

But he has made a name for himself in another sphere. He is a talker—a conversationalist of brilliant talents and parts. In this department of culture he is to-day, by all odds, the best living exponent. Coleridge, you remember, was unequalled in the art of graceful conversation, and the record is as full regarding his talks as it is of his books. De Quincey talked well, so did Margaret Fuller, so did Sheridan and so did Macaulay, who had, as Sydney Smith quaintly puts it, "occasional flashes of silence." But in our time we have very few eloquent talkers, if I may make exceptions of Holmes, and Aldrich, and Fields, and perhaps one or two others. I do not mean of course public speakers or orators, or parliamentary debaters, for of such lights we have very many notable examples. Mr. Alcott is not a platform celebrity. He would be as nervous on the lecture stage as Mr. Froude, and as unsatisfactory as Chas. Kingsley. And I think if he undertook to read you one of his own papers,—but no—the politeness and gallantry of a Quebec audience are proverbial. You would remain in your seats and hear him out. But Alcott, in the drawing-room or in the parlour, is quite another man. It is here that we have him at his best. It is here that you can perceive the wonderful breadth of his mind, and witness the splendid play of emotion in his sympathetic and earnest face, as he rolls out sentence after sentence of delicious and suggestive discourse. You are completely carried away, you listen as one entranced, you are enthralled with his subdued eloquence, for he is never noisy or declamatory. He talks on with the air of one who might be inspired—like a poet who cannot restrain the utterance of the fanciful things which struggle in his mind, like a romancer who in vain attempts to call back the escaping children of his brain. His tones are like the notes of the sweetest music you ever heard. You find yourself going over them softly to yourself. You seem to beat time, and as one mellow