

you would beads. When all are on the thread, draw it up as tight as possible, fasten the thread, and, before breaking it off, sew on a loop of narrow ribbon by which to hang it up. "A very Merry Christmas" to you all, my dear girls, is the best wish of "Auntie," and, hoping some of you may find some hints that will help you make your little gifts pretty and inexpensive, must be my excuse for making this letter so long.

MINNIE MAY.

PRIZE ESSAY.

Topics of Conversation.

BY BLANCHE AYLMEY, MELBOURNE, QUE.

We all know what is meant by the "gift of the gab." The expression is not a very euphonious one, but it has the recommendation of being forcible. He who possesses this gift of the gab is born with a power which, consciously or unconsciously, gives him a great advantage over his fellow-men. If he be a lawyer, he can call forth your tenderest sympathy in favor of a very black criminal at the bar; if he be a caddy from the land of the blarney-stone, you turn your back upon him with a strut in your gait expressive of an increased sense of self-approbation; if he be a politician, he may sway the destinies of a nation; if he be a minister of God, the lawyer, the criminal, the flatterer, the politician, all in turn are constrained to hush their own voice, that they may listen to one which, though still and small, has a penetrating and persuasive eloquence. Such is the tremendous power of the human tongue.

But between this paradise of eloquence and the platitudes anent the weather, the government and the fashions, which we are daily doomed to hear, there is a great gulf fixed. True, it is bridged over by many a heart-stirring debate upon matters of vital interest to the individual or to society, yet on its further side we find shallows of stupidity and ignorance, and rocks of evil-speaking, lying and slandering, among which it is rather difficult to steer. Though it may seem, at first sight, an affectation to repress the spontaneity of human thought and speech, and though a shallow mind might indeed turn it into an affectation, yet are we not already bound by every social and moral law, to repress upon our lips the oath, the falsehood, and the impure communication? Why, then, may we not replace these with a serious asseveration, an exact truthfulness, an innocent and timely joke? By no means would we desire affectation in our friendly intercourse, but rather that the vacant mind be stored with solid ideas, which may, upon occasion, burst forth into something like intelligent expression.

With many of the very best talkers, conversation unfortunately means monologue. Their valuable accomplishment thereby loses half its value, for we perceive at once the egotism that prevents us from "getting a word in edgeways," and being, all of us, rather egotistical, we are wounded in a vulnerable part. Courtesy requiring that every remark on either side should have its due weight, to listen well is quite as essential in a conversation as to talk well, and the punishment borne in upon our friend of the monologue is, that we prod him on if he shew signs of a collapse, and in the meantime our own ideas drift off to the stock exchange or to the bill-of-fare for to-morrow's dinner. The person who

ought to be, but is not always, allotted to him for a *tele-a-tele* at a social gathering, is the young lady who punctuates one's most labored remarks with a "yes" or "no." It is to her interest to study the subject of conversation seriously, and perhaps the sensation of being totally eclipsed may electrify her into a little animation.

A popular and unjust prejudice exists against what is called "talking shop." Provided that one be not too obtrusive, there is surely no subject which one is more competent to discuss than the occupation and interest of one's daily life. When conversation is likely to flag, people should be encouraged to talk shop, and listeners would find in it a source of edification. In fact, it is the thoroughness pervading this particular line of the *pow-wow* that we should endeavor to import into any other chosen topic of conversation. Is it politics? Then do not rest satisfied with a few generalities gathered from the leading articles of your "one-sided newspaper"; but look into statistics and subtleties of argument, so that you may be able to give an intelligent and original opinion when the subject comes up. The criticism of a recent concert or of last Sunday's sermon is a fit and frequent subject of debate.

tain it all, while a note-book of extracts would impress upon a weak memory many thoughts of master minds by which the social circle might further benefit.

And moreover we of the British race need to be corrected of our stolid, expressionless way of saying things. A lighting up of the countenance, a gesture, a shrug of the shoulders, a wave of the hand. How elegant they are,—if it is but a French market-woman bargaining for her wares! There is a certain vulgarity in the tone of a mind that can enunciate solemn facts, and jokes, and reproaches, and entreaties, all in the same tone of voice. We may smile at the eagerness of childhood, and the enthusiasm of youth, but we cannot help catching a little of their spirit by contact.

There is, after all, a large class of people to whom society owes a debt of gratitude. These have a pleasant word for each other whenever they meet, and some of them are ever ready with a brilliant witticism or a well-told story, or are adepts at what Mr. Froude so aptly calls "intellectual lawn-tennis." Oh! that the phonograph were perfected to carry to our eager ears more of the enjoyment that is conveyed to us in this form day by day. This is the spice of life, whatever may be for each of us its solid ingredient, and to these our gifted brethren we cede the palm of superiority over all rules and regulations; we exempt them from all obligations to read, mark and learn, lest their charming originality should be destroyed. May they escape the traps laid for them in schools, and learned societies, and trades unions, and land leagues, and conventional dinner parties, for if the world is to become any wiser we shall soon be educated up to a point that will restore humanity to the original protoplasm from which the ultra-wiseacres profess to have sprung.

Fashion Notes.

A set of handsome furs is a very acceptable gift to the average woman. The consciousness of the spirit that prompts such a gift warms her heart as luxurious fur defends her person from the cold.

A favorite present between women is a yellow garter, to be worn above the left knee. It is rendered as dainty as

possible, being made of silk elastic, with a satin bow or a silver buckle. The words "good luck" is usually wrought or embroidered upon it in Chinese or Sanscrit. The companion to this garter is of another colored elastic with no bow or ornamentation, but it must not be yellow.

Night-gown cases, boot and shoe pockets, and comb and brush bags are now often made of plain white linen pique or damask linen. These are easily laundered.

The words "Robe de Nuit," "Coiffure," "Slippers," "Gaiters," are wrought in Kensington or rope stitch upon the various articles to which they are appropriated.

Another pretty gift for a lady friend is a "Housewife," in the form of a baby's kid shoe, bronze being the favorite color. Into the shoe is sewn a little pocket with drawstrings of ribbon near the top. This is meant to hold a bobbin of shoe-thread, a spool of button hole silk, a bit of beeswax, a few shoe-buttons, a fold of flannel containing half a dozen needles and a celluloid thimble.

Bodices and plain, untrimmed skirts are much favored for street wear. Washable woollens are chosen for indoor gowns in smooth material. Rough fabrics in stripes and plaids for street wear. Eiffel red is the name given to a new shade. The combination of black and white retains its hold on the fashionable fancy, indeed, it is a more general favorite than ever.

JOHNNY AND THE GOAT



Yet how few persons are really qualified to criticise. Everything was "very nice" or "awfully stupid," and the matter rests (with a long pause). Now, supposing it to be a concert you are discussing, if you are no musician at all, be content to confess your inability to criticise; but if you are a musician, however humble, try at least to recall the titles on the programme and the name of the performers. And should you be a fairly skilled amateur, you would derive the greatest pleasure in making thorough acquaintance with the members on a programme beforehand, and if this be followed up with intelligent criticism during the performance, there would probably result at no distant day an interesting debate with a fellow enthusiast.

It is a notable thing that persons who read a great deal are rarely able to talk well. One would suppose that the quantity of matter they absorb would be returned to the hungry world in the form of brilliant discourses from time to time. And so it should be. These reprehensible beings leave undone the things they ought to do, and they deserve no absolution at the hands of society. Their reading would do them and their social circle vastly more good if they were to mark and re-read passages which appear to them most striking. For be it science or history or light literature, no finite mind can possibly re-