

## THE ART OF CONVERSATION.

BY BERTHA DAMARIS KNOBE.

Conversation is indeed an art. To be able to say the right thing at the right time, to give utterance to agreeable thoughts and maintain constancy to individual principles, is an accomplishment rare as it is pleasing. The soothing words at random spoken, as well as the little shafts at random sent, are at times extremely difficult of management.

Conversational brilliancy may be inherited or may be acquired—at any rate, it is a gift devoutly to be wished. It is distinctively an accomplishment that is educational as well as pleasurable. Indeed, some people declare that their brains are fed through their ears. Madame De Stael, for instance.

In the first place, I do not believe that good conversational powers necessarily imply a polished intellect. Bruyere struck the truth on the head when he said: "The best society and conversation is that in which the heart has a greater share than the head." Every person knows with what intense interest he has fairly hung upon the words of an illiterate conversationalist endowed with the gift more alluring than the application of grammatical rules—kindly good nature and intense sympathy.

Holmes was inclined to believe that "whatever comes from the brain carries the hue of the place it came from, and whatever comes from the heart carries the heat and color of its birth-place." And so it is that the thoughts from the brain, unwarmed by the heart, are apt to be blanched, chilled—pure reason, if you will. But the thought that flows from the brain to the heart, and bubbles over the lips a warm, rich, sympathetic thought, is the thought that strikes a sympathetic chord in the listener's heart. In a word, the brain conversationalist never interests one as the brain-heart conversationalist.

A second requisite of a conver-

sationalist is to have something to say. "Say something or nothing," and "unless you think more than you say, you talk too much," are excellent mottoes for the conversational aspirant to file away in one of the pigeon-holes of his brain, as perpetual reminders for every-day application. Carlyle said, "Speak not at all, in any wise, till you have something to speak," which is another way of putting the same truism.

Mere talking is not to converse. Talk is usually broken, familiar and versatile. Conversation is more continuous and sustained, and turns ordinarily upon topics of higher interest. Dr. Johnson once remarked of an evening spent in society that there had been a great deal of talk, but no conversation. So the pleasurable interchange of ideas depends not upon how much, but what is said. Some people, however, delude themselves with the idea that it is preferable to frivolously discuss a shallow and unworthy theme rather than only at intervals to say something worth the saying. And thus they gain the name of unusual loquacity. But what, after all, is in such a name?

Indeed, some people seem to detach their brains from their tongues, chatter like so many magpies but—say nothing. Holmes thus describes such light chit-chat: "Pleasant, airy, complimentary, the little flakes of flattery glimmering in their talk like the bits of gold-leaf in *eau-de-vie de Dantzig*; their accents flowing on in a soft ripple—never a wave, and never a calm; words nicely fitted, but never a colored phrase, or a high-flavored epithet; they turn air into syllables so gracefully that we find meaning for the music they make as we find faces in the coals, and fairy palaces in the clouds. There is something very odd, though, about this mechanical talk."

Parrots may rehearse words learned by rote in much the same way, but such weak attempt at talk is not real conversation. Such efforts constrain-