

Language is a gift of nature to man, by means of which he is enabled to express his thoughts and communicate them to his fellow men. This interchange of thought is called conversation. The use of this power is what we may understand by the art of conversation. Some persons have the ability to express their thoughts easier and to a greater extent than others, the words of the one flowing incessantly, while of the other they come sparingly and with effort. But however great the natural power of expression may be, that alone will not make a good talker. A person cannot go on talking forever without something to say, any more than a mill can continually turn out flour without wheat to grind.

The art of conversation is said to be dying out; This may be due in a large measure to the constant reading of the present day. A book is read simply to say it has been read, and but little thought is bestowed upon it. If after we have read a book we would talk about what we have read, it would impress itself on our minds and furnish food for thought.

The failure of great literary authors as



Pope, Dryden, and Goldsmith in conversation was due to the fact that their thoughts were devoted entirely to writing and as deep thoughts do not lie near the surface, their ideas did not present themselves fast enough to be used in conversation.

The topic of conversation should, if possible, be one in which all take an interest. Subjects that are distasteful to any of the company should be avoided; For while we are in the society of others, we should throw off our business cares and trials, and strive to please and be pleased with the company, and be willing to give and receive. Where there is mutual sympathy the thoughts of one, will quicken the imagination and inspire thought in others, so the conversation will become animated and full of interest.

Abundant and accurate knowledge is one essential, in order to sustain an entertaining and profitable discourse. Burke whose mind was stored with information could talk with any one on any subject, and his conversation was always rich and full of instruction. The materials for conversation may be acquired by reading the newspapers and periodicals so as to be acquainted with



current events, and the daily history of the country; by studying the best authors so as to be familiar with their thoughts and opinions, and also, by cultivating the powers of observation, whereby facts are secured that could be obtained in no other way.

If a person has this material, giving his own views on the subject it will facilitate thought in his companions, and if a difference of opinion exists, by hearing both sides, each will be able to see the true relation of things. We can therefore measure ourselves by our companions, and avoid many mistakes otherwise unnoticed.

A person's manner has considerable to do with the way in which his speech is received. One may, by his manner and conversation, persuade another who would remain unmoved by a written petition to do a thing or change his opinion. Arguments are brought forth and presented in such a way and at such a time as to convince him of their truth.

"Our sympathy" as some one has said "is always awakened more by hearing the speaker, than by reading his works"



in our closets." Madame de Staël had such an entertaining manner that on one occasion a thunderstorm was unnoticed by those in her company, their minds being entirely absorbed in her conversation.

In order that there be a free expression of thought the manner should be composed and natural. Many bashful persons can converse well at home, but when in company their powers seem to be taken from them. They have a hesitating and embarrassed manner and no one enjoys hearing them talk. While if they could lose themselves in the thoughts before them, they could converse with ease and freedom.

Our conversation is improved by our command of words, which comes only by practise, for unless we use the best words every day we shall not be apt to use them in company. In order to express our thoughts clearly we need to enlarge our vocabulary. When we have to stop and hesitate for words to express our meaning, the thought is taken away from the subject. As Mr Beecher has expressed it; The best language in the world is that which is



so simple and transparent that no one thinks of the words which you use, but only of the thought or feeling which they express."

The art of listening goes with that of conversation. Though we should not simply be silent but should give our attention and follow the thoughts presented, and patiently wait to hear a person to the end, by which means we shall receive many a treasure of mind and heart which would otherwise be withheld. Every man no matter what his station in life has some valuable information of which we are ignorant. Knowledge is thus gained which could not be obtained from the written or printed page. Man is eminently a social being, which is shown by his disposition whenever he has discovered any new thing, to go and tell some one about it.

Conversation has been called the idle man's business and the busy man's recreation and not without some reason for certain it is that many gaps are filled by it which would otherwise be long and tedious. Some of our pleasantest hours are spent in conversation. When we are cast down and in need of comfort and cheer, after a short time spent

with our friends in conversation will revive our spirits and we shall go on our way rejoicing.

As conversation gives new pleasure to life and makes it worth living, as well as being a means of mental discipline and improvement, we ought not to neglect it, as something so trivial as not to need any special cultivation; for if we strive to improve ourselves at every opportunity we shall find a corresponding growth of our powers.

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