

## BE ON TIME

Having, haply,  
Found your place  
Would you, start well  
In the race?  
Would you, young man,  
In your prime,  
Pass your comrades?  
Be on time!

Tardy doings,  
Listless deeds:  
Gain no laurels,  
Earn no meeds,  
Idle work hours  
Do not pay;  
After labour  
Comes the play.

After action  
Comes the rest;  
Put your muscle  
To the test,  
If the mountain  
You would climb,  
Young beginner,  
Be on time!

"Right foot forward,"  
Firm and true,  
Left foot forward,  
Hope for you!  
Heed not thistle,  
Rock or rag;  
Earth's great heroes  
Never lag!

Up and doing!"  
Is the cry;  
Prize the minutes  
As they fly;  
In all stations,  
In each clime,  
When you labor  
"Be on time!"

## THE GIFT OF THE GAB.

The gift of speech—the power of communicating thoughts and feelings otherwise latent—is significant of intelligence and responsibility, and is a characteristic of an accountable being. We are so habituated to the practice of it, that we do not think of its convenience and necessity. We make use of it as we breathe the atmosphere or eat our food. The commonness of the possession obscures from our view the indispensable nature of it. So long as we retain the faculty of thought and the ability to use one or more of our organs of sense, we are in a position to receive communications from our fellows, and enabled to convey our ideas to others. Without language, however, we should be deprived of the only medium of intercourse we know, and should, in all probability, be as helpless as men are described to have been in the confusion of tongues, because we should be unable to give any sign or sound which could represent to another mind what was passing in our own. Speech is a power for good and for evil. Wisely used it is a grace and a blessing; at the same time "the little member," which has been called "a world of iniquity" and "an unruly evil, full of deadly poison," and which, from its commanding influence, has been compared to the bit of a horse and the helm of a ship, has not changed in any respect since this definition of it was given.

We may generally form a correct idea of a man's character and habits from his ordinary discourse, and may judge of his manners from his style or mode of expression. As a recent writer significantly observes, "Gush flows directly from sentimentalism, verbiage has its root in mental vacuity and exaggerated language is generally founded on insincerity or some other inherent weakness." We all know the egotist, whom any simple observation never fails to remind of some striking event in his own career, or to afford an opportunity to introduce the great "I," or to relate for the fiftieth time the performance of some wondrous achievement by the unparalleled "me." Not less unpleasant is the dictatorial bore, who interrupts your narrative to set you right in a matter of fact: he supplies a word for the use of which you hesitate, corrects your grammar, and knows a great deal more than you can tell him. Equally so are those who think that pauses in conversation are to be avoided, and that their voices must be heard on all occasions. There is, however, a more objectionable style of speech than what is merely rapid and meaningless, in that which is disagreeable and irritating, as well as in that which is dictated by envy, malice, and uncharitableness. A familiar character is the common blab, who retails, with additions and comments, the failings and peculiarities of others, exaggerating and misrepresenting the most ordinary occurrences. The scandal-monger is even more offensive: he carries reports purposely to exasperate and provoke. "Do you hear," says he, "what such an one says of you? Will you put up with it? It is painful to think how much there is in the ordinary proceedings of social life which only deserves to be instantly and for ever forgotten, and it is equally amazing how large a class seems to have no other business but to perpetuate these very things which are mischievous only by being repeated. Between scandal and slander, however, there is a material difference: one is actionable, the other is not. Slander is, perhaps, the most powerful and insidious weapon of offence which can be employed; but the safeguard against it consists in its danger, as it is apt to recoil on him who uses it, because the slanderer is amenable to the law, and if found guilty is subject to punishment. While he thus gratifies his animosity or revenge, he does so at his own risk; but the scandal-monger enjoys the immunity of the anonymous scribbler, and the wounds and irritation he inflicts are generally caused more by the importance we attach to his remarks than to

anything of moment in themselves. It is only by the notice taken of them that they acquire any weight or give uneasiness.

The gentler sex is charged with having more than their due share in the manufacture of small-talk, and of liking to be heard as well as seen. We do not expect such an exhibition of philosophy and tactiturnity from our woman-kind as Ensch and Abernethy would have expected, so we will not quote their uncomplimentary opinions; and although this peculiarity forms the subject of many remarks derogatory to the fair sex, we do not suppose that the ladies are all Mrs. Caudb's or Mrs. Brown's, or that they bear any resemblance to the American females who take to the stump. If, as has been said, they are silent only when the vocal function ceases, we may miss them all the more when we lose them, as a certain learned dean did who had buried a talkative wife. A clerical brother was condoling with him on the loss of his Mary. "Ah," said the sorrowing widower facetiously, "she is *Mare pacificum* now." "Yes," replied his friend, "but not before she was *Mare mortuum*."

Facility in expressing our ideas succinctly and intelligibly is no ordinary gift. To be able to respond to a sudden call for an explanation, or to make a statement with force and clearness, is a qualification which but few possess. Most men have a hobby, or a weakness of some kind, in which they indulge whenever they have the opportunity; but we think there is no talent more admired, or believed by many to be one wherein they excel, than that of being able to address an audience. The secret of much of the popularity of our debating societies, our *soirées*, and our dinner-parties, and of the animated contests for seats at our different boards, vestries, and councils, is the desire of certain individuals to secure a hearing for their "wise saws and modern instances," and to take advantage of every opportunity to appear in the prominent positions which such occasions offer. In the matter of public speaking, it is so common to suppose that the power of unlimited utterance is everything, and the sense or importance of what is said of no moment, that to many fluency of speech is an object in itself, and we are, on all possible occasions, deluged with a plethora of "gab."

There is a class of people made much of in certain sections of society: these are the persons who speak more languages than one. We venture to think, however, that a facility in becoming proficient in this department of knowledge, so far from being a mark of intelligence or mental power, is the reverse. The semi-barbarous Russian is frequently an adept in many of the tongues of modern Europe. Natives of India, of the lowest class, are often accomplished linguists; and Austrian waiters, Egyptian dragomans, and continental couriers are said to speak more languages, and think in fewer, than any other people on the face of the earth. "If I hear a man change from French to German," says a writer in *Blackwood*, "and thence diverge into Italian and Spanish, with possibly a brief excursion into something Scandinavian or Slav, I would no more think of associating him in my mind with anything responsible in station or commanding in intellect than I would think of connecting the servant that announced me with the last brilliant paper in the *Quarterly*." Perhaps it was on the same ground that a certain distinguished traveller was said to have shown his wisdom as well as his modesty in being able to hold his tongue in eight languages. Similar in type are those who interlard their conversation with classical quotations. This habit generally arises from an ostentatious desire to appear more learned than the listeners; but it only suggests the probability that the speaker once learnt the Latin Grammar, and is ignorant of the fact that scholars do not drag their book-learning into conversation.

There are people of other countries to whom talk is a necessity, and with whom the features and the gestures are almost as expressive as their words. The English temperament, however, is not favourable to freedom in social intercourse. To overcome, with us, the disinclination to enter into general conversation is a matter of no little difficulty; and though the art is often acquired by patience and practice, the most polite Briton does not succeed as a rule. Foreigners have long taken notice of our tactiturnity in a fault-finding spirit, attributing this very general peculiarity to hauteur, indifference, or exclusiveness, when it might be more fitly ascribed to our native reticence. Perhaps it is because of the art of conversation being so little cultivated among us, or so difficult of acquirement, that it is a rare thing to be entertained by conversation that is really interesting or instructive. Now man is a gregarious animal: it is his duty to study the good of his neighbour to edification; and how can he do this if he does not talk? In a comparison of our respective views of a subject, such as are freely exchanged in an earnest well-tempered argument, we generally get more than we give, and there is greater pleasure in acquiring the knowledge that is orally communicated than in the perusal of any number of treatises. Our terse and graphic English language is one of the most glorious of our inheritances, and we should therefore use it skillfully and constantly. Talk, as we have shown, may be basely perverted, as every other good gift may; but, as Bentham has said, "No man who possesses the gift of language can, in the presence of others, pass a single hour without the opportunity of communicating enjoyment. One reason why our existence has so much less of happiness crowded

into it than is accessible to us is that we neglect those minute particles of pleasure which every moment offers to our acceptance. If it were but possible to do something towards the revival of genuine talk, a great boon would be conferred on society. Mind would come into closer contact with mind, and there would arise truer sympathies and more highly appreciated bonds of intercourse." We do not sufficiently estimate the value and the charm of intelligent discourse, or the benefits accruing therefrom in the interchange of our ideas—the correct use of language, facility of expression, the practice of paying attention, and as a gauge or test of the extent of our knowledge. Liveliness, moderate self-confidence, and the constant desire and effort to be agreeable, go further towards making pleasant communion than superior ability, extensive accomplishments, or fullness of information. The author of *Friends in Council* says that hearing sermons and speeches, or reading novels and essays, is like walking in the trim gardens of our ancestors; but listening to good conversation is surveying the natural landscape. He agrees with the American philosopher, who asserts that all the means and appliances of modern civilisation culminate in bringing a few intelligent people together to converse, and appreciates the keen sense of enjoyment expressed in Dr. Johnson's "Sir, we had a good talk." We often feel, in coming into refined circles, dull, ignorant, or uninterested, as if we were intruders, because we are not fitted to shine in society, however we may desire it; but should we not talk much or fluently, if we do so discerningly and sensibly, on subjects worthy of attention, the matter and the meaning of our words redeem them from contempt. Sad as it may be to have nothing to say, it is sadder a great deal to say much and mean nothing. "If I were to choose the people," says one, "with whom I would spend my hours of conversation, they should be such as laboured no further than to make themselves readily and clearly apprehended, and would have patience and curiosity to understand me." To have good sense, and ability to express it, are the most essential and necessary qualities in companions. When thoughts arise in us fit to utter among familiar friends, there needs but little care in clothing them. There is a charm in animated and intelligent conversation which no report of it can properly convey. To any one who had been privileged to hear Robert Hall or the witty canon of St. Paul's in ordinary discourse, how stale and vapid would the same words appear on paper! There would be lacking the earnest countenance, the impressive manner, the infectious sympathy and the responding smile, the nod of approval or the complimentary plaudits, which made the utterances impressive and memorable. This is the secret of the lively interest which accompanies the preaching of Punsdon, and Caird, and Spurgeon, and Beecher of our own day, as it was the key to the popularity and success of Massillon, Whitfield, Wesley, and Chalmers in the past. Their written or reported sermons convey the sense, no doubt; but what a poor transcript are they of soul speaking to soul—the eloquence that made the "thoughts to breathe and the words to burn"! In the cold and unimpassioned printed page we miss the thousands of upturned, earnest, expectant faces, the circumstances which gave point and force to a remark or an illustration, and the voice and presence and manner of the preacher.

The men who make their own way in the world, the statesmen in the van of political life, the writers who amuse or instruct their generation, and the soldiers who add to our military renown, are heroes in a utilitarian community like ours; but, perhaps because we admire most in others the qualities in which we are ourselves deficient, they are not so exceptional, either in popularity or estimation, as our gifted speakers. We peruse with unflagging interest the sayings of wit and wisdom reported from the speeches and conversations of our talking philosophers, and like to preserve collections of their *ana* and table-talk. Of the celebrated talkers of modern times, Coleridge stands preeminent. He was wont to harangue for hours in a monotonous metaphysical strain, oftener to the weariness than the edification of his hearers, and would resent any interruption as an unwarrantable liberty. "Did you ever hear me preach?" he once asked Lamb. "I n-e-v-e-r heard you do anything else," was his reply. John Sterling, describing an audience with the great talker, says, "Our interview lasted three hours, during which he talked two hours and three quarters." De Quincy, a *fac simile* of Coleridge in tastes and habits, resembled him also in this particular, and would have kept his auditors all night under the spell of his silvery tongue with his hazy philosophical speculations. Carlyle, whatever he may be now, was at one time a prince of talkers. If, as has been stated, the *Latter-Day Pamphlets* were spoken before they were committed to writing, Christopher North had some ground for saying that the Chelsea prophet had succeeded to the throne vacated by Coleridge. In social debate Johnson was, in his day, an undisputed master. His extensive knowledge, his wonderful memory, and his love of argument made him a formidable opponent. Except Burke, he seldom encountered a foeman worthy of his steel, and his standing thus unrivalled led him to be imperious and overbearing, impatient of contradiction, and by no means an agreeable controversialist. Diderot could talk down any *salon* in Paris. Brougham was wont to launch forth on subjects the most diverse, which made his discourse resemble no

thing so much as the continuous reading of the pages of an encyclopedia. Mr. Greville, in his gossiping *Journal of the Reigns of George IV. and William IV.*, says of him, "I never saw any man whose conversation impressed me with such an idea of superiority. Rogers said, on the morning of his departure, 'This morning Solon, Lycurgus, Demosthenes, Archimedes, and Sir Isaac Newton, Lord Chesterfield, and a great many more, went away in a post-chaise.'" The late Mr. Buckle was likewise a phenomenon in this respect. Miss Power, who met him at Cairo, says, "I have known most of the celebrated talkers of the time—when Sydney Smith rejoined in his green old age, and Luttrell, and Rogers, and Moore were still capable of giving forth an occasional flash, and when the venerable Brougham and yet more venerable Lyndhurst delighted in friendly and brilliant sparring at dinner-tables. I have known some brilliant talkers in Paris—Lamartine, and Dumas, and Cabarrus, and, brightest of all, the late Madame Emile de Girardin. I knew Douglas Jerrold, and am still happy to claim acquaintance with others whose names are well known. But for inexhaustibility, versatility, memory, and self-confidence, I never met any to compete with Buckle. Talking was meat and drink and sleep to him. He lived upon talk. He could keep pace with any number of interlocutors on any number of subjects, from the abstrusest point on the abstrusest science to the lightest *jeu d'esprit*, and talk them all down, and be quite ready to start afresh."

But loquacity is not necessarily good talking, nor is it always conversation. Learned and dreary monologues are its merest substitutes, and our wonder and admiration of the intellectual exhibition does not compensate for the want of sympathy between speaker and hearer. It does not follow, however, because a man speaks much, that he does not sometimes say something worth hearing. Many talk freely from a desire to communicate information, and take pleasure in yielding tribute of their learning and experience to appreciative listeners. Very enjoyable must have been the table-talk of Luther, who exhibited the variety of his powers by the fireside not less than in the pulpit. Dr. Chalmers carried his Christian usefulness with great effect into the home circle. Wilberforce, sensible of the importance of conversation, made it a study; and his gifted son, the late Bishop of Winchester, was a valuable acquisition in any company. Notwithstanding what has been said of Macaulay's "flashes of silence," and of his "talking like a book in breeches," Dean Milman says that, in the quiet intercourse with a single friend, no great talker was more free and at his ease. There was the most agreeable interchange of thought. In a larger circle his manners were frank and open, and in conversation a commanding voice, high animal spirits, quickness of apprehension, a flow of language rapid as it was inexhaustible, gave him a larger share, but a share which few were not delighted to yield to him. Genial and pleasant also was the company of Dugald Stewart, Henry Mackenzie, and Dr. Gregory, who were all welcome guests at the social board: of Sir James Mackintosh, whose conversation informed and never wearied; of Theodore Hook and his astonishing improvisation; of Lamb, with his quaint humour and book-lore; of James Smith, the brother of Horace, a true wit and one of the most amiable of men; and of Walter Scott, the genial and instructive companion, who, whether by the fireside or out of doors, could be almost equally delightful on farming or domestic matters as he was on history, antiquities, and poetry.

Literature is speech reduced to method. It requires more forethought, because it is more deliberate in expression and more permanent as a record. Though we may equally express our ideas by speech or writing, he who excels in the one method does not necessarily excel in the other. Many learned men have never been able to give verbal expression to their thoughts with any degree of freedom, and a ready speaker does not always write logically or well. Philosophically stated, in a good writer we have intellect dissociated from the emotions; in the free talker the intellect moves in alliance with the emotions, and deals with its subject according to impulse. We are often carried away by a ready speaker, and seldom think of analysing his logic, scrutinising his argument, or criticising his language. We are captivated by an image, puzzled by a paradox, or fascinated by a gesture. After the voice has ceased, we remain for a time subject to its spell; but when we come calmly to reflect on the substance of the oration, or afterwards read a report of it, we wonder how we have been so attracted. Mere talk is not, therefore, a criterion of depth or subtlety, nor does it always exhibit a man at his best. Among many learned and graceful writers who made but a poor *vis-à-vis* exhibition of their powers we may instance Addison and Goldsmith, Longfellow and Tennyson, Hooker and Young, La Fontaine and Marmon-tel, Gray and Wordsworth, Leigh Hunt and Hood, Byron and Dr. Channing, Corneille and Jean Paul, Tasso and Molière.

The gift of speaking in public is *sui generis*. It requires a special talent, and there are particular professions for the due performance of whose duties it is a necessary qualification. To address an audience effectively presupposes more than mere fluency of utterance. A definite end must be kept in view, so that, whether by convincing the judgment or informing the understanding, the purpose of the speech shall be unmistakable.