

ABUSES IN CONVERSATION.

HERE are many abuses in modern conversation. Among them are ranked those of idle talk, slang and satire. All of these are so widespread that they deserve some serious attention. They slip into our conversation without our knowledge or consent. From those attending school, to those in middle life, and even to those on the brink of the grave, everyone indulges in them. Our papers are largely filled thus. How much interest would be taken out of our papers were all scandals, bits of small talk, and other things of a like nature excluded? Do we not know that the papers take hold of any such talk and make the most of it, especially if it shows someone in a bad light; and is it not so that the paper which indulges in this most is most popular? If this is true, it must be that the popular mind demands such food.

To the harm that is done by this talking there is no end. Even the so-called harmless gossip is apt to produce a spirit of levity and shallowness, and makes one less trustful in mankind, less confident in one's own friends, for however harmless it may appear, looked at from a distance, it does not seem so harmless when we think of our names as the subject of such talk. With this spirit of levity grows up one of distaste for solid food for the mind, one of unthoughtfulness, the worst thing honest men have to fight against in this century, and the deadliest enemy of true advancement. Ruskin has spoken of it as one of the mysteries of life that men should spend their lives in frivolity, whilst a little thought would show them how much better things they might have.

Another fault common to many is nicely described in the following lines:—

"Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,
And without sneering, teach the rest to sneer;
Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,
Just hint a fault and hesitate dislike;
Alike reserved to blame or to commend,
A tim'rous foe and a suspicious friend."

This faint speaking is a marked element in modern conversation. In speaking of persons we say, "very nice", "very good", with a suspicious accent on the "very", and if further interrogated as to anything derogatory to their character, we answer, "Oh, no!" in a voice that makes it sound very much like "yes". In the play of "Othello" all the after misery is caused by just a few words spoken thus suspiciously to the Moor. Thus we prejudice the minds of others, weaken our own, and cause a great deal of bitterness to unoffending persons.

Following "harmless" gossip there is bitter gossiping; repeating all the bad points known, and, perhaps, unconsciously, adding to the story. By this great numbers are wounded where they would most feel it, in their reputation and honor; even if they do not know of it, such is its prevalence, that nearly every one feels its dread influence. It gives us a lower estimate of the world; we are taught to

ascribe low motives to deeds; we become false in the fear of having our innermost thoughts talked of and criticised by the staring world outside. By ascribing low motives to worthy deeds, sometimes good works are made of no effect; some shortcoming brought to light casts a shadow over a man's whole life.

Another part of conversation, sometimes called the most interesting, is holding up persons to ridicule, and this is always done when the persons are not present. This is most cowardly and ungenerous. It exposes to public gaze all the little infirmities or foibles of good people, sometimes warping and narrowing natures by making a laughing-stock of virtue.

Slang is, perhaps, the most modern abuse. It forms a large part and a very expressive part of our vocabulary. The chief danger from this is that it hinders thought. Slang words seem to come so naturally to our tongues that we do not stop to think of more correct ones. In some cases, indeed, words, formerly disreputable, have become as good coin with us, the language having needed them. But these words are only a small portion of the army of such words as we hear on the street every day. Another loss from the use of slang is inaccuracy of speech, one so-called good slang word, being made to stand for a number of plain English words.

The only way to avoid these abuses is to set a constant watch over our tongues, and this will serve the double purpose of keeping our conversation pure and of giving to our words a power and dignity which they otherwise would lack.

L. L.

OUR WORD CONTEST.

For the next three weeks our word contest will be open to all. To the person sending the Editor the list containing the greatest number of words formed from the letters of the word "Hoodoo," we will give:

1. A beautiful house and lot on Queen's avenue.
2. One grand piano, valued at twelve dollars.
3. A baby carriage; and also one hundred and twenty other prizes, consisting of, Shetland pony, ratskin sacking, "How to grow rich," Maltese cat, box of cigars, "Life of Birchall," and dozens of other valuable prizes.

When sending in lists state age; whether married or single or widow(er).

At least eight thousand words must be sent in.

The lists must be received before the 1st of Nov., 1890.

Do not miss the golden opportunity.

[If we have not offered every advantage that the other papers offer, we have omitted them unconsciously, and will rectify them on notification from our readers, all of whom we wish to obtain a prize.]

If we must lash one another, let it be with the manly strokes of wit and satire; for I am of the old philosopher's opinion, that if I must suffer from one or the other, I would rather it should be from the paw of the lion, than from the hoof of the ass.

SPECTATOR.