

THEMES FOR CONVERSATION.

There is perhaps no department of Christian life and influence susceptible of greater improvement than daily conversation. At the family meals, in the evening circle, and in the social intervals of business, the watchful Christian will find many opportunities to give a profitable direction to the course of familiar remark. In order to do this, there is often requisite some previous care and preparation.

At the present day, there are several themes of conversation often introduced, which, as they are generally handled, are unprofitable. One is, the doctrine of Millerism. Unless some person is really anxious to obtain light upon it, or needs some aid against its delusion, we think it had better be shunned. It is almost impossible in a mixed company, to secure for it a serious treatment, and if the ordinary witticisms are indulged, and ludicrous anecdotes retailed, we may be trifling, ere we are aware, with the salvation of immortal souls, or indulging in flippant remarks, which would be as appropriate to the doctrine of the last great day, as to the baseless predictions of Miller. Such conversation is not favourable to spiritual religion. When the subject is introduced, the care of the Christian should be to use it as a path to more serious and substantial doctrines, or to a contemplation of those great and precious promises which respect the restoration of the Jews and the conversion of the world. Or it may serve as an occasion of remark on our latter end, and the inconceivable importance of being always ready to meet our Lord, when he calls for us in the solemn hour of death.

Another topic just now prevalent, is the frequency of fearful murders in our land. The duty of having good rulers, efficient laws, and prompt officers of justice, is one which every one should feel, because all are deeply interested in having our land cleansed from the unavenged blood of the innocent. But the details of evidence, as brought before our courts, and the various local circumstances and various connections of the deed, should be carefully avoided as matters of common conversation. They exert an evil effect by familiarizing the mind with associations of a corrupting character.

As a general rule, it is important also to avoid most of the common rumours of the day. Many of them amount to no more than unprofitable gossip respecting men in public life, or the private character of individuals in ordinary society. Hence, they degenerate into scandal—misrepresentations of the absent and defenceless, and occasion many hasty expressions which inflict unnecessarily a lasting injury upon some of our fellow-men.

It is not sufficient merely to shun the evil, but it is our duty to encourage and secure the good. The discoveries of modern sciences—the reports of intelligent travellers—the labours and travels of our missionaries at different stations, the theme of some new and profitable book not yet generally circulated—the nature and uses of the fine-arts—the history of our country and of other lands—the prospects of the church of Christ—the doctrines, precepts, prophecies, and promises of the Bible, its geography and biography, its beauty of style, and exuberance of evidence—the cause of humanity everywhere, however depraved or promoted—these are some of the ample

and teeming fields which invite us to read in order to think, and think in order to converse in an entertaining and instructive manner.

It is because there is so much levity of mind common among so many professing Christians, that we have so much contemptible nonsense dealt out by ladies' men, and so much silly simpering and giggling among those who are capable of ranking among rational beings, if they were only aware of their powers.

General improvement in conversational habits is a powerful means of elevating society. Often it is in animated conversation that the scholar obtains his profoundest thought, the rhetorician his purest illustration, and the business man his most practical hints. Conversation should preserve the tone of kindness. It should be made the instrument of expressing benevolent affections, in all their variety, tenderness, and elegance.

Conversation should not be left to float naturally along, although violent interruptions and changes are to be generally avoided. An active mind of ordinary skill, vigilant for doing good, will find sufficient occasion to give a new direction to the course of talk when it is degenerating, in some remark that is made, or some circumstance which will naturally occur.

Those, however, who wish to do good in conversation, must not be overbearing or officious. They must wait for the proper time, and cherish the manner of modesty, as well as cultivate correct and forcible language. Yet modesty must not decline to dullness, but a certain freedom, liveliness and promptness, is essential to a pleasant companion in the social circle.

We conclude with an extract from Cowper's poem on conversation, which it will be profitable to read entirely through, for those who wish to do good to their fellow-men, and glorify God in the use of the tongue:

"And first, let no man charge me, that I mean
To clothe in sable every social theme,
And give good company a face severe,
As if they met around a father's bier;
For, tell some men, that pleasure all their bent,
And laughter all their work, is life mispent;
Their wisdom bursts into this sage reply,
'Then mirth is sin, and we should always cry.'
To find the medium asks some share of wit,
And therefore 'tis a mark fools never hit.

But though life's valley be a vale of tears,
A brighter scene beyond that vale appears,
Where glory with a light that never fades,
Shoots between scattered rocks and opening
shades;

And while it shows the land the soul desires,
The language of the land she seeks inspires.
Thus touched, the tongue receives a sacred sense
Of all that was absurd, profane, impure;
Held within modest bounds, the tide of speech
Pursues the course that truth and nature teach.
No longer labours merely to produce
The pomp of sound or tinkle without use;
Wherever it winds, the salutary stream,
Sprightly and fresh, enriches every theme;
While all the happy man possessed before,
The gift of nature or the classic store,
Is made subservient to the grand design
For which Heaven formed the faculty divine."
—New York Evangelist.