

social consideration. A little experience abroad will make an American painfully conscious of his national defect. In the very act of introducing himself to a German as an *Amerikaner*, he will almost certainly slur the unaccented vowels, and, if he be from New England, fail to give due value to the letter *r*. It is then that he will begin to deplore the birthright of the modern American, the liberty to talk in any way he pleases, and to produce a jargon of slovenly pronunciation and street slang, uttered with a harsh nasal twang. Let us beware of reaching the condition of Greece and Rome of old, and of Turkey and parts of Germany and France, and other European countries of to-day, where the literary and spoken languages are entirely distinct, and the uneducated man is obliged to study a book in his own tongue as he would a foreign language.

Of course, the most assiduous attention to the rules of good talking will not produce conversation; for, as the "Poet at the Breakfast-table" says: "Good talk is not a matter of will at all; it depends—you know we are all half-materialists nowadays—on a certain amount of active congestion of the brain, and that comes when it is ready, and not before." As in producing fire with tinder, flint, and steel, so in conversation, "after hammering away with mere words, the spark of a happy expression takes somewhere among the mental combustibles, and then we have a pretty, wandering, scintillating play of eloquent thought that enlivens, if it does not kindle, all around it." And then we are told that the explanation of the phenomenon lies in the fact that a "chance thought or expression strikes the nervous centre of consciousness, as the rowel of a spur stings the flank of a racer. Away through all the telegraphic radiations of the nervous cords flashes the intelligence that the brain is kindling, and must be fed with something or other or burn to ashes. And all the great hydraulic engines pour in their scarlet blood—a stream like burning rock-oil. You can't order these organic processes any more than a milliner can make a rose."

Too great an effort to make conversation is disastrous to its spontaneity and charm. All have had experience of those men of *esprit* who, in the words of the "Autocrat," "have what may be called jerky minds. Their thoughts do not run in the natural order of sequence. They say bright things on all possible subjects, but their zigzags rack you to death. After a jolting half-hour with one of these jerky companions, talking with a dull friend affords great relief. It is like taking the cat in your lap after holding a squirrel."

Equally wearisome is the man with whom conversation is impossible because he talks always in monologue. Coleridge would pump his listeners full on the slightest provocation. "Zounds! I was never so bethumped with words," exclaimed Sir Walter Scott, in describing a dinner-party at which he was forced to listen to a long and learned harangue from the Highgate sage, on Homer and the Samothracian mysteries and the Wolfian hypothesis. Theodore Hook, after enduring a three-hours' discourse from "the rapt one with the god-like forehead"—a monologue suggested by the sight of two soldiers sitting by the roadside—exclaimed: "Thank heaven! you did not see a regiment, Coleridge, for in that case you would never have stopped." The true master of the ready give-and-take of conversation, as distinguished from monologue, is like Mr. Bagehot's subtle reader in the essay on Gibbon: he pursues with a fine attention the most delicate and imperceptible ramifications of a topic, "marks slight traits, notes, changing manners, is minutely attentive to every prejudice and awake to every passion, watches syllables and waits on words, is alive to the light airs of nice association which float about every subject—the notes in the bright sunbeam—the delicate gradations of the passing shadows."

A common trick of the man who would converse fluently is to guide the conversation into some pathway already many times trodden by him—into one of those ruts or grooves into which, especially if he be a professor or lecturer or schoolmaster or clergyman, his conversation is perpetually sliding. This is not a practice to be followed. We like rather to converse with such men as Sydney Smith, who talked not for display, but because his mind was a spring bubbling over with ideas, and, as he said, he must speak or burst. He talked on any subject that was started, rarely starting anything of his own, and making it a rule to take as many half-minutes as he could get, but never to talk more

than a half-minute without pausing, in order that others might have an opportunity to strike in. In this he was quite unlike the Frenchman who observed the contrary principle, and caused an envious and impatient rival, watching for an opening, to murmur: "S'il crache ou tousse, il est perdu!"

In general company, the conversational style should be light and constantly passing from theme to theme. If, as Dr. Johnson has said, solid conversation be indulged in, "people differ in opinion, and get into bad humour, or some of the company, who are not capable of such conversation, are left out, and feel themselves uneasy." For this reason Sir Robert Walpole said he always talked gossip and scandal at his table, because in that none were too shallow-brained to join. Whatever be the theme of conversation, whether weighty or light, much depends, for its ready flow and entire success, on how much is taken for granted and how much is left unsaid. Conversationalists should beware of insisting on nothing but absolute truths rigidly stated in the form of propositions. Conversation, like the other fine arts, aims at the ideal, and must be allowed to state its truths with embellishment, with modification, or even with exaggeration. One man who persists in being literal can spoil the talk of a whole company of wits; like the production of a well-trained orchestra, "its fluent harmonies may be spoiled by the intrusion of a single harsh note."

Bacon has a word to say on the mode of delivery—in his "Short Notes for Civil Conversation"—which may be of interest. "In all kinds of speech," he says, "either pleasant, grave, severe, or ordinary, it is convenient to speak leisurely, and rather drawlingly, than hastily; because hasty speech confounds the memory, and oftentimes, besides the unseemliness, drives the man either to stammering, a non-plus, or harping on that which should follow; whereas a slow speech confirmeth the memory, addeth a conceit of wisdom to the hearers, besides a seemliness of speech and countenance."

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The Woodman.

Mrs. Frederic Harrison, in Temple Bar.

"Nightingales warbled without,
Within was weeping for thee:
Shadows of three dead men
Walked in the walks with me—
Shadows of three dead men—and thou
Wast one of the three."

—Tennyson.

OUR village, as we have said, stands in a clearing in a woodland country. Below us stretches a great oak-forest on its ancient home of clay, and around and above us grow almost every variety of tree. Beeches, with their splendour of autumn colouring, the feathery ash and huge chestnut-trees, not the chestnut only that reminds one in shape of the trees in a child's toy-box, but the beautiful Spanish variety, its trunk curving flames.

There is perhaps no country so melancholy yet so fascinating as a forest country, nor one in which the individual finds his own personality so completely reflected in nature. The dweller in the mountains has ever before him the sense of the unattainable, as the eternal hills disclose themselves fold behind fold; but the forest whispers to you of your own thought; what you left in its charge yesterday you find again to-morrow. Your own thoughts are but hidden among the trees.

The forest is even yet the great fact about our countryside. Down to the year 1700, or thereabouts, the forest had been the Birmingham of England, and even so late as the last century it saw the smelting of iron and the casting of cannon. Now the fires are out, and the forges cold, the forest seems to have reverted to its original uses. A number of small industries have sprung up anew which give employment to the woodlander all the year round, and which furnish work to many farm-labourers when farming operations are at a standstill.

Occupations are still more or less hereditary amongst the country folk about us, but in no craft is the work carried on so steadily from father to son as in the craft of the woodlander. There is perhaps a feeling that it is an artist's life, something apart from and superior to the ordinary agricultural work; perhaps, too, there is an inherited instinct which draws men to the woods and gives them what seems