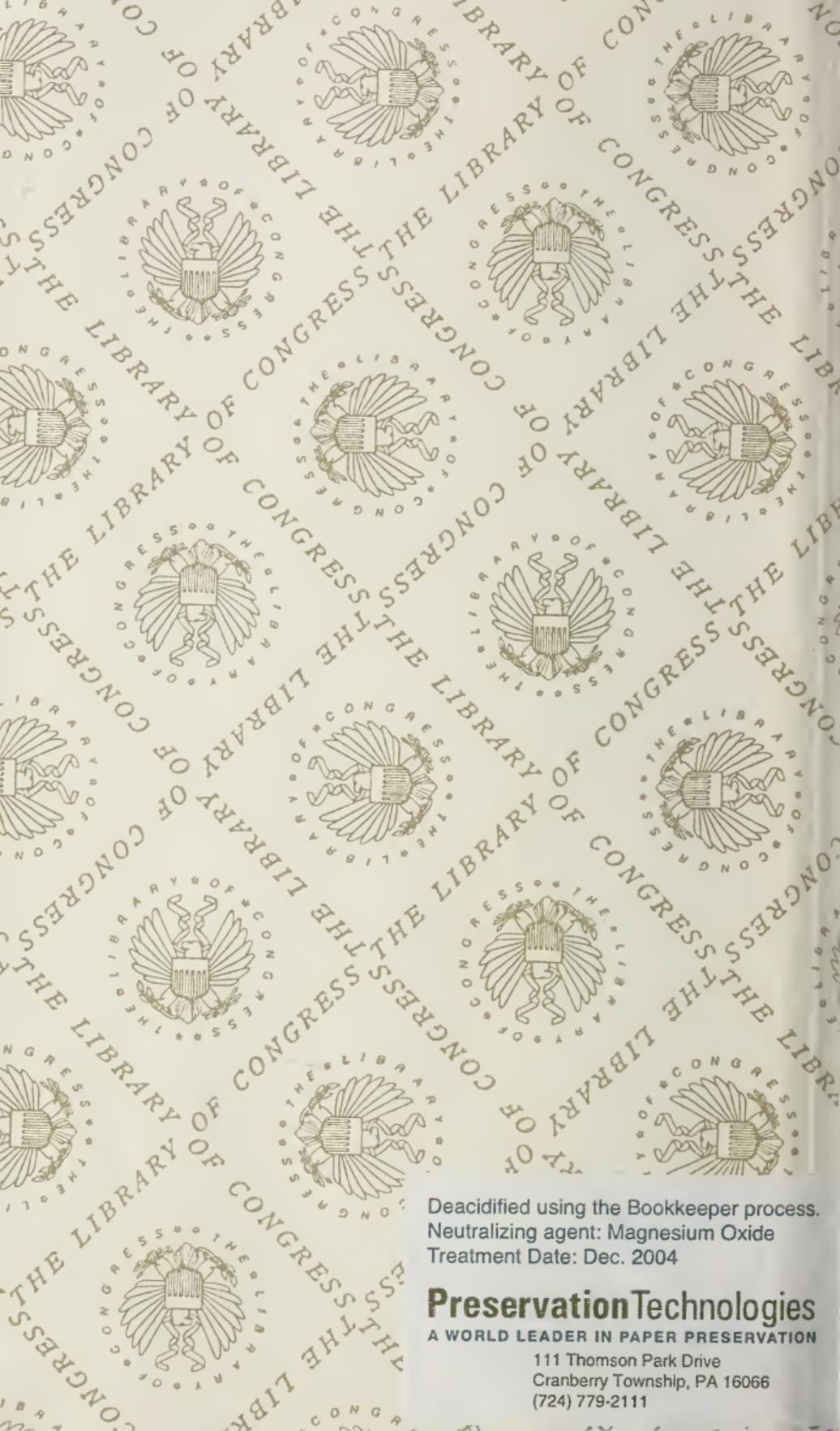
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