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# THE ART OF CONVERSING

OR

## DIALOGUES OF THE DAY

NAWAB SALAR JUNG BAHADUR,





# THE ART OF CONVERSING

OR

## Dialogues of the Day

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"MANNERS AND RULES OF GOOD SOCIETY"



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## P R E F A C E.

"THE Art of Conversing," based upon a former work, "Society Small Talk," has been written with a view to demonstrate how easily conversation to suit every situation and circumstance can be made without any appreciable effort, and examples of this, in the form of dialogue, have been given throughout the entire work.

The idea in writing these dialogues has been to show how surroundings may best be made use of in starting and maintaining conversation on the spur of the moment between comparative strangers, and how previous knowledge and trivial facts may be drawn upon to serve this purpose.



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# THE ART OF CONVERSING; OR, DIALOGUES OF THE DAY.



## CHAPTER I.

### THE ART OF MAKING CONVERSATION.

AGREEABLE conversation, the current coin of society, is the key, as it were, to all pleasant intimacies and acquaintanceships, although a vast difference exists between a brilliant conversationalist and an agreeable person. The one possesses wit, humour, repartee, a ready flow of ideas, a good memory, great powers of rhetoric—in fact, versatile talent, if not exactly genius; while the other brings into society only an average amount of intelligence, tact, good-humour, and geniality, combined with a ready facility of expression and an adaptability of manner; and



## *The Art of*

although but few are endowed with the gifts which distinguish the one, it is within the capacity of all to acquire the other.

It is a very general lament amongst people well educated, but upon whom Nature has not conferred any choice gifts of mind—in other words, people whom it would be idle to call clever—that they never know what to say, or that they “could have got on so much better with So-and-so if they had only known what to talk about,” or that “So-and-so appeared to be a very good fellow, but they could not get on with him somehow.” Not knowing what to talk about is the secret why so many people in society appear to be dull, stupid, or commonplace; they probably merit neither of these uncomplimentary adjectives, and would very much object to such being applied to them.

The art of making a continuous flow of really agreeable, pleasant conversation is not to be overestimated, and those who are masters of this art stand upon a vantage ground which is of real service to them at every phase of their social career.

- By conversation is meant not merely agreeable nothings, but the interchange of civilities, thoughts and ideas on general subjects, all of which form the

## *Making Conversation.*

basis of conversation between acquaintances, and, indeed, of all conversation which is not of either an intimate or private character, or of the nature of an important communication, but which simply takes place between persons meeting in society, and who have no common bond of union beyond the interest of the moment.

There are many things which tend to form a bond of union between strangers meeting even for the first time ; mutual friends are a common bond between both men and women—and with men, mutual professions and mutual pursuits are equally so. Men, as a rule, are quick to discover any mutual link of interest between each other, while women, on the contrary, are comparatively slow at discovering one, unless it is one not easily overlooked.

Remarks or observations, of whatever character, cannot be looked upon as legitimate conversation when they are made with a purpose, and convey a statement, and thus have an end and aim of their own.

If there is any elementary knowledge to be acquired in the art of making conversation, it would probably be to consider in the first place what subject would most likely prove agreeable to the

individual with whom one is about to converse ; this might be arrived at by further considering that individual's sex, age, social position, known proclivities, and pursuits ; and although the proclivities and pursuits which distinguish her, or him, may not be known to a passing acquaintance, yet the sex, age, and social position of a person are at all times sufficient indications on which to form an accurate idea as to the subject of conversation most likely to be of interest for the time being.

A likely subject of conversation having been thus arrived at, the next consideration is how it should be handled, or how it might best be introduced. To an intelligent mind three or four\* ideas would probably suggest themselves, all equally apropos of the occasion.

These additional ideas should be looked upon as a reserve force, to be called up at any moment in the event of a first conversational effort falling rather flat or having become speedily exhausted through the unskilful manner in which it was originated ; or supposing the contrary to be the case, and the first start to have been a happy one, **then**, by a few judicious remarks, the conversation could be led into the direction in which these ideas, either singly, collectively, or consecutively, might

be brought into play; and thus the ball of conversation would be briskly kept up, and those dead locks in conversation, known as awkward pauses, avoided.

When a subject of conversation is allowed to die out of itself, or to exhaust itself, then a complete silence must ensue, unless out of the ashes of the one subject a new topic should arise, or by the conversation being turned into one or other of those channels which have been already alluded to, viz. the "reserve forces."

Having thus acquired possession of an idea, the little ship should not be abruptly launched into deep waters, but should be first permitted to glide gently and smoothly into the shallows; that is to say, the conversation should not be commenced by broadly and roundly stating a fact, or didactically expressing an opinion, as the subject would be thus virtually or summarily disposed of, or perhaps be met with a "Really" or "Indeed," or some equally brief monosyllabic reply. If an opposite opinion were held by the person to whom the remark were addressed, he might not, if a stranger, care to express it in the form of a direct contradiction, or actual dissent.

To glide imperceptibly into conversation is the

object to be attained. To be desirous, as it were, of learning and of hearing the opinions and ideas of others, is a far surer way of drawing them into conversation, and of giving scope for the exercise of their conversational powers, and at the same time of affording room for the display of one's own resources, than by being egotistically and curtly explicit as to one's own opinions and convictions.

Again, to evince a kindly interest in an individual with whom one is conversing, is both flattering and agreeable, while to put home questions or questions of a wholly personal nature—the evidence either of an idle curiosity or utter thoughtlessness—is the reverse of flattering, and is as illbred in the one as it is disagreeable to the other.

A brusque, abrupt, jerky manner of speaking is often the result of nervousness and self-consciousness, and imbues the most innocent remark with a catechising tone, creating an unfavourable impression upon the mind or susceptibilities of the person thus addressed.

Mental exertion is as necessary in the art of conversing as in the exercise or practice of any other art: This fact is too much lost sight of, and many are apt to imagine that without the smallest

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effort or exertion a sudden rush of brilliant ideas floods the soul of the agreeable conversationalist, and envy his wonderful and superior gifts, never attributing these gifts to the natural exercise of an average intelligence. The vapid vacant manner common to many who appear vainly seeking to derive inspiration from the inanimate objects which surround them, precludes the possibility of holding any conversation with them beyond the merest trivialities; they answer "Yes," and "No;" and people, with a shrug, say of them, "A pretty woman, but nothing in her," "A good-looking man, but so dull!"

Next to the good talker ranks the good listener, and the good listener is always voted a most agreeable person; a good listener appears to be keenly interested in the conversation addressed to him, and with great tact and judgment is able to put in just at the right moment the right remark, calculated to assist and to sustain the conversation, but great discretion is needed in not interrupting a flow of ideas or a graphic narration by an ill-timed observation or an equally inappropriate question.

It is not seldom that a good listener also possesses considerable conversational powers, the

mental exertions required of both listener and talker being equal if not synonymous—the qualities of the one being also the qualities of the other.

A mediocre egotistical talker proves, as a rule, but a bad listener, his egotism asserts itself at every turn of the conversation. Let him but have half an idea on the subject in hand than he hastens to unfold it, regardless of how the interruption will be received ; but when a good listener has an idea worth the hearing, he reserves it until a break in the conversation admits of his giving it utterance. Impulsive people are too often apt to offer these inopportune interruptions, rather, perhaps, from mere thoughtlessness than from egotism or 'self-importance.

Voice and manner are of paramount importance in the art of conversing. It is a very erroneous idea to suppose that men or women in fashionable society, or what is termed the "best society," or "good society," speak with a lisp or a languid drawl, or with any mannerism whatever. Well-bred people speak in a natural and unaffected manner, the intonation thoroughly distinct, each syllable of each word being clearly pronounced, but without pedantry or exaggeration.

The modulation of the tones of the voice is also

a great point with the well-educated ; and this it is which gives to the voice the slow, measured ring which the uninitiated endeavour to imitate by assuming an affected drawl, or by speaking in deep or guttural accents, as foreign to the genuine voice of the well-bred man or woman as is the dialect of a Lancashire operative. When ladies speak in deep contralto tones it is because Nature has endowed them with deep contralto voices, and not with an idea of assuming tones other than their natural ones.

The voice is one of the best and truest indications of education and refinement, and betrays the absence of these qualities with almost painful intensity.

Those who possess unrefined or common voices, should, on becoming aware of the fact—and there is no surer way of gaining this knowledge than by comparing the tones of their own uncultivated voices with the tones of more refined ones—endeavour to remedy this defect by carefully *educating* their voices by speaking slowly, clearly, and distinctly, and by pitching the voice in a low key. Chest notes are an advantage to persons having shrill voices if they can be made use of without gruffness ; thus, with a due regard to accentuation,



modulation, and pronunciation, a very fair result may be achieved.

The common error with the many is their rapid or, so to say, slovenly manner of speaking; the slurring over of the final syllables, the dropping the voice before the words have been but half uttered, and the running a string of words together with hurried ungraceful accents, too often starting with a jerk and concluding with a rush.

The fashion of pitching the voice in a high shrill key, and of talking loudly and rapidly, is but an ephemeral one, and is destined to be short lived by reason of its unpopularity with the other sex. It is a fashion by no means general, and is only to be met with here and there in society.

## CHAPTER II.

VERBAL INVITATIONS TO DINNER, TO LUNCHEON,  
TO "AT HOMES," ETC., WITH ACCEPTANCES AND  
REFUSALS OF THE SAME.

### TO DINNER.

VERBAL invitations to dinner are not always easy to decline when to decline is the uppermost wish, unless fact can be brought to bear in ever so remote a manner. In the case of a married couple the expedient at command is to shift the responsibility upon the absent one ; thus—

"You are very kind ; but I fancy we have an engagement for that evening. I will tell my husband of your invitation and let you know." Or—

"Thank you very much ; but I am afraid my wife has some engagement or other that night which will prevent our having the pleasure of dining with you ; but she must write to you herself about it." Or—

"It is most kind of you ; but I fear I shall not be

able to come. I think I must ask you to excuse me this time." Or—

"I am not sure that I shall be home until it is too late, and I must not leave it open. It is most kind of you all the same." Or—

"If you are not engaged on Saturday will you come and dine quietly with us at a quarter to eight? We shall be delighted to see you."

"I am not dining out on Saturday, and I shall be very happy to come and dine with you." Or—

"It is very good of you; but I am afraid I am engaged that evening, or I should have been very pleased to dine with you." Or—

"We want you to come and dine with us one day next week. Which day will suit you best, bar Thursday?"

"You are very kind; I think Friday would suit me best. What hour do you dine—eight o'clock?" Or—

"I am afraid I am dining out every night next week. I am sorry it should happen so." Or—

"I can't quite say. May I write and let you know?" Or—

"Is there any chance of your being able to dine with us next Wednesday? We expect some friends of yours, Mr. and Mrs. B——."

"Thank you very much. I shall be very happy to come and meet the B——'s. What time do you dine?" Or—

"I am sorry to say I am engaged for that night. I have to attend a complimentary banquet to Sir Geo. A—— at the Metropole." Or—

"It is very good of you. I fancy I am engaged that evening. I will let you know as soon as I have looked at my engagements." Or—

"We expect a few people to dine with us next Thursday. Will you and your wife give us the pleasure of your company also?"

"You are very kind. I think I may answer for my wife being disengaged, and say we shall be very happy to dine with you on that day." Or—

"It is extremely kind of you to ask us. I will tell my wife of your invitation; but I cannot promise to come until I know what engagements she has made for us." Or—

"We are making up a theatre party for Tuesday next at the 'Prince of Wales.' Would you care to join us? We intend to have supper at the 'Savoy afterwards.'"

"Tell me a little more about it. Who have you asked? Any one I know?" etc. Or—

"Thank you; but I am afraid you must excuse

me. That sort of thing is not much in my way ; I am not much of a playgoer, I don't care to turn out after dinner." Or—

"I am much obliged to you ; but I am dining out on that evening," etc. Or—

"We are going to have a dinner-party dance on Friday, and if you can come we shall be delighted to see you."

"Thank you, very much ; I will come with pleasure. I suppose you dine at eight, as usual?" Or—

"I should have liked it of all things ; but I have an engagement for that evening. I am so sorry." Or—

"It is very good of you ; but you must not depend upon me. I have almost given up dancing ; you must ask me another night when you are alone." Or—

"Will you come and dine quietly on Saturday ? We shall be quite alone, and very glad to see you."

"I shall be very pleased to do so. At what hour do you dine?" Or—

"Oh, thank you ; but I am going to dine with W. G—— at Boodle's that evening, otherwise I should have been delighted."

Verbal invitations to dinner are constantly

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given, and are sometimes disconcerting. On the spur of the moment it is not always possible to remember previous engagements, and also many invitations are given which are not convenient to accept, while to decline invitations requires more readiness of resource than is always at command, and thus the foregoing examples have been written with a view of showing how they may be easily refused. Acceptances, on the other hand, offer comparatively little difficulty, and yet to word them in the usual conventional manner requires a little thought and a little courtesy, hence the examples offered.

#### TO LUNCHEON.

Verbal invitations to luncheon are even more numerous given, and these also it is expedient to decline occasionally, even when prior engagements do not exist. Some consider that to accept invitations to luncheon breaks into the best hours of the day, shortening the morning and afternoon hours, which are already hardly long enough to allow of all daily occupations being conveniently got through in the given time.

Others, on the contrary, appreciate invitations to luncheon, and lay themselves out to obtain them,

and only refuse them when actual engagements prevent them being accepted. A few examples will serve to illustrate both sides of the question.

"I had no idea you were in Town ; perhaps you will be able to come to luncheon one day next week. Would Wednesday suit you ? "

"Thanks, very much ; I shall be delighted."

"Well, then, we shall expect you at 1.30," etc.  
Or—

"I am afraid we are engaged on Wednesday ; indeed, I think we have something to do every day next week. Perhaps later on I might be able to come. It is very good of you to ask me," etc.  
Or—

"We shall be very happy to see you at luncheon on Wednesday, if you are disengaged."

"Thank you ; I will come with pleasure. I think your luncheon hour is 2 o'clock, is it not ? "  
Or—

"Thank you very much ; but I am thinking of running down to the country for a couple of days." Or—

"Thank you, you are very kind ; but I have a great many engagements on Wednesday, so I cannot give myself the pleasure of coming to luncheon with you on that day." Or—

"Will you and your sister come over to luncheon with us on Tuesday? We shall be so glad to see you."

"We should like to do so very much. We were thinking of driving over to call, but have been prevented. We will be with you about 1.30." Or—

"I am so sorry, but we are going to attend a lecture that afternoon, and we must start early in consequence."

TO "AT HOMES."

"I have sent you a card for my 'At home next Thursday; I hope you will be able to look in."

"Thank you; I will, with pleasure. May I bring a cousin who is staying with us?"

"Certainly; I hope you will, etc." Or—

"I will if I possibly can; but I am a little doubtful about it." Or—

"It is very kind of you; but I am afraid I shall not be able to manage it." Or—

"I am so sorry. I wish I had known of your invitation yesterday. I promised to take my niece to Ranelagh, and I must not disappoint her." Or—

"I shall be at home after the Drawing-room



on Friday next; I wonder if you would care to look in?"

"Yes, indeed I should; about five o'clock, I suppose, would be the best time to come?" Or—

"I should be very pleased to come; but I have two or three teas already at which I have promised to look in. If I can get away I will try and come, even though it may be late." Or—

"Thank you, I will try and look in for a few minutes; but I have an engagement that will take me in an opposite direction, and I fear there is little hope of my being back in time to come on to you." Or—

"I am going to have two 'At homes,' one on Thursday next, and one on the following Thursday. I hope you will be able to come to one or other of them?"

"Oh, certainly I will. I think the second date would suit me best, as I have two or three engagements on the first Thursday." Or—

"I wish I could say that I could do so; but unfortunately both those afternoons are quite filled up with engagements I can't put off. I am so sorry for this." Or—

"My sister has an 'At home' on Saturday, and expects to have some good music; would you care

to have a card for it, and we should have the pleasure of meeting there ? ”

“ I should like it of all things, if it would not give you too much trouble,” etc. Or—

“ It is very good of you to think of it ; but if it is on Saturday, it would be quite impossible, as I have asked some friends to afternoon tea, and I could not put them off. Thank you very much all the same.”

#### TO CONCERTS AND PRIVATE THEATRICALS.

“ I am helping to get up a concert in aid of The —,” etc. ; “ I do so hope you will be able to come. \* I will send you a programme ; the tickets are only ten shillings each.”

“ Oh, in aid of The —. That is a very good institution, and I am much interested in it. I think I will take two tickets, if that will be of any use to you.” Or—

“ You must not ask me ; I should not be able to come on that evening, and I don't care to take tickets to give away ; besides, I should not know to whom to give them. Your concert is sure to go off well without my small aid, you are so popular.” Or—

“ Have you heard about our theatricals ? They

are expected to be very good. We are to have Mr. B——, and Captain H——, and Mrs. L——, and they all act splendidly, as you know. I hope you will take tickets and support us. The best seats are ten shillings each.”

“Is not ten shillings rather high? We always find we sell many more tickets if we put the price at five shillings. People do not care to pay so much for amateur performances. What are these theatricals in aid of? You have not told me.”

“Oh, in aid of the —— Hospital. We have seats at seven and sixpence and five shillings, but the first rows are ten shillings. You see, the hall is a small one, so we must put them rather high.”

“Then, suppose I have two seats at seven shillings and sixpence each? I think they would do very well.” Or—

“Yes, I have heard about them, and I hope they will be a success. It is very good of you to take so much trouble about getting them up; but I have so many ways of spending money, I am afraid I can’t afford to take any tickets for this performance. You must tell me how it goes off when we next meet.” Or—

“I hope you will be able to come over to our village concert, in aid of the Institute, next Tuesday.

It will be very good. Miss B—— is going to sing for us, and Miss E—— will play the violin, and Mr. H—— will sing humorous songs. It will be very amusing—you *must* come. The tickets are three shillings each for the first rows, and the others are two shillings and a shilling."

"Really! we will all come over. We shall want six three-shilling tickets, and five tickets at one shilling each for the servants." Or—

"I am sorry to say we are going away next week; but I will take three three-shilling tickets with pleasure. I dare say I shall find some one who will be able to make use of them," etc.

INVITATIONS FOR SHORT VISITS.

"I am going to run down to my place on Saturday for a couple of days. If you have nothing better to do, perhaps you would like to come down with me. I shall go by the 5.15 train. You can be back in Town by 9.30 on Monday morning."

"I should like it extremely. I will meet you at King's Cross, as you say." Or—

"I should have liked it very much—nothing better. But I am engaged to dine out Saturday and Sunday; so, you see, I could not manage to get away." Or—

"I was thinking, perhaps you might like to come down to us for two or three days next week. What do you say?"

"I should be delighted; the change would do me good, I think. What days would be most convenient to you? I could not come before Wednesday, I am afraid."

"Well, then, shall we say Thursday? And I hope you will stay until Monday," etc. Or—

"Could you come to us, when you leave here, for two or three days? We should be very glad to see you."

"Oh, thank you! I should be very pleased. I am staying on here until Monday."

"Then, will you come to us on that day, and stay until the following Thursday, if you can?" Or—

"It is very good of you; but I am obliged to return home on Monday, as we have people coming to dinner that evening—otherwise, I should have been charmed to have come to you." Or—

"We want you so much to come and stay with us for a few days next week. Do try and manage it. It will give George and myself so much pleasure to see you, if you will."

"You are too kind. But you have asked us so often, I am almost ashamed to take advantage of your invitation."

"Oh, then you will come! We shall expect you on Tuesday. You will not disappoint us—will you?" Or—

"It is most kind of you to wish it. We should have enjoyed coming to you immensely; but, unfortunately, we have asked Mr. and Mrs. B—to come to us next week for two or three days. So, you see, it is impossible—much as we should have liked it."

## CHAPTER III.

### CONVERSATION AT FIRST MEETINGS AND CHANCE MEETINGS.

TO make a few appropriate remarks at chance meetings is not always as easy as it may appear, when those thus meeting are comparative strangers, and yet more than a bow of recognition is expected from each. At crowded outdoor gatherings these are of frequent occurrence; at places such as Ranelagh, Hurlingham, Lord's, and so on, the sport going on usually furnishing an opening remark or two, which can always be made use of for this purpose; thus—

“Oh, how do you do? I have been looking at the ladies cycling quadrilles. It is wonderful how well they go through it.”

“Yes; and how pretty the cycles look decorated with flowers. I was not able to see the prizes given; there was such a crowd.”

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"I don't know whether they have been given yet or not. I will go and find out if you like."

"Oh, please don't take the trouble to do that ; we are going to walk over to the Polo ground."

"I hope you have had some tea ? "

"Oh yes ; we had some when we first arrived. How very well it is arranged. Is Mrs. D—— here this afternoon ? "

"No, she is not. I wanted her to come, but she had another engagement, so I have brought my nieces," etc. Or—

"Oh, how do you do ? What an immense crowd there is here to-day."

"There is indeed. We have been here since twelve o'clock, watching the play ; we have to meet some friends at luncheon, and I must go and look for their coach."

"I am afraid you will find it rather hot ; the heat is very great just now."

"We felt the heat very much in the stand, and are quite glad to take a little walk."

"Can I be of any use to you in helping you to find your friends ? "

"Oh, thank you very much ; but I see my son coming. He is sure to know where they



"Oh, well, that is all right, then. I will leave you with him."

Such trivial remarks as the foregoing are all that is expected in the way of conversation between those who thus casually meet at public resorts. A word or two as to what is going on, a word or two of polite inquiry after absent acquaintances, an offer of some slight service or other, a bow, and a smile, and thus acquaintances meet and pass on.

#### BETWEEN CALLERS.

When strangers are unexpectedly brought together, a doubt often arises as to whether they should enter into conversation with each other or not, and, if so, how best to start one.

For instance, when a caller is announced and a guest is in the drawing-room, while awaiting the coming of the hostess, something should be said to break the awkward silence, and it rests with the guest to commence the conversation in this wise—

"Mrs. A—— will be here directly ; she has only just returned from driving."

"I am glad. I was almost afraid she would not be at home."

"She generally is out in the afternoon ; but to-day she returned much earlier than usual."

"Oh, really ! Then I am fortunate."

"How is Mr. A—— ? I have not seen him for some time. He has been away, has he not ?"

"Yes. He is expected back next week." Or—

"Mrs. A—— will be here in a few minutes. Won't you come nearer the fire ? It is very cold to-day."

"No, thanks ; I am so wrapped up that I am rather afraid of coming too near it. The wind is so very keen out of doors."

"Yes ; and I think there must have been a sharp frost last night. I was out early this morning on my bicycle, and I thought it bitterly cold."

"Do you ride much in town ? The traffic is too much for me. It makes me feel quite nervous."

"I ride every morning when it is fine ; but then I keep to the quiet streets or to the Park, and avoid the crowded thoroughfares as much as I can," etc.

"Here is Mrs. A——."

After an interchange of greetings, Mrs. A—— would naturally say—

"I must introduce my cousin, Miss B——, to you. She is staying with me for a few days."

"Miss B—— and I have already made acquaintance. We have been talking about cycling," etc.

A conversation between two ladies who happen to call at the same time, and who find the hostess engaged for the moment, is even more constrained, neither venturing upon taking the initiative, not exactly knowing how a remark might be received; but when an absence is prolonged beyond two or three minutes, then one or other is almost compelled to hazard an observation, and it generally takes the form of something to this effect—

"What a lovely day it is. We are having delightful weather just now, are we not?"

"We are indeed; but they prophesy a change shortly, and the glass has been going down steadily; at least, my husband said so this morning."

"I hope the weather will not break up just yet, as it so seriously affects all the outdoor gatherings, and there are a great many things coming off just now."

"Yes, a wet season is deplorable, and spoils one's pleasure to a great extent; but they want rain badly in the country—everything looks burnt up," etc., etc.

Commonplaces of this nature tide over a few minutes of awkward waiting until the appearance

of the hostess, unavoidably detained, and who is consequently pleased that her visitors have found something in common to talk about in the mean time.

It occasionally happens that it is desirable to escape from acquaintances bent upon entering into lengthy conversations. To extricate one's self from this is not always as easy as it might appear, if courtesy is to be studied.

"How do you do? What a nice party, isn't it? Do you know many people here? I wanted to ask you if it is true about the G——s being quite ruined?"

"I have not heard anything about it; I should hardly think it was true."

"I am afraid it is, and I will tell you why."

"You must not tell me now. I see a friend of mine has just come in. I must go and say a word to her as soon as this song is over," etc.  
Or—

"Good morning. What a beautiful day it is."

"Yes, very."

"Which way are you going? I will walk a little way with you, if you like?"

"I was rather thinking of sitting down; it is so hot walking."

"Yes, suppose we do. I see some chairs over there."

"Do you know, I think I had better not sit down, but walk on. I rather expect my aunt will take a turn this morning in her bath-chair, so I will say good-bye."

"Good-bye. Are you going to hear the band play this afternoon? because, if so, I will look out for you."

"I don't quite know. Perhaps I shall; but I am not sure," etc. Or—

"How do you do? How are you to-day?"

"Quite well, thanks; the change has done me a great deal of good."

"Really! I am glad to hear it. Do you intend making a long stay here?"

"I can't say; it very much depends upon circumstances."

"I hope I shall see something of you while you are here. Do you think you could come and have tea with me on Thursday?"

"Thanks; I am afraid not. I am very much engaged this week, and next week also; indeed, I have not one free afternoon at present."

"I am sorry. I was in hopes that you would have been able to come. Shall you be at Mrs.

Y——'s 'At Home' on Friday? She is a friend of yours, I think?"

"No; indeed, I know her very slightly! I have an invitation, I think; but I am afraid I shall not be able to look in, I have so many things to do that afternoon. Good-bye; I must not keep you standing," etc.

#### AT FIRST CALLS.

On the occasion of first calls, it is often somewhat trying to commence a conversation and to maintain it, even for a few minutes, from the fact of the hostess and visitor being complete strangers to each other. Here, again, the former has the advantage over the latter. She is at home, and has the opportunity of proffering trifling civilities, and of taking the lead if she pleases and is equal to doing so. But if she is nervous or diffident, her visitor takes the initiative, and starts with a few *à propos* remarks; and if one fails, she can fall back upon another, in her endeavour to draw out her hostess. After "How do you do?" has been said on both sides, a visitor generally commences in this wise—

"I am very pleased to find you at home. I have been wishing to drive over and see you for

several days, but have always been prevented, as it is rather a long drive over here from S——."

"Indeed it is! So good of you to come to-day. I drove into S—— last week. It was very hilly for the horses, I thought."

"Yes; we find it so, as we are some distance from the station. You have a station close to you, have you not?"

"Yes; it is most convenient. My husband would never have taken a place that was not near a station. We are beginning to like this place better than I thought we should."

"I am very glad. It is so nice to have neighbours here again. I hope you are going to remain some time?"

"I don't know; at present we have only taken it for a few months. It is difficult to get everything one wants in a house. The accommodation for the servants here is not very good; but my husband likes the shooting, so perhaps we shall take it on for another year or two."

"It is a very good neighbourhood. So many nice people within driving distance, or "cycling" distance, I might say; but some few are away just now."

"So I understood. Mrs. H—— is a cousin of

mine. I only wish they were a little nearer to us."

"Oh, really! Mrs. H—— and I are great friends. Our boys are in the same house at Eton," etc.

If the hostess took the lead after shaking hands and "How do you do?" has been duly said, she would probably say, if it were winter—

"I am afraid you find it rather warm in here; perhaps you would like to sit a little way from the fire."

"Thank you, I think I will." Or—

"It is very good of you to come and see me. I am so glad I was at home. Have you had a long drive?"

"No, not at all. We live about three miles from this, at G——."

"Oh, I think I passed your place, when I was out driving yesterday. What a fine avenue you have."

"My husband is very proud of his trees. We only recently heard that you had arrived. I hope you are feeling settled and like the place."

"Oh yes, we do. But is it not very cold here in the winter? I should fancy it was. I hope it is not damp. I suppose you know this house well?"



"Oh yes, indeed I do ; the O——'s were our best neighbours ; and their going abroad was a great loss to us. And there has been no one here for nearly two years."

"Oh, really ! I hope you will find us good neighbours during the time we are here."

"I am sure we shall. But you must not fancy the house is damp ; it was never considered to be so. It is heated with hot water, you know. I used to think it a very warm house," etc.

#### AT BRIDAL CALLS.

The so-called "bridal calls" are considered by many to be somewhat trying ordeals to go\*through, from the fact that both are entire strangers—the bride and the visitor—and also from the uncertainty of not exactly knowing how to respond to congratulations, should they be offered, or whether they should be offered or not.

As a rule, visitors generally prefer not to enter upon the subject, and to confine their conversation to generalities, which view of the matter is quite in accordance with a bride's sentiments. Thus, after the preliminary greetings are over, something to the following effect is usually said—

"I have been wishing to call upon you, but

have not had an opportunity of so doing until this afternoon. Your husband is an old friend of ours. We have known him ever since he was at college—perhaps he has told you so.”

“Oh yes, I think he has! I am almost sure I recollect your name being mentioned. I think you were at our wedding, were you not?”

“I am sorry to say I was not, although we had an invitation. We were away just then. My husband is looking forward to making your acquaintance.”

“I shall be very pleased to meet him. My husband will be very glad to hear I was at home to-day. I should have been so sorry to have missed you.”

“How long have you been back from your tour? I suppose you are hardly settled yet? It takes so long to get quite straight, does it not?”

“Oh yes! Indeed, I have hardly had time to unpack my presents yet!” etc. Or—

“My brother said he thought you would be pleased if I came to see you. He is such an old friend of your husband’s!”

“Oh yes, I know he is, and of mine too, I may venture to say. I wonder we have never met before!”

“Well, I have been very much abroad lately, with my sister; but now I am going to keep my brother’s house for him.”

“Oh, then we shall see something of you, I hope! Your brother is going to dine with us one day next week. I wonder if you would care to come too?” etc.

## CHAPTER IV.

### VERBAL REQUESTS AND VERBAL REPLIES.

THE verbal requests made are naturally too numerous to enumerate. Perhaps the following examples are amongst the most frequent and most difficult to refuse without causing a little friction, or what<sup>\*</sup> is sometimes termed "a feeling" of annoyance.

To answer verbal requests graciously is, again, not always an easy matter, as the answer has too often to be in the negative, and this is more agreeable to write than to express verbally.

"Evelyn B—— is very anxious to go to Mrs. A——'s dance; do you think you could get an invitation for her?"

"I am afraid not; but I will ask her, if you wish it."

"I am so anxious to stay on in Town a few days longer. I wonder if you could possibly put me up

for two or three days? It would be so very kind of you if you could."

When there is an actual fact to go upon to prevent such a request being acceded to, refusal is as easy as prompt acquiescence would be.

"I am very sorry; but we shall not be in town next week. We are going away ourselves on Saturday." Or—

"It is most unfortunate; but my sister-in-law is coming up next week. We expect her on Monday, and I really don't know how long she will remain, or whether she will leave on Friday or not."

The real difficulty of the situation is when there is no desire to comply with a request, and only a wish to escape from compliance without giving actual offence, in which case the most trivial reasons have to be put forward.

"I don't quite know our arrangements; but I am almost afraid we shall not be able to manage it. We are changing servants, and are very short-handed just now." Or—

"I am afraid we shall not be able to ask you next week, as I shall not have a room to offer you; the boys are at home now." Or—

"I should have been delighted; but it is quite impossible just now for many reasons." Or—

"I wish I could have asked you ; but it is no use thinking about it, I fear." Or—

"I hear Mrs. A——'s dance is to be such a good one. Do you think you could get an invitation for my sister-in-law?"

"I will see what I can do ; but I am very doubtful about it." Or—

"Are you going to Mrs. B——'s dance on Wednesday? If so, I wonder if you would mind taking my niece with you?"

"I am not going myself, and I don't know who is." Or—

"I am going ; but I am afraid to promise to take her, as, if I go, I shall do so very late, and probably remain only a very short time." Or—

"Would you mind my joining your party at the B——'s ball, as I am disappointed of my chaperon, and have no one to go with?"

"I am very sorry to appear ungracious, but I do not think I can be of much use to you, as I have two or three girls to chaperon already. You must try to think of some one else." Or—

"May I go with you to the B—— C—— Ball? My husband is not going, and it is so awkward to enter the room alone."

"I think you had better not depend upon me

to meet you there, as we may be very late, or not go at all. It would not do for you to wait in the cloak-room until we arrive, would it?" Or—

"Could you spare a card for your dance for Mr. G. A——; and, if so, may I bring him?"

"I am quite sorry to say no; I have refused so many applications already. You won't mind my saying this, will you?" Or—

"Could you give me two ladies' tickets for Saturday next? I hear it is to be a great day at H——."

"I am afraid I can't spare them. I have half promised them. I should have been delighted otherwise."

"I should very much like to belong to the —— club. I was going to ask you if you would propose me."

"I am sorry to refuse you; but I don't think I can. They seem to have been blackballing a great many lately." Or—

"I wish you would write to the committee and ask them if they would re-elect me, now that the club is under the new management."

"I don't see how I can; I have only just been re-elected myself. We had better wait a little." Or—

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"Could you give me a lady's ticket for the Eton and Harrow match?"

"I am afraid I can't. I have been asked for the same thing over and over again this week. Every one seems to want a ticket." Or—

"I think you said you were going to one of the May Drawing-Rooms? A friend of mine, Mrs. G——, is very anxious to be presented, and does not know of any one of whom she could ask this favour. You are so good-natured, I thought you would not mind doing this, perhaps."

"Well, really I don't know quite what to say. You must let me think it over, and I will write and tell you whether I can or not." Or—

"I am afraid I must refuse, as I make a rule of only presenting my own relatives, but seldom any one not personally known to me."

Trivial requests also require some preamble to distinct refusals, as otherwise they appear curt and ungracious.

"Are you going to Mrs. D——'s garden-party to-morrow afternoon? I have been asked, but I do not know how to get over there. I have nothing to drive. Might I go with you?"

"I am afraid I can't offer to take you, as I am thinking of taking Miss B——, if she is able to



come. It is no use leaving it open, as I think she is almost sure to do so." Or—

"Would you be able to take me out driving to-morrow afternoon, as I have several calls I want to make? It would be so kind if you could."

"Well, not to-morrow, I am afraid; I have so many things to do. Another day I shall be very pleased to do so." Or—

"I see you have Lord M——'s Life. I should so like to read it. May I borrow it?"

"I am sorry I can't spare it just now, as I am reading it myself. I have only just got it." Or—

"I see you have that amusing book the G——'s. I am tired of asking for it at the Library. May I borrow it?"

"I am sorry to say I am sending my books back to-morrow, and I never lend Library books; I am so afraid of their not being returned." Or—

"May I take these two songs to try over? I would not keep them very long."

"No. I don't think you may; I shall want them myself this evening. I am afraid you are not very good at returning music. You have one or two songs of mine already, you know." Or—

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"I wish you would introduce me to Mrs. A—— ; I should so much like to know her."

"If I can manage it easily, I will ; but she does not care much about making new acquaintances."

Or—

"Will you introduce me to Lady B——, if you have an opportunity ?"

"I hardly think I know her well enough to venture upon doing so." Or—

"May I introduce Mrs. F—— to you ? I have asked her to come over this afternoon."

"Thank you very much ; but I think I would rather you did not. I don't think I should care for her particularly." Or—

"May I introduce Miss M—— to you ? She said she should so much like to know you."

"Oh, Miss M——. I think I would rather not, if you don't mind. I should not be able to call upon her. It would be of no use introducing her."

## CHAPTER V.

### VERBAL EXCUSES AND REPLIES.

IT requires no little readiness of speech to make appropriate excuses on the spur of the moment—excuses for trifling omissions and the like; for instance—

“I am so sorry I had no opportunity of introducing you to Mrs. A—— the other evening. I had quite intended doing so; but I saw you got on very well together, nevertheless.”

“Thank you; it would have been very kind of you; but I had met her before, and she recalled herself to my recollection.”

“I am so glad she did. She is such a nice woman, and I wanted you to know one another.” Or—

“I am so sorry I have not been able to call upon you yet; but I have been so much engaged. I must try and come and see you very soon, however.”

“I hope you will. I am always at home on

Wednesdays, and shall be very glad to see you."

Or—

"I am quite ashamed not to have answered your letter ; you must have thought me very rude."

"Oh no ; but I was afraid you had forgotten all about it."

"No. I was only waiting to see if we could manage to come ; but I am afraid it is impossible. I had intended to have written to say this, so it is very fortunate our having met this afternoon."

Or—

"I did not say good-bye to you yesterday ; you were so much engaged when I left, that I thought it better not to interrupt you. I wanted to ask if I could be of any use to you in the way of luncheon or tea when you come to Town next week?" etc.

Want of punctuality necessitates numerous excuses being made, also the non-fulfilment of engagements through unforeseen circumstances calls forth many excuses. And on both these counts it is not always easy to say exactly what should be said, neither too much in the way of apology nor too little. Hence the following examples. •

"I am afraid I am rather late, and that you have been waiting dinner for me."

"We always give our guests ten minutes' grace at least, as it is so difficult to time one's arrival to the moment." Or—

"Are we very late? I hope not. We started in very good time; but the traffic was so great at Hyde Park Corner, we were delayed quite fifteen minutes."

"We had almost given you up, and were just thinking of going down to dinner. How provoking these blocks are when one wants to get on! We were delayed in a similar manner the other evening." Or—

"I am shocked to be so late; but there was a division as I was about to leave the House, which detained me."

"I am so glad you were able to get away, even though it is a little late." Or—

"I am afraid we are terribly late. I did not reach home until half-past seven. It was so difficult to get away from Ranelagh. I could not find my carriage."

"Oh yes; I know how difficult it is on these Saturdays to do so, and we are not waiting for you only. Mr. and Mrs. B—— have not arrived yet." Or—

"I hope you will excuse my being a little late; I was engaged up to the last moment."

"Indeed I will ; I am only so glad you are able to come at all." Or—

"I am rather late, am I not?"

"You are indeed ; another minute, and we should have gone down to dinner without you." Or—

"I am shocked to see how late it is ! I fear you have waited dinner for us."

"We have waited for you, of course ; but it does not much signify. I find every one is late, more or less. I am myself, very often, I am sorry to say."

A dinner engagement is an important one to keep with punctuality, and therefore the excuse should always convey the reason of the delay when possible. Otherwise, the inference is that it was not unavoidable, and only occasioned by thoughtlessness, or want of consideration, not a pleasant impression to create.

The excuses made for being late at luncheon are not of so apologetic a character. Luncheon guests are not, as a rule, waited for, and therefore their tardy appearance does not delay the meal, and they, rather than their hosts, are inconvenienced thereby.

"I am late. You have commenced luncheon, I see. I could not get here earlier."

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"Yes, we have ; we never wait for any one at luncheon, and so it is of no consequence your being late." Or—

"I am afraid it is nearly quarter-past two. I had no idea it was so late. I had such a wretched hansom ; the horse seemed hardly able to move. I thought I should never get here."

"I am glad you have arrived at last. Every one complains now of the hansom cab horses ; one is only too thankful when no accident takes place." Or—

"You must forgive my being late ; I stupidly missed my train, and had to wait twenty minutes for the next one. It was so provoking." •

"I know how difficult it is to catch one's train. Twenty minutes is a long time to wait ; you must have felt bored."

As regards excuses made at the eleventh hour after acceptances to invitations have been sent, it is necessary that they should be explicitly and frankly made, to render them at all worthy of credence, and to avoid giving very natural offence.

Thus the facts which occasion the non-fulfilment of these engagements must be fully stated, and form the only possible excuse. Such excuses are invariably made by letter, and not verbally.

## CHAPTER VI.

### MAKING CONVERSATION AT DINNER-PARTIES.

AGREEABLE conversation, necessary as it is on all social occasions, is more particularly so at the most important of all social gatherings, namely, dinner-parties, and it is at dinner-parties that the greatest call is made upon the social qualities of the guests, and upon their powers of making themselves agreeable.

This is not particularly easy of accomplishment, in consequence of precedence being so strictly enforced at these functions. A hostess cannot study the individual characteristics of her guests and send them in to dinner accordingly, but must give to each couple the precedence due to them, even if it obliges a young man to take an elderly lady in to dinner, or a young girl to have an elderly gentleman as a dinner companion, when both the elderly lady and the young girl would much prefer to change places with each other



could they but do so ; but the elderly lady is the widow of a baron, and the young man is the second son of a viscount ; the elderly gentleman is a knight, and the young girl the daughter of a baronet, they must therefore bow to the rules that govern these things.

Conversation between couples so ill-assorted must of necessity be difficult to start, and equally so to maintain with any degree of satisfaction. The elderly lady would doubtless be contemporary with the aunts of her companion, and in that case might commence a conversation with some allusion to one or other of his elderly relatives, thus :

“ I think I knew an aunt of yours many years ago, Mrs. A——, but I have not seen her for some time. Let me see, I think it must be fifteen years at least.”

“ Oh, she lives entirely abroad. I have not seen her since I was quite a boy.”

“ Really ! I think it was at Torquay I last saw her, and she talked of wintering abroad then. She looked very delicate, I thought.”

“ I fancy she is quite an invalid,” might be the rejoinder.

Or the opening remark might have been on the part of the lady—

"I think my son was at Eton with you. I have heard him mention your name several times," etc.

Those who bear titles themselves, or who are members of the nobility, or who bear well-known names, or are related to those who do, have the advantage over others in this wise—that they can, if so inclined, make mutual relatives the first topic of conversation, from the fact that they possess a general knowledge on this head.

It is especially at the hour of dinner that the heart of man expands and when all the geniality of his nature rises to the surface; even the most taciturn, reserved, and rugged natures are not insensible to the influence of the hour; therefore, uncongenial companionship at a moment such as this, compulsory companionship, which must continue for at least an hour, is more of a strain than a relaxation.

Precedency often obliges a host to take in to dinner and try to amuse the dullest and least attractive lady in the room, as commonplace as she is uninteresting; the hostess, likewise, has probably to put up with the like drawbacks on the part of her companion, because he has a trifling claim to precedency over that of any of the other guests.

But as society thinks fit to pair its guests according to precedency only, and with but little regard to individual tastes, sympathies, and likings, it behoves its members to make the best of the situation and to be as agreeable as they well can be under the circumstances.

Genuine conversation must not be confounded with senseless, ceaseless babble, or with a string of platitudes and commonplaces.

The style of running on, common to so many good-natured but well-meaning persons, is even more irritating to the clever, intellectual, or gifted ones of the earth than are the dulness and reserve of those commonplace people from whom nothing more lively can be obtained than a monosyllable uttered at intervals.

The gist of conversing is, having something to say and saying it well. It is not given to every one to be brilliant and amusing, with a capacity for making conversation independently of facts and passing events, therefore the mass of individuals who are neither brilliant, gifted, talented, nor in any way geniuses, have no other resource than to draw upon facts and events when starting a conversation ; and very good, excellent, unfailing resources they are, but the peculiarity is, that

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the generality of ordinary people fail to make use of this wealth of subjects at their command, ready as it were to their hand, to be turned to good account.

To be aware of a fact, event, or incident, which might have been made a vehicle of pleasant talk being *à propos* of the moment is one thing, and to recollect it *à propos* of the moment is another thing, and thus many slow-witted people call to mind hours afterwards some circumstance which, had they but thought of it at the time, would have been the one thing about which they might have conversed, and so made themselves agreeable. They remember good things they might have said some twelve hours after the opportunity has arisen for saying them, a little late for the purpose of shining as agreeable talkers.

It is a prevailing idea with some people that it does not require much cleverness to be able to weld facts and incidents into entertaining conversation, and yet it is surprising how little skill is shown by these very people in their treatment of subjects of an everyday character, and how very little intelligence they bring to bear when discussing them.

There are certain people who rely upon telling

a good story as their speciality, and gain for themselves a notoriety and reputation in this line. And this is an amusing line to take; but there is one thing to be avoided, which the tellers of these good stories are very apt to overlook, and that is the facility they have of forgetting to whom they have told their last good story, and the consequent repetition of it to the same person. It must be a very good story that does not suffer from this second hearing. It would be throwing back the narrator in his efforts to be amusing to remind him that one had heard the story before, and that he himself had narrated it.

"I don't know if I have told you the story about," etc., etc., is a good preamble to telling a good story, as it gives the opportunity for any one to say that they have heard it, or that they should very much like to hear it, and the story-teller escapes being characterized as "prosy," a reputation which too often clings to gentlemen who take up this *rôle*. People not sufficiently intimate with the narrator to arrest narration of a story by remarking, "Oh, yes, I have heard that before; it is a capital story!" generally receive the repetition of it in an absent manner and with an artificial little laugh which the narrator, ignorant of the cause,

attributes to a want of appreciation or a lack of humour on their part.

One of the best modes of telling a good story is to preserve the strictest gravity throughout the relation, and at the close to lead, as it were, the laughter by a genuine hearty laugh, which is always contagious and mirth-provoking. Laughter is to the story-teller what applause is to the actor, and without which the best story falls flat.

The art of telling a story really well is to make it fit into or illustrate some incident or other appertaining to the moment ; whereas the straining after an opening through which to bring in a good story is so palpable an effort that it is at once seen through.

A story-teller who possesses a coadjutor amongst the company has an advantage over other men, whose forte it also is to relate good things. A clever wife is the best of coadjutors, or, failing her, a *fidus Achates*, who, although appreciating a good story, does not aspire to be a story-teller himself, but is content to give his friend a lift and a lead when opportunity offers. The clever wife, who wishes to give her husband an opening for telling one of his good stories, should contrive to make some remark calculated to turn the

conversation in the direction where the good story lies, or if she saw her way to it, she should ask for the story outright by saying—

“My husband knows a capital story about that ; have you ever heard it ?” Or—

“Ask my husband to tell you a good story about this very thing.” Or—

“My husband knows a much better story than that, if you can only persuade him to tell it you.”

Thus the clever wife plays into her husband's hands, and gives him just the opportunity he wants for the display of his talent in this direction. The *fidus Achates* does not *finesse* as does the clever wife, but boldly, and bluntly, asks for the story *à propos* of the occasion ; besides being the one to give his friend the start, he is equally ready to lead the laughter at the finish, he is never tired of hearing his friend's stories ; indeed, he has a sort of partnership in them, and is proud of the success they achieve.

There are certain men who, aware of their weakness in the matter of making agreeable conversation, read up a subject either from a new or an old work, it is immaterial which, and being thus crammed for the occasion, they contrive during

the course of the dinner to introduce it somehow ; but people of average intelligence and moderately well-read are generally aware of the source from whence such information springs, and hardly give the crammed one credit for all the trouble he has taken in getting up his subject.

There are several descriptions of conversation current at dinner-parties common to the various individuals whose ideas and thoughts they respectively embody and illustrate ; to wit, the commonplace, the matter-of-fact the gossipy, the humorous, the vivacious, the speculative, the intellectual, the imaginative, the dry, the sarcastic, the epigrammatical, and the practical, etc. Those endowed with high conversational powers naturally take high conversational honours, whilst those who are not so endowed play their little round game or their simple rubber in a very tame fashion.

Two persons, strangers to each other, sent in to dinner together by their host, not unnaturally experience a slight hesitation as to with what agreeable remark they shall commence the conversation ; both feel while descending the staircase that it is incumbent upon them to make an observation of some kind, and if one or other, or both, should happen to be afflicted with shyness



or reserve, they probably maintain a perfect silence until seated at table, each feeling rather annoyed at being sent in to dinner with such a very dull person ; and fearing, moreover, that, to judge from this unpromising commencement, the next two hours' *tête-à-tête* will not be a particularly lively one.

A good impression created as to one's sociability is a great step towards pleasant companionship at a dinner-party. Those who prefer eating their dinner in silence to the most intellectual of banquets are beside this question, which so greatly concerns the general run of men.

To make pleasant, easy conversation is to pave the way towards pleasant companionship, and the slightest thread is capable of being woven into a substantial fabric. The conversation which takes place between a couple going in to dinner together hardly merits the name, and amounts to little more than one or two very ordinary remarks, the time occupied in reaching the dining-room being too brief for anything further to be said ; and, as silence must be broken, the most trifling observation suffices for the purpose.

It is immaterial which of the two hazards the first opening sentence, although a man is supposed

by common consent to take the initiative. In a small house it often occurs to him to make the staircase a peg on which to start a remark.

"This staircase was hardly built for two to descend together;" or, "There is rather an awkward step here." To which the reply might be, "It is rather narrow, certainly." And to the second remark she might say, "Yes, I see it is." Or, in the case of a fine staircase—

"How well they build the houses now! The staircases are made a great point of, which is an immense improvement."

"Yes, indeed; so broad. And how easy of ascent, are they not, like the staircases of old-fashioned houses?" Or a remark on the current events of the day might be made in this wise—

"There is some startling news in this evening's papers about our troops; have you seen it?"

If his companion was aware of the intelligence referred to, and merely gave the affirmative reply of, "Yes, I have seen it," nothing further could be said; but if she were to add some opinion concerning the news, however insignificant, such as—

"It seems very alarming; do you think it is true?" it would give him the opportunity of making some further remark on this head.

Personal remarks are often made, such as—

“I think I have met a cousin of yours, Mr. A. B——” If A. B—— was the cousin of his dinner companion, one or two remarks respecting this gentleman would be all-sufficient to occupy the time until the dining-room was reached, and, indeed, would serve as an opening for continuing the conversation in default of a topic of more interest at the moment.

Conversation that takes place between couples while going down to dinner scarcely ever soars above or beyond such trivialities as the foregoing—that is to say, between strangers or very slight acquaintances, who have, as it were, to feel their way step by step to discover what amount of conversational powers each possesses, that they may either talk up to or down to such standards; and the first few sentences falling from the lips of an individual are sufficiently suggestive of what is likely to follow.

Current topics, or topics of the hour, are useful aids when nothing more important presents itself to the minds of dinner companions; and, as a rule, these trivialities appear to answer the purpose excellently well. Strangers to each other can hardly converse on personal matters on first

introduction, and must therefore confine themselves to generalities ; but the way in which these are approached and made use of, denotes the difference between one who is bright and interesting or dull and uninteresting.

"Do you often sit in the Park of an afternoon?"

"No ; I have so many afternoon 'At homes' to go to just now."

"Do you care for afternoon 'At homes?' I must confess I do not."

"Why do you dislike them?"

"Well, you see, one hates the heat and the crowd, and being expected to take all the old dowagers down to tea, and having to listen to some woman or other who fancies she can sing."

"Well, that does not sound very amusing, certainly; but 'At homes' are to women what clubs are to men—a pleasant way of meeting one's friends."

"Would not the evening do equally well?"

No ; I don't think so. Women have very little opportunity of talking to each other then. One dines, and one dances, and one naturally talks more to men than to the women one knows."

Or a man might remark—

"What a number of ladies' clubs have been started lately! Do you belong to any of them?"

If the answer were, "No, I do not," her companion would be under the necessity of finding something else to say, or to take refuge in silence for the time being; but, if she continued—

"A club would be of very little use to me; I should so seldom be able to make use of it. But I often have luncheon or tea, and I sometimes dine at clubs where ladies are invited by members."

"I belong to the 'Waterloo,' and I find it very useful; it enables me to show a little civility to my friends, which a bachelor has few opportunities of doing, as a rule."

The plays of the day are very fertile subjects of conversation between strangers.

"Have you seen such and such a piece?" Or—

"Have you seen the new piece at the So-and-so?" Or—

"Have you seen So-and-so in the Something?" are current society queries, readily put, and as readily answered, causing no strain upon the feeblest imagination; while any one endowed with average intelligence could pursue the subject by calling forth her companion's impressions of a

piece she had not seen. She would thus gather a superficial knowledge of the new piece in question, and he would gain what most people appreciate, a good listener. If, however, the reply were in the affirmative, and the play under discussion was known to her through having seen it, its good points and its weak ones could be canvassed at some length. Or—

“You have seen the new piece, of course, at the ——?”

“Oh yes, I have ; it is quite excellent. The house was crowded in every part.” Or—

“Have you seen the new piece at the Frivolity? Is it good?”

“It is, and it is not ; the acting is very good ; but the plot is an indifferent one. In fact, there is very little plot at all.” Or—

“How many plays there are worth seeing now, and yet so much is required to make a good play ; the plot must be strong and unfold itself, the dialogue good, and the situations telling,” etc.

On such slight foundations as the foregoing does the matter-of-fact conversation rest. The gossip style of talk has a still flimsier *raison d'être*, and runs very much after this fashion—

“I hear that magnificent house So-and-so has

built is in the market. He has taken a dislike to it, and means to get rid of it."

"Really! It must have cost him many thousands." Or—

"I suppose you know that Lord A——'s engagement to Miss B—— is broken off? Have you heard the reason?"

If the answer is, "Yes; I have heard something about it," it only remains to discuss the truth or the reverse of the statement current in the clubs; but if the answer takes a negative form, such as, "No; I have heard nothing about it—except that the engagement is broken off," then an opportunity arises for a little gossip on the subject.

It is needless to reiterate that facts are invaluable in starting a conversation—facts, for instance, connected with mutual friends, either absent or present—inquiries after them if absent, allusions to them if present—society facts of mutual interest, public events of importance, or things appertaining to the moment.

The *menu* is a very general subject of conversation at a dinner-party, and frequently originates it.

"Would you like to look at the *menu*?" is a stereotyped phrase addressed by a gentleman to

his dinner companion. Then follow a few observations relative to the dishes in the various courses.

Dinner-givers and diners-out find that the question of *cuisine* is, however, an exhaustible topic in making dinner-table talk, it being thoroughly understood that, although the *menu* is a privileged subject for discussion, yet no criticism is allowable, save in the case of the host and hostess. New dishes, and new ways of serving old dishes, novelties of any shape or kind, are all of interest to those who give dinners, and are always within the powers of observation, however limited, of those who dine out; and unimaginative, practical-minded individuals contrive to get over a good deal of ground, and to acquire a wrinkle or two by the ventilation of this particular topic.

If a man has any knowledge of a new dish, he is pleased to impart it; and if otherwise, he is equally willing to discuss it, and to speculate as to its nature, and to remark on the general comprehensiveness of the *menu*.

Some people are not inclined to eat and talk at the same time, the few observations they make merely coming in between the courses; but a man must be somewhat dull who cannot contrive



to do both, with satisfaction to his neighbour and to himself.

Although conversation between those meeting for the first time is of necessity restricted to commonplace topics, yet occasionally, after the ice has been broken, a deeper vein is struck, and one of the prominent and favourite theories of the day lightly touched upon, such as hypnotism, X-rays, heredity, the books of the hour, and the authors thereof.

"I have just been to see some wonderful experiments made with the X-rays," might be an opening remark.

If the reply is, "Oh, have you!" or, "Really!" it would not be likely to lead to anything further on that head; but if, on the contrary, it was—

"How very interesting. Do tell me about it."  
Or—

"I am very much interested in hearing about the rays. I had my hand put under them. The bones appeared to be enormously large. Why was that, do you think?"

To end a sentence with a query gives an opportunity for ventilating a subject, and puts an almost ready-made reply into the mouth of the companion of the moment. Failing this, the

original remark would have to be again drawn upon if the subject were to be carried on ; still, continuing in the deeper vein, one of the two might rejoin *à propos* of some remark made at the table.

"Do you believe in heredity to the extent that so many do, and the transmission of qualities?"

"I don't see how I can help doing so; everything goes to prove it." Or—

"Of course I do; every one does." Or—

"Yes, I do to a certain extent; but I do not go as far as others. I think our vices and our virtues have more to do with ourselves than with our ancestors," etc.

The subject of the books of the day is an inexhaustible one, and it is by no means considered pedantic or missish to make this a very prominent topic of conversation when no personal ground can be ventured upon between slight acquaintances.

"What do you think of So-and-so's last book?"  
Or—

"Have you read So-and-so's last book?"  
Or—

"If you have not read So-and-so's last book, you really ought to get it." Or—

"If you have not read So-and-so's last book, I advise you not to do so; it is gruesome." Or—

"That is a wonderful book of So-and-so's. I suppose you have seen it?" Or—

"If you want to read a really amusing book I advise you to get So-and-so's"—naming the title—"it is well worth reading." Or—

"What a wonderful success So-and-so's book has had. You've read it of course?" Or—

"I sat up half the night reading So-and-so's delightful book, 'The Champion.'" To the first of these questions—

"What do you think of So-and-so's last book?" nothing could be easier than to make a suitable reply.

"I think it is very clever; but it is a book you can skip a good deal of. Don't you think so?" and this gives an opening for contradiction, assent, or even argument. If—

"I like it very much," were the brief reply, it would close the subject abruptly.

"I thought you would." Or—

"I am glad you do." Or—

"Do you really!" would be the only style of rejoinder possible.

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If the answer to "Have you read So-and-so's last book?" were—

"Yes, I have," this would again close the subject. But if it were—

"Yes, I have. Do you know, I did not care for it much; I was disappointed in it. Don't you think it is exaggerated and overdrawn in many of the descriptions?" this would give an occasion for calling forth an opposite opinion or a corroborative one.

Were the reply to the remark, "If you have not read So-and-so's last book, you really ought to get it," to be—

"I have not read it, but I shall certainly do so;" this again would bring the conversation almost to a deadlock. But if she continued—

"Is it an amusing book? Is it anything like his last one?" this would offer the possibility of mentioning a few salient points of the book thus warmly praised.

To the remark, "If you have not read So-and-so's last book, I advise you not to do so; it is gruesome," the reply might be—

"Do you know, I have read it, and did not think it so very horrid. It is intensely realistic; you must allow that?"

This would ensure the topic being further opened out, and the opinion started with defended or explained. But if the reply were—

“I have not read it, and, after what you say, I shall avoid doing so, as I particularly dislike that style of book. I suppose it is like her former one; you’ve read that, too, no doubt?”—mentioning the title—this again would be an outlet for further discussion. To—

“That is a wonderful book of So-and-so’s. I suppose you have seen it?” if the answer were—

“Yes, indeed it is! It quite fascinated me. The characters were all so strong and well worked out, especially that of the burglar; did you not think so?” here again many remarks might be made upon the book both so greatly admired. Or—

“I have commenced to read it, but I have not got through it yet.” Or—

“I have read an excellent review of it in the *Times*, and it seems intensely interesting. I have sent for it, but have not got it yet. I suppose you saw it at your Club? One cannot always get the newest books that are in demand, and one has to wait for them.”

When, however, an adverse opinion has been formed of a book that is highly praised, it should

not be expressed in the form of a flat contradiction, but rather in the form of a mild protest, bearing well in mind that a man's taste is not always that of a woman's, or contrariwise, although, in these *fin de siècle* days, many women rather wish to ignore this fact, and desire to be considered the comrades of men, with all tastes in common. To—

“If you want to read a really amusing book, I advise you to get So-and-so's”—naming the title—if the rejoinder were—

“Oh, I know the book you mean! I have read it,” this would prevent anything further being said respecting it. But if the reply were—

“I have read it, and I agree with you. I was charmed with it! There is not a dull line in it. What a good scene that was at the hotel, when,” etc., etc.—this would place the conversation in his hands once more, and he would, doubtless, refer to another situation in a book that struck him as being particularly amusing, and which he evidently liked so much. Or—

“Do you mean that literally or ironically? Do you really like it, or are you only joking?” this would afford a further opportunity to say more on the subject, either in support or disparagement, in whichever way his opinion really

lay, and she would be also able to express hers.  
To—

“I sat up half the night reading So-and-so’s delightful book, ‘The Champion,’” if the answer were—

“Yes, it is a very clever book,” this admission would throw cold water on the subject. But if it were—

“I quite understand your doing so; I could not put it down myself until I had read every line of it. They say the characters are all taken from life. Do you know him at all?” such a reply as this would cause the conversation to take a turn in the direction of the author of the book under discussion.

The personality of authors and authoresses is now almost as general a theme as their works. The desire to associate the personality of the writer with his or her creations is a very common one, shared in by all men and women alike, and anything that can be said on this head offers an agreeable channel for making conversation.

“I met B. A. at dinner the other night,” might be an opening remark. “He is such good company, and I was surprised, as his books are so serious.”

"Oh, did you! I have often wished to meet him. I am a great admirer of his works, and I think a knowledge of the author renders them more intelligible; one seems to understand them better—do you not think so?" Then whatever could be said respecting the author alluded to would be said. But were the reply to have stopped short at—

"Oh, did you!" it would admit of nothing further. Or—

"What sort of a man is A. B.?" might be the question put. "Is he a very original talker? Does he impress you as being as clever as he is?" Or—

"Mrs. G—— came to see my wife this afternoon, the authoress of that popular book, 'The Marshes';" and then might follow a few remarks as to this famous authoress.

This style of conversation distinctly belongs to the order of facts, and thus every reply made either comes through personal knowledge or from a desire to gain it, and it entirely depends upon the extent of such knowledge as to how long a conversation of this nature is maintained.

Facts are invaluable in starting a conversation—



facts, for instance, connected with mutual friends, either absent or present ; inquiries after them if absent, allusions to them if present ; society facts of mutual interest, public events of importance, or things appertaining to the moment.

When a host, or one of the guests, is relating a story for the amusement of his immediate neighbours, conversation should be discontinued—but not too abruptly—that a guest might have the option of hearing the gist of the story, and of joining in the general comments that usually follow upon a well-told anecdote or the narration of some interesting incident.

Apart from the question of *cuisine* and gastronomy, is the far wider question of self, consciously or unconsciously. Self, *i.e.* "I am," is the most pleasing subject that can be broached. Whether this feeling or sentiment be of a pronounced or of a passive nature, it always exists in a larger or smaller degree, and is there to be played upon by the hand of a skilful performer.

Of all harmonious sounds, the music of one's own voice, with one's self for its subject, is of all strains the most beguiling ; consequently, the one capable of drawing forth this pleasing melody takes high rank in the other's estimation ; and as

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this instrument—the inherent selfishness existing in most men and women—is so easily played upon, and as playing upon it has no other main-spring than putting men and women on good terms with themselves, and as self is of all topics the one a man or woman is fairly and justly entitled to talk about, his or her own doings, feelings, impressions, and convictions, in preference to the doings or sayings of his or her neighbours, it is most allowable that this safe and pleasant outlet should be permitted and encouraged.

Personal knowledge of acquaintances is a great incentive to conversation, but in constructing it to serve as an example as to how it may most readily be carried on through and from one subject to another, this valuable aid has been up to this point on all possible occasions purposely excluded, for the reason that when this mutual ground exists, and people are in a position to refer to whom and to what they have seen, and to what they have done and are going to do, or to where they have or have not been, the difficulty of making conversation is disposed of.

As, however, there is no rule without an exception, and as many do not know how to make use of the materials thus supplied by mutual

interests and the current events of everyday life, to them a few suggestions how to handle these subjects with facility and ease, devoid of effort or strain of any kind, may be of service.

#### AT DINNER-PARTIES.

"Are you any relation to Mr. D. G——? He was staying at the same house where I was last week."

"Oh yes; he is my uncle—my father's youngest brother. I have not seen him for some time. He has only recently recovered from a bad attack of gout." Or—

"Mr. D. G—— is a relation of yours, I think? He asked me to meet you last week at dinner—but I was unfortunately engaged."

"Oh yes; he is my brother-in-law. We often dine with him." Or—

"You are related to Mrs. C. D——, are you not? What a pleasant woman she is."

"Oh no, I am not; but I know her slightly. She had a house at Folkestone when we were down there. I used to meet her occasionally. I suppose the similarity of names made you think so?" Or—

"I think you know a great friend of mine—Mrs. H——?"

"Indeed I do. She was driving with me this afternoon." Or—

"Have you heard any news of your brother lately from the Cape? I saw his name mentioned in the papers as being on the sick-list."

Remarks of this nature render conversation a very easy matter, there being much to be said on either side respecting the persons referred to; although oftener than not this personal knowledge is overlooked on first introduction, and subsequently regretted.

"I wish I had asked after So-and-so." Or—

"I quite forgot that So-and-so was related to So-and-so." Or—

"I wish I had happened to remember that Mrs. B—— was related to Mr. H——;" and so on.

It is surprising how far people will go to discover a link of this nature between new acquaintances, even to the remotest one. Perhaps this is only natural, after all, as a common interest in, or liking for, any particular person places the acquaintanceship newly formed on a distinctly friendly footing.

When a conversation turns upon travel, or upon

where one or other has been spending the autumn or winter, or intend doing so, there is no end to its possibilities. After a few preliminary remarks, much useful information can be imparted on the one side and received on the other, and useful hints gathered, independently of the pleasure always derived from hearing anything about a place to which one proposes going, and with which one is unacquainted, and the still greater pleasure that most people feel in relating their past experiences of any particular place to an appreciative listener. A conversation might start in this wise—

“Are you going out of town for ‘Easter?’”  
Or—

“Did you go anywhere for Easter?” Or—

“I suppose you are soon thinking of leaving town?” Or—

“I suppose you are not remaining much longer in town?” Or—

“You were at Spa last year, were you not? Do you think of going there again?” Or—

“We are thinking of going to Buxton as soon as we can get away.” Or—

“I think you know Hamburg well? There is an idea of our going there next week.”

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Leading remarks such as these afford an opening for the one to whom they are addressed to reply to them with readiness and without effort, the chief point being to put these simple observations in an interrogative form, as assertions have a contrary effect, and bar the way to further remarks.

To the first observation the answer would probably be—

“Yes; we thought of going to Rome for a fortnight. It will be a complete change for my father; he has been rather over-worked lately. I should have liked to have gone for the Holy Week, but could not get away so soon.”

If the answer were in the negative, the reason why should be stated thus—

“I am afraid not. We have had so much wet weather lately that it is hardly worth going down into the country just now, and the east winds are so disagreeable. We shall not leave town, as far as I know at present, until Whitsuntide.”

This would provoke either a concurrence with this opinion or an opposing one, thus—

“I quite agree with you. The country is wretched in this weather, and the spring is so backward; you would certainly find it pleasanter in town.

Why don't you take a run over to Paris for a few days?" Or—

"Well, I don't know. I think getting out of town is always an advantage at this time of year. I hate a Bank holiday in town. I am going down to Northamptonshire, to stay with my brother-in-law at his place. There is nothing much to be done; but it is a change, anyhow."

"Do you know that part at all?" etc.

This would give an opportunity for saying the place was known or unknown, and for mentioning the particular county more familiar to the person in question.

Or to the question, "Did you go anywhere for Easter?"

To so direct a question as this, it is hardly necessary to frame the sort of reply that would be made, as it would naturally depend upon the state of the case. Still, if the mere fact were stated, it would at once put an end to the conversation; therefore to—

"Yes, we did." Or—

"No, we did not," something further requires to be said, thus—

"Yes, we did. We went down to Eastbourne, and had a very pleasant ten days. It was very

quiet, but we liked it. Where did you go?"  
Or—

"No, we did not. We had several engagements to keep us in town, although it was Easter week ; besides, we did not care for the trouble of making up our minds where to go. You see, we are such a large party ; it is so different if you have a country house to go to. You have a place in the country, I think?"

Upon this, information would be given as to whether he had or had not, or where it was situated ; or that he only went down to his brother's place when he wanted a change, etc. To the remark—

"I suppose you are soon thinking of leaving town?"

Here again the replies embody facts ; but bald affirmatives or negatives must not alone be given, as they would lead nowhere, whereas, if coupled with further observations, they could be made to lead anywhere and everywhere.

"Yes, we are. I think every one is doing the same. We are going abroad at once. We shall make for Geneva in the first instance ; but they say we shall find it very hot. What do you think?"

This would lead to his saying that he was afraid



she would find it so, or that he never found it too hot as far as his experience went.

On the subject of travel there is hardly a man or woman who has not some interesting experiences to relate, some advice to offer, an hotel to recommend, a route to advise, or a point of interest to mention which ought not to be missed, etc. The name of some resident, a friend, might be given; one well known, who would be glad to be of use at any time, etc. If personal experiences cannot be drawn upon on the occasion, then those of some near relative or intimate friend are made available; thus—

“I don’t know much about it myself, but my brother and his wife were staying there last month at the new hotel just opened—the Metropole—and they said you could not beat it for comfort, everything is so well done. The rooms are very handsome—such fine views too; it is in a very good position,” etc. Or—

“No, we have not made any plans at present; we shall have to do so soon, I suppose. We went abroad last year, but this year we are thinking of going to Scotland to Braemar.”

Here again this topic would induce a reply, either based on his own experience or those of his

friends, and although a statement is not made interrogatively, yet to mention a place to which one intends going is sufficient lead to call forth some information respecting it, or some other even more attractive spot with which one or other is well acquainted ; thus—

“Oh, Braemar! I don’t know much about Braemar; but why don’t you go to Invercauld? The scenery is lovely—such walks and drives. And there is a very good, reasonable hotel. You would like the place, I am sure.”

The conversation would here be maintained by additional facts, the idea might be entertained, or might not be entertained, or the grounds for the preference for the original place named confessed to and so on.

To such a remark as—

“You were at Spa last year, were you not? Do you think of going there again?” facts are again the basis of the replies ; but these must be skilfully marshalled, or they will fall very flat for the purpose of making conversation.

“Yes, we were there for three weeks ; but it rained the whole of the time. It prejudiced me against the place. I do not think I should care to go there again.” To which the response might be—

"You see, the rain was so general last September ; it rained everywhere. We had an awful week at Doncaster, I remember. You know the A.s, I think? I was staying with them for the Doncaster week. We had a perfect deluge."

This, though branching away from the original topic, would equally serve to carry on the conversation.

To the bare statement of—

"We are thinking of going to Buxton as soon as we can get away," if the answer were—

"Oh, indeed! are you?" the topic would be exhausted before it had well begun ; but if some remarks relative to the place were made, it would keep it up and lead it into a different channel.

"The Peak country is lovely ; I know it well. They get more rain up there, however ; but the air is wonderful—it is so invigorating."

If to the remark—

"I think you know Hamburg well ; there is an idea of our going there next week," the reply were—

"Oh yes, I know it well," it would discourage further allusion to the subject ; but if to this rejoinder were added some details respecting the place, such as—

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"It is a pretty little place. I think you will like it ; one always meets some one one knows there." Or the answer might be—

"I don't know much about it myself ; I never made any stay there. Is your husband ordered to take the waters, or are you merely going there for a change?" this would occasion more facts to be elicited as to the reason for going, but it would not greatly prolong the conversation, for when neither one nor the other are acquainted with a place thus casually mentioned, they must either draw upon what they have heard respecting it or turn the subject into another direction ; thus—

"I have been to most of the German Spas, and if you had asked me about any other I could have told you what I knew about it," etc. Or—

"I have not been to any of the German Spas for health or amusement ; my time has not yet come for a course of waters—I suppose it will some day. Now, if you had asked me about Japan it would have been a different matter ; I have been there three times," etc. ; and this would suggest some leading observations concerning this distant region, its climate, its people, and so on.

A conversation is often commenced in this wise—

"Do you take any interest in that remarkable

will case that we have heard so much of lately in the papers?" Or—

"Are you at all interested in the expedition to the North Pole?"

To the first question the reply might be—

"Yes, I do ; it seems rather complicated. But do you think those codicils were genuine, or that some undue influence was brought to bear upon him?"

This would elicit an opinion either way ; and when a topic of any public interest is started, it may be taken for granted that the one who does so is well up in it and therefore has something to say upon it ; therefore to throw cold water upon any such allusion by saying—

"I don't think I do." Or—

"I am afraid I do not," would be the reverse of complimentary or conversational.

The foregoing commonplace examples of starting conversation have been chosen, because commonplace remarks are distinctly those with which ordinary conversation is commenced, and anything more original would be exceptional, and therefore not likely to prove of the same utility to those concerned.

General conversation is apt to concentrate itself

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on some particular topic, for the reason that each person adds his or her observations or individual ideas to the general stock, and thus a subject remains under discussion for some little time ; but if, as is often the case, it is an uncongenial one to any of the party present, and if they do not care to pursue it, or if they feel that were they to do so, they would probably get out of their depth, or if the subject in hand possesses little or no interest, a diversion could easily be created in an almost imperceptible manner. It does not demand any considerable amount of talent to do this well, although it calls for judgment in striking the key note, with due regard to time. An ill-timed interruption would not cause a divergence, but would rather tend to prolong a discussion ; the only result accruing from it would be the humiliating consciousness of having made a false move, and of having the remark ignored or put on one side.

A clever man or woman experiences but little difficulty in seizing the opportunity, and in obtaining the lead when any particular card is worth playing ; but if, on the contrary, the subject is of sufficient interest to all present not to call for any subtle interference from any of the party, it should then be permitted to drift on and follow its own

course, winding in and out, eddying round and round, now from opposition becoming a miniature cascade, and now flowing on smoothly and placidly, its surface only stirred by ripples of laughter, if any one present is equal to calling it forth.

Banter, however good-natured, if persisted in beyond a certain limit, not unfrequently develops into unpleasant personalities; therefore, the greatest good humour, consideration, and delicacy of feeling should be exercised when indulging in it; and a weak point in the character of any individual should in no case be ruthlessly or mercilessly exposed, or held up to ridicule under the guise of badinage.

Badinage, repartee, and humour, are as-sparkling wines to a dinner. Many a man who aspires to being considered a wit, prepares his witticisms or puns beforehand, and gives them forth when opportunity offers, and if the opportunity is not forthcoming, he generally creates it for himself. Other men, again, have a ready wit, which serves them at every turn of the conversation. They are always ready with a sparkling repartee or a witty rejoinder, and are equal to capping any joke; the difference between the two men being, that the good spirits of the one serve to keep the company amused during the whole of dinner, although nothing

particularly good or worth remembering may have been said by him, while the witticisms of the other are probably worthy of being remembered and repeated on subsequent or similar occasions.

A dinner-party of eight is very generally considered to be a most sociable number, as it admits of conversation being general ; the smaller number, six, not offering sufficient variety or versatility for the purpose ; while the larger number, twelve, or even ten, is outside the circle of the friendly and intimate, and within that of the conventional and the ceremonious.

The conversation at these pleasant dinners of eight is carried beyond the region of *tête-à-tête* dialogue, which is the usual order of things at dinner-parties of larger dimensions, as each individual composing the party of eight is expected to sustain his or her part, and to add his or her share to the general fund of talk, one individual drawing out the other. An idea started by one is taken up by another, passed on to a third, and is met, perhaps, by a still brighter ray from a fourth, thus offering a series of opportunities for all that is lively and bright, sparkling and witty, deep or profound, in the guests present to be brought into play.



In organizing dinner-parties of eight, it not unfrequently happens that two or three acknowledged clever talkers, whose *esprit* runs in the same groove, counteract each other's agreeable powers; while those whose talents lie in opposite directions, serve as whetstones for sharpening each other's wits.

Thus, at a dinner of eight, every man should be on the alert to catch what is being said, as the ball may be thrown in his direction at any moment, and his skill as a conversational bowler be put to the test. The host is often the best bowler of the party, through knowing the style of play of his various guests, and the special points in which they excel.

The conversation which takes place between men, both at dinner and after dinner, even though strangers to each other, usually takes a practical and common-sense turn. Politics, the money market, the state of trade, and all in which men have both a private and public interest, are discussed by them in a broad and vigorous manner, and, therefore, examples of how to start a conversation on these subjects would be superfluous.

## CHAPTER VII.

### AIDS TO COMMENCING CONVERSATION IN THE BALL-ROOM.

CONVERSATION in a ball-room hardly merits the term, and is more or less stereotyped and conventional. It can hardly be otherwise, when it is remembered that the majority of those assembled are either very slightly acquainted or entire strangers up to the moment of introduction. Young men still at college, and young girls just out, invariably confine their remarks and observations within the narrowest limits on account of shyness, diffidence, and inability to express themselves as they would. The up-to-date young lady, however, has got far beyond this phase, if she ever experienced it, and the up-to-date young man is equally master of the situation, and neither requires any help or assistance in getting over the preliminaries towards acquaintanceship. All are not thus equal in the opening days of their manhood and girlhood to

making themselves agreeable to their partners on first introduction, and "What shall I say next?" is the thought uppermost in the minds of not a few during the short time that they are in each other's company. When the remarks of a young man meet with no other response from his partner than "Oh yes," or "Oh no," he is inclined to pronounce her the stupidest girl he has ever met, and yet perhaps she is the reverse of dull and unintelligent, only that she does not know quite what to say relative of the moment. A young man has the advantage in that he has the privilege of commencing a conversation by asking a girl to dance, and therefore his subject is ready to hand, and it rests with him to offer to take her to the tea-room or to the supper-room, as the case may be, thus the lead is with him rather than with her.

All ball-room formulas, as regards asking for a dance, and the consequent replies, are more or less on the same lines between slight acquaintances, and thus a young man either says—

"May I have the pleasure of dancing this with you?" This ceremonious request is usually made on a first introduction ; or—

"May I have the pleasure of dancing No. 6 with

you?" The reply to either of these is, in the case of acceptance—

"I shall be very happy." Or, in the case of refusal—

"Thanks very much. I am afraid I am engaged for this dance." Or—

"What is No. 6? Is it a valse?" And if the answer is—

"No; it is a square dance," it gives her the opening to accept or decline according to inclination. If the query is—

"Will you give me a dance?" Or—

"What dance may I have?" a girl has the option of letting him choose a dance or of offering him any one she pleases. In town it is seldom possible to ask for other than "this dance" or "the next dance," as guests are constantly coming and going the whole of the evening. For this reason programmes are so seldom used.

"Are you engaged for this?" is another useful interrogation, and leads to the quick response—

"No, I am not," which elicits the polite rejoinder of—

"Then may I have the pleasure?"

"Are you engaged for No. 10?" If the reply is again—

"No, I am not."

"Then may I write my name on your programme?" is the inevitable sequence. Or—

"I am afraid I am engaged; but I will give you No. 13 if you like." But this only where programmes are in use, and not at London balls.

When a girl desires to give an unqualified refusal, she should either say—

"Thank you very much, but I am engaged," or if not engaged, and still not desirous of dancing with the man in question, her best way out of the dilemma is to say—

"I don't think I shall dance this;" and should he ask for a later dance and she feel equally reluctant to dancing it with him, she might honourably evade doing so by pleading the probability of her leaving before that particular dance comes off. If this is not likely to be the case, then she might plead fatigue and the wish to sit out rather than dance.

Between those who know each other more or less intimately—

' "I hope you have kept a dance for me?" is frequently said, but oftener to married ladies than to young girls, as the phrase conveys a minimum

of flattery seldom addressed to young girls unless by friends of long standing.

"Won't you spare me a dance?" is equally complimentary, and comes within the same category.

"May I not dance something with you?" Or—

"Shall we dance this?" Or—

"Shall we take a turn?" Or—

"If you are not engaged, will you dance this with me?" are phrases much in use between friends and acquaintances, to which the rejoinders vary in this wise—

"I hope you have kept a dance for me?"

"I am afraid I have not one to give you; you should have asked me earlier," would be an amiable way of declining the request. Or—

"Yes, indeed I can give you the dance after this, if you like."

To "Won't you spare me a dance?"

"Certainly I will. Which dance will you have?" Or—

"I am afraid my programme is quite full." Or in town the reply might be—

"I am engaged for the next two or three dances; suppose you ask me a little later?"

To "May I not dance something with you?"

"Yes ; the next Lancers, if you like." Or—

"I am sorry to say I have not one dance to give you. I know so many people here."

"Shall we dance this ?" can only be said when a dance has commenced, and when it is quite evident that the lady is not engaged for it, or that her partner has failed to find her. If the former, the ready answer would be—

"Yes ; I shall be delighted." Or—

"Certainly, with pleasure." Or—

"Yes, if you like." In the latter case the answer might be—

"I am engaged, but I don't see my partner anywhere."

To "Shall we take a turn ?" Or—

"If you are not engaged, will you dance this with me ?" the answer might be—

"Yes, certainly." Or—

"No, I am not engaged for this."

Any of the foregoing phrases are applicable to this subject, and are in current use in the ball-room, *i.e.* these are the lines on which such requests are made, accepted, and declined, modified and varied, according to circumstances and length of acquaintanceship. The ceremonious phrases of—

"May I have the pleasure ?" And—

"I shall be very happy," are still somewhat in use—in spite of the old-fashioned ring about them—by those who feel that this style of address is more suited to the occasion than a less formal one would be. As a ball-room introduction frequently commences and ends with but one dance only, these words, though distantly stiff, are not wholly inappropriate.

Another distant remark still made in the ball-room, is the stereotyped—

"Thank you," addressed by a man to his partner, when he has conducted her back to her chaperon. To this no reply is expected or possible—there is no time for it; he has dismissed himself, and a bow and a smile is the only acknowledgment it admits of.

Dancing in itself is not conducive to anything beyond desultory observations, disjointed sentences, questions and answers; and, therefore, ball-room conversation does not, and is not expected to, soar above polite commonplaces relative to the occasion. The materials at command are decidedly limited, and, if enumerated, might be summed up thus: the band, the flowers, the floor, and, later on, the supper. The majority of people perpetually ring the changes upon the following phrases,



with but little variation in the construction ; for instance—

“What a capital band it is !”

“How well the band plays !”

“What a good band this is !”

“This is a better ball than last year’s !”

“This is a very good ball !”

“This is not such a good ball as it was last year !”

“What a pretty ball this is !”

“What a good floor this is !”

“What a first-rate floor this is !”

“Don’t you find the floor very slippery ?”

“What lovely flowers !”

“How beautiful the flowers are !”

“I think the flowers quite lovely ; don’t you ?”

“How pretty the flowers are !”

“The decorations are very good !”

“Are not the rooms prettily decorated ?”

“How pretty the lights are. I like those shades ; don’t you ?”

“How the electric light flickers. Do you think it is going out ?”

‘The frequent repetition of these remarks is apt to grow a little wearisome—the slight variation in the construction of each sentence hardly offering

sufficient variety to atone for its monotony after, perhaps, the tenth time of hearing. These topics should be left to those who cannot conveniently get on without them, and it is advisable to branch away from them in any direction, even if compelled to start with them through the pertinacity of a partner.

Partners in a ball-room are sometimes dull—oftener quite the contrary. The readiness of speech and the immense amount of “go” met with in some young men fresh from the Universities, is only equalled by the reserve to be met with in others; and thus a young girl at her first ball may have as partners young men with whom it is easy to talk, and with whom no effort is necessary to make conversation. On the other hand, she may dance with men so quiet, and with so little to say, that conversation is uphill work, and she feels that, unless she originates some remark, or series of remarks, they will remain a very silent couple during the whole of a dance.

Monosyllabic answers to trivial questions do not help a conversation forward, but rather retard weak efforts, and, as it were, put a complete stop to anything further being said. In every instance the “Yes, I am,” or “Yes, I do,” or “No, I do

not," should be supported by some trifling observation or other, by way of sustaining in some degree a short conversation.

"Have you been to many balls this season?" is not unfrequently a leading question.

Fact comes to the rescue when some such question as this is put; but it must be fact, not dryly stated, and slightly opened out.

"I have been to several dances, but to no balls as yet. Very few balls take place in this neighbourhood, and those we have come off later. Have you ever been to the Bury ball?" Or—

"No; indeed this is my first ball. I have been looking forward to it very much."

"Do you know many people here?" might be the next observation. "I suppose you do?"

"Yes, I think so. I am engaged for nearly every dance, and I only hope we shall stay long enough to get through them all," etc. Or—

"No, I know very few indeed. We have come with quite a small party, and I don't expect to get much dancing this evening in consequence, unless my brother meets any of his friends here. You know him, I think, do you not?"

"Do you have many balls at Cambridge?" is a leading remark that the shyest girl might make

to her partner if she knew that he was a Cambridge man.

Here, again, fact would assist in carrying on the conversation, and the rejoinder would naturally be to this effect—

“Very seldom during the winter months ; but during the May term we have a week of jolly balls, four or five at least. Have you ever been to Cambridge?” This would lead to any information she had to give on the subject, and would carry on the conversation quite as long as required.

If an Oxford man, a similar remark might be made, with a little variation as to facts, and would offer an opening for mentioning Commemoration week and the autumn county balls.

Although a girl is not always aware from whence her partner hails, yet when the introduction is made it invariably conveys something on this head. For instance, her brother would certainly say when introducing his friend to his sister—

“I want to introduce my friend B—— to you. He was at Magdalen with me.” Or a friend of hers, in making an introduction, would certainly say—

“I want to introduce my nephew to you. He is at Sandhurst, but he has come to stay with me for a few days.” Or—

"I don't think you know my son ; he is studying for the Army."

Such indications as the above, as to the position of a young man introduced, gives a girl an opportunity of saying something to the point, by way of making ready conversation, to which he can respond with equal readiness.

The conversation that takes place between married ladies and their partners is, as a rule, of too friendly a character to need any examples being given, or to lay down any lines on which to originate it. And even if comparative strangers to one another, as men and women of the world, they require no assistance or advice in this matter. This equally holds good between chaperons and the patrons and patronesses of balls. They also have too much common ground to go upon to need any suggestions with regard to making conversation.

When a young man comes to claim his partner for a dance, he usually says—

"This is our dance." Or—

"I think you are engaged to me for this?" To which the answer is, as a matter of course—

"Yes."

The first conversational effort is expected to come from him, and if a square dance, it generally

relates to the position they shall take in the room, whether they shall stand at the top or bottom of the quadrille, and so on ; and this offers no opportunity or necessity for any remark from his partner other than acquiescence ; and when not dancing, the brief moments are filled up by questions and answers of rather a practical nature, relating to the surroundings of the ball-room.

On a first introduction, personal topics are out of the question, and the two thus brought together can only rely upon the adventitious aid the surroundings supply.

Sometimes a young man hazards a remark such as—

“Are you staying in the neighbourhood for these balls?” Or—

“Did you come over with So-and-so from Bramley?”

The answer to the first question is perhaps—

“Yes, we are.” This alone would block the way to pursuing the subject, and he would have to find another opening if he wished to be conversational ; but were she to say—

“Yes ; we are staying at Foulton Towers, and we came over a large party,” he might be able to say that he knew her hostess slightly and that

the hounds were to meet there on the following morning, and he hoped to ride over in time for the meet, and so on. This common ground would last them until the dance was over, and would afford sufficient topics for conversation should they again dance together during the course of the evening.

At London balls introductions are but seldom made, and consequently those who dance together know each other slightly or well, as the case may be, and even the slightest acquaintance affords scope for a few remarks independently of the surroundings relative to mutual friends, etc., and the uphill style of conversation—endeavouring to find something to talk about—has not to be gone through.

In the pauses of a round dance, occasionally for a subject of conversation allusion is made by the lady to her partner's dancing, if it is something out of the common, and she says—

“How *well* you dance.” Or—

“Have you been much abroad? You dance so well.” This would induce him to tell her whether he had or had not been abroad, and would furnish a theme for desultory conversation.

A trivial observation will often serve as a lead

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to a partner to carry on ball-room conversation, if conversation it may be called, as time and exertion do not admit of its being but of the briefest.

Sometimes it happens that a young man's willingness to dance is not equal to his capabilities of so doing, and his partner has to use a little *finesse* in giving him to understand that she would rather not continue the dance, and she says—

“The room is rather crowded; suppose we rest a few minutes?” Or—

“We are not getting on very well, are we? Shall we go to the tea-room? I think I should like an ice. This valse is nearly over.” Or—

“I don't think I shall finish this dance, I feel rather tired; the room is getting very hot.” Or—

“I don't think this valse is a good one to dance to, do you? The time is not clearly marked. Suppose we go round to where my mother is seated on the other side.” Or—

“There are so many couples dancing now, it is almost impossible to dance at all.”

It is quite needless and, in a way, almost unkind to tell a young man frankly that his dancing is wretchedly bad, or that he cannot dance at all,



as, when he is a bad performer, he is pretty generally conscious of the fact, and makes the most ample apologies for his clumsiness and awkwardness, and overwhelms himself with blame to such an extent that his partner has to protest and almost to defend him from his own reproaches. On these lines partners part the best of friends instead of being distinctly antagonistic to each other, as is often the case when a curt or even sharp remark is impatiently uttered. Good dancers, however, are not of necessity always to be found in the ranks of ladies, and here and there a man has for a partner a girl who positively has no idea of dancing, and whom no 'amount of teaching could teach.

A man seldom asks a girl who dances badly to dance a second time—it is as much as he can do to get through their first performance together; but politeness does not allow him to make as many excuses for abruptly terminating a dance as may his fair partner, so he endures to the finish if practicable. Or he says—

“I am afraid I am not dancing your step,” and determinedly refrains from joining in the dance again, or takes one more turn and again stops until the valse is finished.

Later on he says to his friend, "Why did you ask me to dance with that girl?" but to the girl herself he does not in any way make known his opinion of her dancing, it would not be polite or courteous on his part, and so she never knows what a penance her partners have to undergo.

A little conversation is furnished between the dances on the subject whether or no a lady will have some tea.

"Will you have some tea or an ice?" is the stereotyped phrase. Or—

"Will you let me take you to the tea-room?" Or—

"Shall we go into the tea-room, if you are not engaged for the next dance?" And the rejoinders to these requests, if in the affirmative, are—

"Thank you, I should like some tea very much."

"Yes, please, do ; it is very hot here."

"Oh yes, certainly ; I don't think I am engaged for the next dance." If in the negative—

"No, thanks ; I don't think I care about any." Or—

"Thank you ; but I see my partner for the next dance is coming in this direction, so there would not be time to have any." Or—

"I am engaged, thanks, so I am afraid I must go back to my chaperon."

Phrases such as these are in everyday use, and are repeated with very little variation. Again, the act of going in to supper supplies another set of conventional phrases subject to the like variations.

"May I take you in to supper?" or "down to supper?" as the case may be. Or—

"Will you let me take you in to supper?"  
Or—

"May I have the pleasure of taking you in to supper?" Or—

"Have you been in to supper yet?" Or—

"Shall we go and have some supper now?"  
Or—

"You promised me the pleasure of taking you in to supper."

To the foregoing, the replies should not be confined to "Yes" or "No," but—

"Thank you very much; I should be glad of some supper," would be a more appropriate answer. Or—

"Yes, I shall be delighted if you will." Or—

"No, I have not had any supper yet; I should like some very much." Or—

"You are very kind; suppose we do?" Or—

"Yes, I know I did ; but don't you think the room is too crowded ?"

The negative answers run—

"Thank you very much, but I have promised to go in to supper with Mr. A——."

"I am afraid not ; I think I am engaged for this supper dance."

"Thank you very much, but I have already been in to supper with Mr. B——."

"No, I don't think we will ; the supper-room is so crowded. I would rather wait, if you don't mind."

"Did I really ! I am sorry to say I had quite forgotten it, and I am going to dance this valse. You don't mind, do you ?" and so on.

The moment of departure from county balls is another opportunity for proffering small attentions.

"May I take you to the cloak-room ?" Or—

"Can I be of any use in taking you to the cloak-room ?" Or—

"Shall I ask for your carriage ?" Or—

"Shall I go and see if your carriage is up ?"  
Or—

"May I take you to your carriage ?"

To these kindly offers of assistance, only gracious affirmatives can be given, such as—

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"Yes, please." Or—

"Thank you very much." Or—

"It will be very kind if you will." Or—

"I don't like to give you the trouble." Or—

"I should be so much obliged, if you don't mind the trouble." Or—

"Yes, if you will," etc.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### AIDS TO CONVERSATION AT MORNING CALLS.

AT afternoon or so-called morning calls, those not well acquainted, or who are on ceremony with each other, having but little in common, and not exactly sure of their ground, require, as it were, quite a fund of ideas to carry them pleasantly and easily through an interview or *tête-à-tête*. But between people thoroughly intimate, moving in the same sphere, and having a circle of mutual friends, pleasant friendly chat, agreeable conversation flows readily enough, called forth by a general interchange of ideas on social and domestic matters.

To possess a good flow of conversation, or rather to have the power of making it readily *à propos* to the occasion, is a faculty that all are not endowed with, taking society in the aggregate.

A slight acquaintance with a person is not necessarily a drawback to making conversation, as

might be supposed; for persons whose acquaintance is of long standing often experience as much difficulty in making themselves agreeable to, or in other words "getting on with," each other, as if their acquaintance were but a day old. Every one knows persons of this class, and every one has met them. They have no ready flow of ideas, and no readiness of speech at command; and when an ordinary idea does occur to them, they hasten to deliver it with inordinate eagerness, ungracefully and ungrammatically. These abrupt utterances are usually followed by a collapse. If the remark thus jerked out happens to fall flat through being ill-timed, or rather from being beside the question, it is either met by a little cold unsympathetic "Oh," or calls forth a slightly sarcastic rejoinder; and either of these modes of receiving the well-meant conversational effort is equally detrimental to further advances of this nature.

In conversing with new acquaintances a certain amount of shyness and reserve is often perceptible in the manner of persons who are not naturally reserved, and who, not quite sure of the line they ought to take with respect to the proclivities and ideas of a new acquaintance, feel a reluctance in starting any but the most commonplace topics, and

thus appear to be but very commonplace people. It is the facility of making conversation that enables a person to set this natural reserve on one side, and which gives, as it were, the key of the situation to its fortunate possessor.

“Afternoon Calls” are a great test of individual capabilities for making conversation, as a call signifies neither more nor less than a quarter of an hour’s conversation with the person called upon; and a *mauvais quart d’heure* it is to those who are at a loss what to say or what to talk about. To those proficient in the agreeable art of conversation calls are amongst the pleasantest of social duties, when the conventional quarter of an hour of a conventional call is lengthened out into half an hour’s easy and delightful talk, chat, or conversation, as the case may be.

The etiquette of calls is fully described in a former work; \* thus when the call is made, and the visitor is ushered into the drawing-room, and the hostess has risen to shake hands, the usual salutation should be, “How do you do?” The abbreviation of “How do you do?” into “Howdy do?” is supposed by some to be the height of good manners, whereas it sounds affected, rather



than not, although "How do you do?" when uttered quickly, almost takes the sound of "How d'ye do?"

The salutation of "How do you do?" should simply be regarded as a salutation only, and not as a personal inquiry after the health of the individual to whom it is addressed; and this formula of "How do you do?" is answered with the like formula of "How do you do?" It is actually as much a simultaneous salutation as is a bow, and is simultaneously expressed.

To answer this greeting of "How do you do?" with "Pretty well, thank you," or, "I have not been very well lately," or, "Quite well, thank you; I hope you are quite well?" or the like references to health, would be trite, and out of place. When the health of either visitor or hostess is discussed, inquired after, or sympathized with, it should not be referred to on the first entrance of the visitor, but later on when the ladies are seated.

It is not considered in good taste for ladies, when addressing each other, to add the surname to the salutation of "How do you do?" unless several persons are present, when it might be expedient to do so, or in the case of a visitor

being a comparative stranger to the hostess, when it would be correct, although ceremonious, and then only on the visitor's first arrival ; but in *tête-à-tête* conversations it is not usual for persons to address each other by their surnames, the personal pronoun "you" being all-sufficient for the occasion.

When several people are conversing together, it is often necessary for ladies to address each other by their surnames—in the case, for instance, of two ladies wishing to draw a third into conversation, or in the case of one lady wishing to address her friend or acquaintance at some little distance from her ; but two ladies should not ring the changes on each other's names, neither should one lady reiterate the name of the other with whom she is conversing.

On the hostess and visitor being seated at a morning call, they should, if not particularly intimate, have recourse to the adventitious aid of general topics.

The weather is a never failing subject with the unimaginative, but it is a weak resource, after all, and is very speedily exhausted. Wet weather admits of a few more remarks being extracted therefrom than does fine weather. Wet days and cold winds can be deplored and regretted, but

remarks on fine weather admit of little but assent.

"What a beautiful day it has been!"

"Yes, it has ; quite lovely."

"I hope we shall have fine weather now."

"I am sure I hope so ; we've had so little sunshine."

The topic of fine weather can but begin and end in this wise. The topic of bad weather carries the conversation but very little further ; and those depending upon this frail conversational bark find themselves very soon stranded.

"What a miserably wet day it has been !"

"Yes ; I think it is raining now."

"I really think it has rained every day this week."

"Yes, I think it has. Thursday was very wet."

The variability of the English climate naturally suggests a few passing remarks, but remarks of this nature are not sufficiently important or interesting to warrant their forming the first, and with some people the *only*, subject of conversation.

Conversation to be agreeable should not partake of the nature of a catechism, meaning a mere string of questions—questions not led up to or in any way originated or evolved from the foregoing conversation, but put abruptly and *à propos*

of nothing. There are several topics that are handled in this uncomfortable manner by certain commonplace people, until these commonplace questions are anticipated almost before they are uttered ; such as—

“Have you been to see the pictures?”

“Have you heard ——?”—mentioning some new tenor.

“Have you seen ——?”—naming some new popular piece.

“Have you read ——?”—referring to some new popular book.

These and similar subjects are very suitable ones upon which to converse, but they should be introduced and welded into the chain of talk rather than be treated interrogatively, and should be given rather as a personal experience, combined with an apparent wish to gather an expression of opinion from the person to whom the remarks are addressed. This mode of treating these ordinary subjects divests them slightly of the commonplaceness with which they are too often broached. Commonplace people greatly try the patience of their friends by their trite commonplaces respecting the pictures and the artists, the theatres and the actors, apparently oblivious of the fact that the

daily newspapers contain ample criticisms on their merits and demerits. These observations apply solely to mediocre people incompetent to form any opinion on the matter, being wanting alike in talent and intellect, and these are precisely the people who step in and thrust their remarks upon those who are far more capable of forming a correct judgment. When musical events or artistic or literary points are discussed or alluded to by talented and gifted people, the contrary is the case, and their opinions are sought for and appreciated.

After the preliminaries of welcoming a visitor at a morning call are over, the ball of conversation might be set rolling in this wise, premising that the ladies are new acquaintances rather than intimate friends.

"I was so sorry not to find you at home when I called." Or—

"I am so glad I happened to be at home to-day." Or—

"I have been trying to come and see you, but have been so much engaged."

"Yes; I was sorry too. But I am seldom at home in the afternoon." Or—

"Yes; it is very fortunate. One seldom finds any one at home now." Or—

"Oh, I hope you will come and see me soon ; I am generally in at five."

A lady by mentioning her own movements or arrangements, or by referring to any matter connected with herself and family if not of too private a nature, gives a lead or opening, and affords an opportunity for taking up the thread of the discourse, and carrying it into wider channels, far beyond the range of the pictures, the theatres, or the weather. And in proportion as the conversation diverges into friendly or domestic topics, so do the two ladies become more at ease with each other, gaining in a short time a clear insight into each other's views and pursuits.

In answer to a remark such as—

"I have not seen you for some time. Have you been away?" a visitor might say—

"Yes, we have ; and I have had a wretched cold since I came back."

"I am sorry ; I hope you have quite got over it. Where did you go?"

A short reply of this nature would give an opportunity of much being said. The beauties of the country might be descanted upon, the neighbourhood be casually mentioned, and the neighbours as casually referred to.

If the winter had been passed abroad, there would at once be a wide field offered for conversation, which an intelligent visitor would make the most of by drawing forth descriptions of the tour, and the amusements and interests of the place, by a few judicious observations in this wise. Supposing that the sojourn had been at Algiers, Rome, or Nice, and the hostess has been at neither of these places of resort, she should draw upon her memory and endeavour to recollect something she has heard respecting the most salient features of either place for the purpose of keeping up the conversation, and of calling forth details that her visitor is able and willing to furnish. And if, on the contrary, she is herself personally acquainted with the foreign town or city named, whatever had most pleased and interested herself would be the points to bring forward, with the view of eliciting the opinions of the lady with whom she was conversing.

A query of "Where have you been staying?" would offer an opportunity for some little conversation of this nature being held.

"We have been to Nice for a few weeks, to get away from the fogs. We had brilliant sunshine, most perfect weather; a little snow, but that was very transitory."

"What a pleasant change! We were there last year, only a little later, and did not come back till after Easter." Or—

"We only came back from the North a few days before Christmas."

"Really! Did you not find it very cold?"

"Well, yes, rather, but very bracing."

Such a lead as this would carry on the conversation for a good quarter of an hour at least, very pleasantly and easily.

To touch on the actual topics of the hour demands both tact and cleverness, and a topic of ordinary interest that has become common property through the medium of the daily papers or the society journals should never be introduced as an item of original news. Many people contract the habit of making conversation out of the intelligence supplied by these channels, slightly forgetful of the fact that this mine of information is open to all. This class of conversation is peculiarly irritating to a well-informed listener. When the public news of the day is important enough to be referred to, it should be brought forward as "public news" only, for discussion or argument, or as a matter of general interest, surprise, or regret.



If tea is brought in during the visit, the hostess says—

“May I give you some tea?” Or—

“Will you have some tea?” Or—

“The tea is here; may I give you some?”

Or—

“You will have some tea, will you not?”

But she should not say—

“Will you allow me to offer you a cup of tea?”

Or—

“Will you take a cup of tea?”

Drinking tea or not is so thoroughly immaterial and unimportant a matter, that no persuasion need be employed in offering it, and if visitors decline it, it is unnecessary to induce them to alter their minds.

When one or two callers are present, unacquainted with each other and but slightly acquainted with the hostess, if not intending to make a formal introduction, she should endeavour to render the conversation general, incidentally mentioning the names of the callers, that each might become aware of the identity of the other. A hint, a suggestion, or an expression dropped from either of the ladies would, in the hands of a clever woman, be all-sufficient for the basis of conversation.

Even between the merest acquaintances some slight fact must be mutually known to serve as an opening for making conversation, and the opening thus given admits of a wider range of subjects.

A hostess might remark—

“It is quite a chance my being at home this afternoon. I am so glad to see you. I was going out of town for a few days, and was obliged to put off my visit this morning.”

“A very lucky chance, I think,” might be the rejoinder. “I am a great believer in chance, or fate, or whatever it may be.”

“I have always thought that every one is master of his own fate,” the hostess might reply.

If in answer to this remark the visitor replied—

“Do you think so?” or, “Yes, I think so,” or, “I suppose one is,” the conversation on this head would come to a deadlock; but if the reply suggested that chance was accountable for much, and that the inevitable could not be controlled, especially with regard to the higher and more important events of life, the conversation could be easily carried on, and the hostess might continue in this vein by saying—

“Yes, I have seen instances when a quarter of an hour has altered the whole tenor of a person’s

life ; and, after all, one's life is made up of little rather than of great turning points," etc.

Conversation of the nature of the foregoing can easily be evolved from the most trivial remark, and in this those who are strangers to each other can readily take part, and it can even be directed into more elevating channels than can be the mere fashionable gossip of the hour. It has also this advantage over fashionable gossip, in so far that it is not necessary that people should move in the same set to understand the drift of the talk, whereas fashionable talk relates principally to the movements of personal acquaintances, pointless to an uninitiated listener.

"How well the wedding went off. I thought the bride looked lovely. What magnificent diamonds she had !"

"Yes, were they not? They are going to spend the honeymoon at Moors Castle, his brother-in-law's beautiful place in Cumberland." Or—

"I dined with the A——s last night, and they were talking about Mabel's wedding, and they said——"

Here the conversation becomes inaudible, and is resumed by a remark addressed to a third person present—

"I think you know Lady Brown, do you not? We are talking about her daughter's wedding." But the reply is hardly waited for, and the speaker continues—"Oh, do you know Evelyn is going to be presented at the first Drawing-Room? Constance has asked them to stay with her, as Sir George is away just now. You know, he is such an invalid that he does not care to have visitors in the house—not even his relatives."

"So I have heard!" Whether this refers to the presentation or Sir George's health is not quite clear.

"Who is going to present her?"

"Her mother-in-law. Have you met her?"

"Yes, I have! At a dinner-party at the G——s'."

When a conversation such as the foregoing is carried on by hostess and visitor at an afternoon call, a second visitor present often finds herself quite outside of the conversation through not knowing any of the people referred to, and therefore takes her leave at the earliest possible moment, having sat an all but silent listener to the duologue between the two ladies.

## TAKING LEAVE AT AFTERNOON CALLS.

Leave-taking at afternoon calls is in itself an art requiring grace of manner and decision of action, devoid of abruptness and of indecision. The leave-taking of many people is trying in the extreme, not on pathetic grounds, but because of a way peculiar to them of hovering between remaining and departing; they rise, they shake hands, and still they linger, not that they have anything particularly to say, but because of the difficulty they experience in getting themselves away.

When a lady has paid, as she considers, a sufficiently long visit, if she has been forming any plans with her hostess, of however simple a nature, she should, on rising from her seat, and while extending her hand to her hostess, refer incidentally to them, which would be a graceful preparation to leave-taking, such as—

“I will write whether we can get tickets for that night. Good-bye.” And the reply might be—

“Yes, do!” Or—

“I will send round to know, if you like. Good-bye.” Or—

“Then you think you will be able to come with us?”

"I am afraid not! I much wish I could; it is so kind of you. Good-bye."

When there is nothing of this sort to go upon, no reminding words to supplement the leave-taking, the visitor rises, and while extending her hand, might say—

"I am afraid I must say good-bye." And the hostess might reply, while accompanying her visitor to the drawing-room door—

"Good-bye. I am so glad to have seen you!"

When making adieux it is not usual to say "Good afternoon," or "Good morning," but simply "Good-bye." Between friends and acquaintances the expressions of "Good afternoon," or "Good day," are not in use, neither is "Good morning," said to friends or acquaintances, save at the breakfast-table, and during the morning hours; then it is used as a salutation, and not as an expression of farewell. The terms "Good morning" and "Good afternoon" are chiefly in use between superiors and their inferiors, and *vice versa*, and business men.

Men, more especially professional and business men, having but a superficial knowledge of each other, generally make use of this term of "Good morning" in their mutual recognitions, when not

being sufficiently intimate to use the familiar "How are you?" or "How do you do?" which are the usual salutations between men when well acquainted with each other.

When a call is made upon a friend of the hostess—whose guest she is—and not upon the hostess herself, if she happens to be present when the visitor is announced, she might, after a few moments of conversation, leave the friends to themselves, not quitting the room abruptly, however, and perhaps remarking to her guest, while rising from her seat—

"I shall leave you now—I dare say you have a great many things to talk over." Or—

"I have ordered the carriage at three. So I will come back for you in about half an hour, if you like." Any trivial remark relating to domestic affairs might also be made to avoid leaving the drawing-room silently or hastily.

On the subject of bridal calls, if a married lady makes a first call, unaccompanied by her husband, and is under the necessity of introducing herself to the bride, a remark of the following description would be the most applicable under the circumstances, and from this point the conversation might be easily carried on to other topics, thus—

“I must introduce myself to you. My husband is a great friend of Mr. A——’s, so I have come to make your acquaintance.” To which the bride might reply—

“It is very kind of you ; I have often heard my husband talk of Mr. G——,” etc.

The subject of bridal calls, however, has been referred to at some length in another chapter of the present work.



## CHAPTER IX.

### CONVERSING WITH NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

WHEN introductions are made between persons on ceremony with each other, it is usual to pave the way for this being done by a few polite preliminaries in this wise—

“Mrs. A—— has asked me to introduce her to you. I wonder if I may?” Or—

“Mrs. A—— would so like to know you. May I introduce her to you?” Or—

“I want to introduce Mrs. A—— to you. I am sure you would like her.” Or—

“I don’t think you know Mrs. A——? Shall I introduce you to her?” (The introducing YOU *to* HER should be said in the case of Mrs. A—— being of higher rank or social position than Mrs. B——.) Or—

“I must try and make an opportunity presently, and introduce you to Mrs. A——. You would get on very well with her; I am sure.”

If the proposed introduction were agreeable, and under such circumstances it could hardly be otherwise, the acquiescence would probably take this form—

“Oh, certainly! I should be very pleased to know her.” Or—

“I should be very glad to know her.” Or—

“Thank you very much; I should like to know her immensely.” Or—

“Yes, please, do! I have often wanted to know her.”

If the proposed introduction were for some reason or other not desired, a polite negative should be expressed—

“Thank you very much, but I don’t think I care about it.” Or—

“It is very kind of you; but from what I have seen of her, I don’t think I should care for her much.” Or—

“I don’t think you must introduce us to each other. I fancy my husband does not like Mr. A——.” Or—

“Oh, I am rather afraid of Mrs. A——; I hear she says such very sharp things about people.”

Reasons such as these might render an introduction undesirable, in which case a refusal

should be couched in some such manner as the above.

The subject of introductions has been so , thoroughly exhausted in a former work, that it would be superfluous to refer to it again in the present one.

Persons being casually and unexpectedly introduced to each other, often experience a certain amount of difficulty in starting a conversation, unless supported by the person by whom the introduction is made; and it is precisely at the moment an introduction is made that pleasant, bright observations do such good service in promoting future intercourse, and in creating a favourable impression.

A person with a flattering tongue, or who is ever telling a flattering tale, is very rightly considered to be a most untrustworthy and objectionable individual, and has justly been held up to universal reprobation by moralists, essayists, historians, and novelists.

But the flattery current in society does not consist of insincere compliments, indiscriminately launched, with a view of propitiating, or of cultivating some one in particular with whom the flatterer is anxious to ingratiate himself, but rather

springs from a just and honest appreciation of the merits of the one to whom it is offered. Flattery of this nature, if indeed it may be called flattery, is thus divested of one of its chief characteristics—namely, humbug. To put this honest appreciation into well-chosen words, at the right time and at the right moment, has the effect of putting a person on thoroughly good terms with himself, and consequently with the one who has occasioned this very pleasant sensation ; but when this honest appreciation is handled in a rough, clumsy, and unskilful manner, it produces exactly the contrary effect, and has the appearance of the coarsest flattery, distasteful and repugnant to its recipient.

Remarks that have this end in view, namely, the creating a favourable impression, hardly ever fail of their end, as a sincere endeavour to please, and to be pleased, is usually crowned with success.

On an introduction being made, any small fact or incident relating to the one and known to the other should be touched upon in the first instance. Facts, however insignificant, always serve as a *cheval de bataille*, and can be elaborated or not as the occasion demands. Some such lead as the following would soon place two comparative strangers thoroughly at their ease :—"I am so glad

to have met you. I have often heard of you from some friends of mine, Mr. and Mrs. A——."

"Oh yes, Mr. and Mrs. A——. I know them very well," etc. Or—

"I have often wished to make your acquaintance. We appear to have so many mutual friends."

Or the conversation might branch into other directions, or reference to the person who has made the introduction might appropriately be made—

"Mrs. A—— has talked to me about you very often. I am so pleased to have met you."

"Mrs. A—— tells me you are such a thorough musician." And then music might 'be made a theme on which to converse for a short time, or the conversation might branch into another direction.

Any idea suggested at the moment by the various surroundings would invariably serve as an opening for making conversation, always bearing in mind that the subject mooted must not be permitted to expire spasmodically, and that it is actually intended as a lead to further conversation. A few disjointed remarks, thrown out in a disjointed manner, and as it were leading to nothing, would be useless to effect this purpose, and could but be considered ~~as~~ mere remarks, having no

claim to be termed conversation; say, for instance, remarks of this description and of like brevity—

“How well Miss G—— sings!”

“Yes, she does.”

“Have you tried the motor-cars?”

“No, I have not.”

“Do you cycle?”

“No, I do not.”

Either of the foregoing remarks, taken singly, might have served as groundwork for a little conversation; taken collectively, they are but common-places of the most ordinary character.

To commence with the first trivial observation—

“How well Miss G—— sings.” And here might follow remarks as to her style and the quality of her voice, leading up to comparisons with voices of similar character—

“Yes, her voice is very sympathetic; not very powerful, perhaps, but singularly sweet.”

“Have you heard Madam H—— in the ——?”

“No, I have not,” would at once close the subject; but if to the “No, I have not,” were added something to this effect—

“It is so difficult to get places. I hear they are taken three weeks in advance,” etc., it might be prolonged.

To the second equally trivial remark—

“Have you tried the motor-cars?” an opinion as to their merits and demerits might be expressed, and the motor-cars be contrasted with the electric cars in use in New York and Boston, and the advantages and disadvantages weighed.

To the question of “Do you cycle?” “Yes, I do,” or, “No, I do not,” would equally close the conversation. But if to “Yes, I do,” “I belong to two cycling clubs” were added, the conversation might widen out into a pleasant recital of different cycling experiences, and much useful information imparted on both sides.

The occasion of an introduction has much to do with the topic of conversation started, when there is no personal ground to go upon, no previous knowledge of each other's families, connections, or even friends. For instance, if the introduction takes place at a garden-party, there is much in the surroundings to suggest subjects for opening remarks—the beauty of the grounds, the trees, the flowers, the mansion itself, the neighbourhood, and even the company assembled; all are channels into which conversation might be directed without any effort to two ordinary people, brought together for the first time.

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If an introduction takes place at an afternoon call under the same circumstances, *i.e.* of mutual want of knowledge of each other, then public topics must of necessity be referred to in the first instance, and the same rule holds good at an evening-party, at a ball, or dance, and even at a dinner-party; and it depends entirely upon how these topics are handled, whether a conversation is allowed to languish, or is briskly maintained.



## CHAPTER X.

### AIDS TO COMMENCING CONVERSATION UNDER VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES.

AT afternoon parties, the buzz of conversation is heard on all sides, intimate and friendly sociable chat between friends, who have much in common, and many mutual interests, side by side with desultory ceremonious remarks. It is at this description of gathering that those who are intimate discuss everything that concerns themselves and each other, if not the affairs of the world at large, and no effort is needed on their part either to commence or sustain a conversation ; on the contrary, the difficulty with them is rather to stem the torrent, and to condense what they would say to their many acquaintances, within the limits of the time to which their visit is, perhaps, necessarily restricted. Those who are dependent upon extraneous aids at these entertainments, by reason of being but slightly acquainted, find that here it

comes easier to them than elsewhere ; for one thing, there is much to suggest and supply a range of topics suitable for making conversation. Then, again, there is the confidence that a crowd always engenders in those who are nervous or shy.

Then, too, the conversation is not a long *tête-à-tête*, as at a dinner-party or at a morning call, but is oftener more general than not, three or four ladies and one gentleman carrying on, perhaps, a desultory conversation, made up of odds and ends of talk, a remark from each as they think fit. But the crowning point of ease and satisfaction to both men and women at these afternoon teas, is the knowledge that at any moment they can beat a retreat, should they find them more than a trifle dull, or if they are not getting on particularly well, or if they are feeling rather bored, or if they "have had enough of it," as they term it. A sure escape thus ready to hand gives an assurance and confidence, unknown at other social gatherings, where the hours of arrival and departure are more strictly defined.

The materials for making conversation at these afternoon parties are numerous, music being perhaps the foremost of these, instrumental and vocal, comprising professional and amateur talent ranging

from the classical to the comic. It would be a poor intelligence that could not extract a few observations from the resources forthcoming at these entertainments; conversation of a higher order than that suggested by the general surroundings is rarely looked for or expected between slight acquaintances at afternoon parties. When general conversation is entered upon, say between four or five people composing a little group, it invariably resolves itself into *têtes-à-têtes*, *i.e.* out of a group of five, two couples will at once commence talking to each other, the fifth person of the group as invariably remaining silent for a few seconds, until led to join in one of the two dialogues going on that happens to be the most congenial at the moment.

Groups must of necessity divide in this way, say three women and two men, or four women and one man, or four women only.

One dialogue might commence in this way—

“What a pretty song! Whose is it? I think I have heard it before.” Or—

“I like that last song; don't you?”

To which the replies might be—

“I forget who it is by; but it is ‘The Lark up-rising.’” Or—

"Yes, I like it too; but the words are rather foolish. She has a good voice, hasn't she?" Or—

"Yes, I do pretty well; but I think it is rather a crib on the 'Blue Mountains' of So-and-so. You know the song I mean?" Or—

"What a pretty house this is!"

"Yes, it is. I have not been here before. Mrs. A—— used to live the other side of the Park, as you know, and I have only just come back from Colombo."

Such a remark as this would at once lead the conversation away from the present surroundings to the far-distant place mentioned, and one could listen and one could talk. A few pertinent recollections from the traveller might be called forth by the appreciative listener, or both might have a knowledge of the place mentioned, either far or near, whether Ceylon or Bournemouth, and be able to compare notes, and agree or differ on the subject according as their personal experiences had impressed them.

Badinage or banter is not indulged in between those but recently introduced to one another, nor between slight acquaintances; it requires an intimate personal knowledge of each other, and a certainty that such playful rallying will be well

received, and not be regarded in the light of an unconventionality or overstepping the bounds that the acquaintanceship warrants. Those most given to bantering their friends are foremost to disapprove of it when directed against themselves, therefore this style of conversation should only be attempted between people thoroughly sure of their ground. There is, of course, badinage that is personal, and that which is not personal and merely relates to inanimate objects, and it is not a little difficult to avoid the one and to make play on the other.

This kind of badinage is, perhaps, preferable to "gossip" about one's acquaintances, "gossip" which too often trenches upon the borderland of scandal. It would be idle here to offer examples of how best to commence and continue a lively conversation of this nature, as personalities are essentially the groundwork on which it is maintained.

To turn once more to the ordinary conversation between those suddenly introduced to each other without any previous knowledge of even each other's names. They happen to be in the same room, standing near to one another; they happen not to have any acquaintances present at the

moment; they are both valued guests of their hostess, and for this reason the introduction is made, that they may not find themselves bored or dull, it being out of her power to devote any further time to either. Under such circumstances introductions are often made, and it is a crucial moment for those thus introduced; they have not an idea what to say, or how to commence a conversation, and therefore the most commonplace remark is consequently made.

“What a very cold day it has been!”

“It has, indeed; much colder than yesterday.”

Or—

“Are we going to have any music this afternoon?”

“Yes, I think so.”

This short reply induces another search for an idea, which might take the form of this commonplace remark—

“Do you know many people here? I know scarcely any one.”

“No, indeed, I do not.”

This reply would be a stiff barrier to get over; but if to it were added the reason why she happened to know so few people present, it might be one way out of the difficulty; such as—

"No, I do not. I don't see any one here I know, at present. I expected to meet Mrs. A. B—— here ; she always comes to these 'At homes.' Do you know her at all?"

Mrs. A. B——, being a friend of the hostess, might probably be known to both ladies conversing, therefore this question would be *à propos*.  
Or—

"No ; indeed, I have been away from town so much, I know very few of Mrs. A——'s friends. I suppose you know a great many?"

This would suggest a disclaimer, or contrariwise.  
Or—

"No, I do not ; I live the other side of the Park. So few of my friends live over here. Although Mrs. A—— is a great friend of mine, I do not see so much of her as I could wish, for this reason."

"Yes, I find that also ; distance prevents one seeing much of one's friends, even in town ; and now that I am living close to Mrs. A——, in B—— Square, I see so much more of her than I formerly did." Or—

"Would you not like to sit down ? I see there is plenty of room on that sofa ; one gets so tired standing, I find."

"Oh, thank you very much; suppose we do. The rooms are very full, are they not? It is quite difficult to find a seat." Or—

"There is plenty of room here, if you would like to sit down. Some one is going to recite now. Do you know who he is?" etc. Or—

"Have you had some tea? If not, shall we go down together, and get some?" Or—

"I have not been down to tea yet. Would you care to come with me?" Or—

"Do you know who that lady is talking to Colonel A——? I seem to recollect her, but I forget her name." Or—

"Town seems very full for the time of year, does it not? I was driving in Bond Street this afternoon, and it was as crowded as in the season itself." Or—

"How very empty town seems just now! I hope we are going to have a good season."

Commonplaces such as the foregoing are invariably made use of in commencing a conversation when both speakers are perfect strangers to each other, and have no clue to guide them as to the topics likely to prove of interest to either, and will serve as examples better than more original remarks would be likely to do.



Conversation in the tea-room does not often soar above this calibre—

“May I take you down to have some tea?”

Or—

“Perhaps you would like some tea?” Or—

“There is tea going on downstairs, if you would like some.” Or—

“People seem to be going down to the tea-room ; shall we go down too ?” Or—

“I wish you would let me get you some tea.” Or—

“Will you have some tea, or an ice, or anything?” Or—

“Have you had some tea?” Or—

“Let me take you to have some tea,” etc.

Such phrases as these are usually made use of when proffering this kind of civility ; and as the stay in the tea-room is of so short a duration, the conversation indulged in between slight acquaintances is necessarily of the most desultory character.

At garden-parties conversation is greatly facilitated by the surroundings as well as by the amusements provided, and not a little by the liberty of action and the freedom afforded by being able to stroll about from point to point, and not compelled to remain stationary in one

particular spot ; besides which, garden-party amusements are a prolific theme upon which to converse. Croquet, lawn tennis, archery, cricket, boating, etc., are all so suggestive, that the most diffident of girls and the shyest of young men can hardly be at a loss for a subject to talk about. Therefore it would be unnecessary to offer any further advice on the subject.

At "At homes" or receptions the aids to conversation furnished by the surroundings are not so apparent, and at these evening entertainments even music is not always forthcoming. Thus there is no ready-made topic at command, and consequently the conversational powers of some of the guests are put to a higher test.

The oft-referred-to adage of throwing a stone into a stream is aptly illustrative of the widening and extending of circles of conversation from one small centre. Originating clever remarks is not necessary to commencing what may ultimately prove to be very entertaining talk, and from the feeblest start many ideas may be evolved. Indeed, it would be rather pedantic or eccentric than not to throw a conversational shell in the way of a startling clever observation, or to start a proposition, or to put a question of so original

a character as almost to shock conventional prejudices. Observations and remarks of this nature are a trifle too unconventional to be quite appreciated by the world in general, and the perpetrator of them would be looked upon as an eccentric rather than an amusing man.

Amusing people find that sometimes overmuch is expected of them: they have a reputation for being amusing, and this reputation is apt to overweight them. They are, in a measure, dependent upon circumstances for the display of their powers of being amusing; and if the time, place, or company are not in harmony for such a display, the strain is too acutely felt to permit of their making anything like successful efforts. The very fact of being told to say "something amusing" by appreciative friends is a challenge that few are capable of taking up with any degree of spirit. But ordinary people, when they happen to know a man or woman claiming to be considered amusing, at once imagine that amusing sayings can be called up by them at any given moment, and are proportionately surprised when the charm of such invocations as these fail to work:

"We want you to come and be amusing." Or—

"I told Mrs. A—— you were so amusing. I want her to hear how amusing you can be." Or—

"You are not amusing to-day, and you were so very amusing when I met you at the B——'s last night. I so wish you would say something to make us laugh now;" or irritating remarks of a like nature.

At these "At homes," when the host or hostess introduces strangers to each other, a trying, awkward ten minutes occasionally follows.

"Let me find you a seat somewhere. Don't you hate a crowd?" might remark a man, thoroughly at his ease.

"Thank you; I think you will find it rather difficult, as you say the rooms are very crowded. I suppose it proves that one's invitations are appreciated."

"You are evidently looking at it from a hostess's point of view."

"Well, if you went to an 'At home,' and found no crowd, only a very few people in the rooms, and no one on the staircase, you would probably say to yourself that there was 'no one there,' and what an unpopular woman the hostess must be."

"Then you think that crowded rooms signify

the popularity of the hostess, or the reverse? Perhaps you are right, and a crowd does mean popularity."

When a trivial conversation has arrived at some such point as this, it would be unwise to continue longer in the same strain, the subject being hardly strong enough to warrant it; unless a practical turn is given to it otherwise, it should be diverted into a fresh channel in some such way as this:

"Is this the first entertainment you have been to in this new house?"

"Yes, indeed; I was asked to a party here last month, but I was away."

"I was asked to that party, I remember, but was not able to go to it; and when you have been compelled to give up society for a time, it is surprising how difficult it is to get into harness again."

"Do you mean that people forget to send invitations, or that you don't care to accept those you receive?"

"A little of one and very much of the other. I confess that the routine society imposes upon one, jars when one feels slightly out of gear; there seems such a sameness and aimlessness about the whole thing, that one begins to ask

one's self whether it is not, after all, but a huge mistake."

"Well, I don't know; I think society is well enough in its way, if one does not have too much of it."

If those conversing were desirous of pursuing the conversation as to whether, and in what way, it were woman's mission to do her best towards elevating the tone of society, and of remodelling various of the laws by which it is governed, they would have but to put some leading remark to draw forth each other's views, stating their own ideas and convictions; but if not desirous of continuing it, they should skilfully lead it into other channels, thus—

"It is very difficult to be sure of one's ground when talking to new acquaintances, and to avoid wounding the susceptibilities, or running counter to their prejudices."

"Yes, indeed, some people are so crotchety and thin-skinned, and not at all easy to get on with."

A little badinage gives conversation of even an ordinary character a brightness and sparkle—a dash of colour, as it were, and therefore really clever people naturally adapt their conversation to the idiosyncrasies of those with whom they

are conversing, and badinage is as much out of place with some people as is the idealistic with others.

The profession or pursuits of an individual should be taken into account when opening a conversation; at least, this rule holds good between acquaintances, while friends usually follow it from personal inclination and warm interest. It is always gratifying to an individual to converse on those topics with which he is most familiar and which he has most at heart; therefore, his calling, profession, or pursuits obviously offer a direct road to conversation.

"Where are you quartered just now?" might be a useful lead if addressed to a young man bearing her Majesty's commission in a cavalry or a line regiment; and upon his saying where he was quartered and how he liked the place, the next observation might be—

"Have you been long down there?" Or—

"It's a very dead-and-alive place, is it not?" Or—

"I know that part very well."

Any of these remarks would give an opportunity for pursuing the conversation. Thus facts could be at once stated, such as—

"I have been down there about six months." Or—

"I have only just joined the regiment there," and so on; and to make a few minutes' conversation based on facts offers little difficulty, and only requires a good listener to put in an intelligent word or two in the right place.

A conversation which strays from subject to subject until it reaches a point that can be continued *ad infinitum*, or directed to some other point, affords an opportunity of hearing other people's opinions as well as of stating one's own, and of having the rough edges of one's prejudices filed, or of one's views being in a measure enlarged if directed to subjects of general interest.

Supposing the calling of an individual to be that of the law, and the one about to converse with him had no certain ground to go upon beyond the knowledge that such was his profession, the subject started with him should be one on which he might be expected to be thoroughly *au fait*. Having regard to the profession and pursuits of individuals with whom one comes in contact in society is not to be confounded with that rather objectionable practice of perpetually talking "shop," as this class of talk is slangily termed.



To refer to the proclivities of a legal gentleman, either he himself, or the one conversing with him, should, if at a loss for a suitable topic, allude to or touch upon some prominent case of interest somewhat in this way—

“What a very interesting trial that was last week! I read your opening speech with the greatest interest. Were you satisfied with the verdict given?” Or—

“I suppose I must not ask you any questions about the trial which is now going on in which you are engaged?” Or—

“What an extraordinary breach of promise case that was last week! You must have found it rather amusing?”

It is needless to give the probable replies to such remarks on these public topics, as the facts would speak for themselves, and these examples are merely intended to show how they might best be introduced. Most men are willing enough to talk upon subjects of public interest in which they have been concerned, when the knowledge of the result has become public property through the medium of the daily newspapers, although somewhat reluctant to be the first to broach them, and ever so slight a lead suffices for the purpose. When a

conversation has arrived at a certain stage a new theme might be originated, or the dialogue continued in the same strain, a word sometimes sufficing to give it another direction.

Politics, with the generality of men, are a strong point, and when this is so, they are always amenable to a conversational lead on the subject ; but it is one that should be approached with caution, and a feeler might be dexterously thrown out before hazarding an opinion, to avoid running counter to any political bias, which, where it exists, is often strongly felt, and still more strongly expressed. A false start on this head often occasions a loss of ground which is difficult to recover.

A man loses very little time in making the nature of his political opinions thoroughly understood. If the one conversing with him be of the same way of thinking, the conversation would doubtless consist of an harmonious duet of eulogies on the leader and members of their party ; but if the contrary were the case, and opposite views were entertained, the most moderate manner of stating them would be the most conciliatory, and would prevent the conversation degenerating into a series of assertions and contradictions. In the case of a lady conversing on the subject, she should

rather convey the idea that she was open to conviction and to conversion, as by this means she would easily lead her companion on to a further exposition of his political principles, throwing the reins of conversation into his hands, and allowing him a clear course for an agreeable canter.

Here again facts are innumerable upon which to make a conversation. They only require a judicious introduction, thus—

“What a long sitting it was in the House of Commons last night! I suppose you took a great interest in the debate?” Or, if to a member of the House—

“What a scene you had in the House last night! You were present, of course?” Or—

“I see you voted in favour of ‘The Woman’s Suffrage Bill.’ Do you think there is any chance of its passing this session?” Or—

“You had a tremendous majority in the House last night. Did you expect it?” Or—

“I have been reading one or two of the speeches this morning on last night’s debate. I hope you intend to vote for that Bill?” Or—

“The elections are going pretty well, are they not? Do you think So-and-so will get in, or not? I hope very much he will.” Or—

"How difficult it is to get a seat in the Ladies' Gallery. I think I am very lucky to get in on Friday next. I suppose it will be a very interesting night?" Or—

"How crowded the terrace was yesterday afternoon. Mr. A. B——, the member for C——, asked us to tea there. I suppose you were in one of the committee-rooms? I did not see you." Or—

"What a very good speech Mr. D—— made. I have often wanted to hear him speak, but have never been able to do so." Or—

"I was so disappointed not to hear Mr. P—— speak last night. Why did he not do so? Do you know?"

Any remark of this nature, addressed to a member of the House of Commons, would give an opportunity for a few minutes' chat of interest to both; while to an ordinary politician, any remark that has politics for its basis will induce a response on the subject quite sufficient to maintain a short conversation, with more or less spirit.

"What an admirable article that is in to-day's *Times* on the Education Bill! Do you take any interest in it?" Or—

"What an excellent article that is in the *Times* of to-day on Mr. S——'s speech!" Or—

"Do you think there will be a division on Mr. B——'s Bill to-night?" Or—

"I hope the Ministry will not be beaten to-night. Do you think there is any chance of it?" Or—

"Do you think Mr. G—— will lose his seat? They seem to fear so."

This kind of remark only requires a slight knowledge of current events in the parliamentary world, and always elicits interesting rejoinders; and as these are necessarily based on facts, it would be futile to offer examples.

Some people are so devoid of humour, that they cannot see the point of any story or the pith of any joke, while others discover it for themselves probably half an hour after it has been perpetrated.

To continue a conversation blandly in the face of occasional dry retorts disarms further attacks, and is a skilful line of tactics to pursue under such circumstances; to "cut up rough," to use a homely expression, would be an exhibition of weakness, and by no means politic.

When a laugh is going on, provoked by something that is being said, those not near enough to catch the *bonmot*, or who, if they have done so, do not see the drift 'of it through' ignorance of

the cause from which it arose, often say, rather testily, "May I ask what is the joke?" and if it be repeated for their benefit, although mollified and appeased, they rarely condescend to laugh, perhaps because the contagion of general laughter is lacking; consequently, a joke or witticism which, in the first instance, was thought good enough to provoke a hearty laugh, on the second hearing is discovered to be but a poor one after all.

Hearty, merry laughter is generally contagious. There is a good deal in a laugh, a natural, musical, genuine one; what a pleasant thing it is to hear.

The society laugh is a little forced, a little affected, and a little hollow, but it is the kind of laugh one most often hears; it is ready for all occasions, it is polite, conciliatory, complimentary, and conventional, and is never objectionable or vulgar, as is the boisterous guffaw. There is, however, a ring of sadness about this stereotyped laugh—an effort of will rather than the offspring of joy, pleasure, or appreciation.

## CHAPTER XI.

### HOW TO JOIN IN CONVERSATION.

LUNCHEON is one of those sociable meals at which very little is expected in the way of conversation. If any one is disinclined to talk, no one notices the silent member. If a woman, and if she has nothing to say for herself, and bestows more of her attention upon her plate than upon her neighbour, she is merely credited with being but a dull person; and if the silent member be a man, he is not supposed to be at his best until the hour of dinner; but if either a man or a woman have the faculty of being spontaneously agreeable, and of keeping a luncheon-party amused by pleasant, lively talk, it is a pleasure not unmingled with surprise.

### AT LUNCHEON.

The general topics of the day offer great facilities for making conversation between slight acquaintances and strangers met together at luncheon.

"What an enormous amount the Famine Fund for India has reached!" remarks one.

"Yes," rejoins another; "but I hear we do not know half the extent of the calamity; the people are dying off like flies." Or one might remark—

"What an interesting account there is in this morning's paper about the African Expedition!"

"Yes. Was it accident or design that the force was so surrounded by the enemy?"

"It appeared to me that they did not estimate the strength of the enemy, and were taken by surprise," remarks another. Or—

"What a terrible fire that was last night in Blank Street; and the fire-escape was not there until the house was gutted!"

"Yes; how deplorable it is!" returns another. "The fire-escapes appear to be practically useless; they are invariably behind time." Or—

"You see that extraordinary will case has been decided?"

"Oh, has it? I have not had time to look at the papers this morning. Which side won the case?" might be the rejoinder.

- To state a fact, or to ask a question respecting any event of public interest, is a very practical way of commencing a conversation when no personal



knowledge is available ; and as the time occupied by luncheon is exceptionally short, a sustained conversation is seldom possible, and interruptions incessantly occur during this brief half-hour. The arrival of a late guest, for instance, a word from the host or hostess, a little attention proffered to one or two of the guests, on the part of a man, or by one of the guests present breaking into the conversation with some remark well timed or otherwise, etc., etc.

#### CONVERSATIONS FOLLOWING ON INTRO- DUCTIONS.

It is always somewhat difficult to commence a conversation on being introduced. If there be any fact to go upon, however slight and unimportant, it should be made use of on the spur of the moment. This is often overlooked, however, and thus the start is frequently a very lame one, when there is nothing to go upon.

When two people are entire strangers to each other, when they have never even heard each other's names, and have not the slightest idea of each other's surroundings, the one resource in this case is to draw upon platitudes, and the most

general way of commencing a conversation under these circumstances is with—

“How do you do?” This is also replied to in the same words—

“How do you do?”

After this preliminary a few seconds are allowed to elapse while both are considering what to say next, and ninety-nine persons out of a hundred invariably fall back upon the weather, and utter a sentence or two respecting it according to the climatic condition of the day. This sometimes serves as a lead to other subjects; oftener than not the conversation is carried on no further, and absolutely drops. This topic is discussed by some people in so agreeable a manner that pleasant conversation naturally ensues. The one thing to avoid if the weather be the subject chosen is a bald statement of facts, which must of necessity fall flat and preclude anything further being said on this subject.

“What a very hot day it has been!”

“Yes, it has indeed.” Or—

“How very cold it is to-day!”

“Yes, it is very cold.” Or—

“What a very wet day it is!”

“Yes, it is very wet. I think it has been raining all day.” Or—

"What a lovely day we have had!"

"Yes, quite lovely."

This dialogue speaks for itself. It amounts to statement on the one side and acquiescence on the other; no difference of opinion is possible, and on neither side can explanation be entered into as to how the weather has affected their movements, it being too personal a matter to be discussed with a stranger.

"What lovely weather we have been having lately! One is able to be out-of-doors so much, the mornings have been so clear and bright."

"Yes; I think this is the most delightful time of the year. I am told that everything is very forward in the country," etc., etc. Or—

"How hot it has been to-day!—quite oppressive. Do you feel the heat very much?"

"Indeed I do; it renders me incapable of doing anything—everything is such an effort. I think we should find it a little cooler if we went into the other room; or shall we go downstairs and have an ice?" etc.

"Do you like this intensely cold weather? I can't say that I do."

"I don't mind it as a rule; but this has been

an exceptionally cold week, and there seems a probability of the frost continuing; and it causes so much distress," etc. Or—

"I am so sorry it is such a wet day. Mrs. A—— told me so many people she had asked have not been able to come—the rain is so depressing on these occasions."

"Yes; I was rather doubtful about coming myself, it rained so very fast when I started, and I had a long drive through the Park, as we live in Lancaster Gate," etc.

A little thought is only required to lead a conversation, thus started, into other channels, personal or otherwise.

When the weather is not chosen for a starting-point, the reception-rooms, a portrait, or the amusements that are going on, are each and all useful in their way.

"What pretty rooms these are!" might be remarked. "I admire the decorations very much. They always strike me as being so bright."

"Yes, they are; and these are such beautifully built houses. I think, altogether, this is one of the nicest parts of town," etc. Or—

"Have you seen Miss A——'s portrait in the other room? What do you think of it?"

"Oh, it is very good. But don't you think it makes her look much older than she is?"

"Well, I do, now you mention it. I could not quite catch the name of the artist. It is by a lady, is it not?" Or—

"How very clever that humorous sketch was! Were you here when it commenced?"

"Yes, I thought it very good. I always enjoy hearing him. Have you heard that Frenchman?—I forget his name—he does something in the same way. I heard him last week at Queen's Hall."

When an introduction is made by the hostess, a few words are often said respecting the friendship that exists, thus—

"How well Mrs. A—— is looking! I think her stay at Ems has done her good."

"Yes; I was quite sorry to see her looking so ill last summer. She is such a great friend of mine. I know both her sisters and her mother so well."

#### CONVERSATION ON "AT HOME" DAYS.

Conversation between a hostess and a visitor to whom she has been but recently introduced is rather of an uphill character, although the

hostess has the best of the situation, as she is at home, and can proffer small civilities, while the visitor has to marshal her ideas to evolve something to say; but it should be borne in mind that if unacquainted with her hostess's predilections and occupations, it is more than unwise to affect to be aware of them, and start a conversation respecting them, thus—

“You walk a great deal, do you not?”

“No, indeed, I am sorry to say I hardly ever walk.”

“But you walk when you are in the country? Walking in the country is so much more amusing than walking in town.”

“No, I don't walk when I am in the country; and if I did walk, I think it would be far more amusing to do so in town.” Or—

“You bicycle in the Park in the morning, do you not?”

“No, I have not done so as yet. I do not ride my bicycle in town.” Or—

“You sing a great deal, do you not?”

“No, indeed. I am very fond of music, but I don't sing at all.” Or—

“You have been away all the autumn, have you not?”

"No, we have not ; my husband was not able to get away."

This style of conversation is equally unpleasant to the one who makes one of these random statements, and to the other, who is obliged to contradict them. On the other hand, if these statements had been put interrogatively, the replies could have been made in the negative, without bearing flat contradiction on the face of them.

If a visitor is almost a stranger to a hostess, there are generally some slight facts to be made use of sufficient to start a conversation, and which should be made the most of by both ladies. Oftener than not, the one is preoccupied with thinking how she can best say a few words to a group of ladies who have but recently arrived, and the other is diffident and nervous, and cannot recollect at the moment anything to say ; and this, probably, accounts for so many inconsequent remarks being made in an attempt to carry on a conversation. Inquiries after the members of a family is a kindly and usual way of commencing a conversation, thus—

"How is Mr. B—— ? I hope he is quite well ?"

"Yes, thank you ; he has quite recovered from the bad cold he had." Or—

"How is your mother? I hope she is pretty well?"

"Yes, thank you; I think she is quite well. She has gone to Brighton for a few days." Or—

"I have not asked after your sister yet. I hope she is better?"

"I am sorry to say she is not; these east winds are very much against her. I don't know when she will be able to go out," etc. Or—

"I am sorry to hear Mr. B—— has been ill again."

"Oh, he is much better, thank you; but he still has to be very careful."

On "At home" days the conversation between a hostess and a visitor, and between the visitors themselves, is usually very brief, being subject to so many interruptions, notably the arrival and departure of the visitors, and the short stay made by each.

A few observations to the point is all that is expected from visitors to their hostess, and between visitors themselves when but slightly acquainted with each other. Intimate friends, on the contrary, have much in common, and require no hints' as to how they should start or maintain a conversation.



## AT EVENING RECEPTIONS.

At evening receptions a hostess does little more than shake hands with her visitors, and the conversation that takes place is between the guests.

When a gentleman is introduced to a lady he generally commences a conversation by asking her some question to this effect :

"May I have the pleasure of giving you some tea?" Or—

"May I take you to have some tea?" Or—

"Have you had some tea, or may I give you some?" Or—

"Would you like an ice? The staircase is rather crowded, but I think we can get through if you care to try." Or—

"May I have the pleasure of taking you in to supper?" Or—

"Every one seems to be going in to supper. Will you allow me to take you down?"

The replies to such civilities as these can only amount to short affirmatives or negatives, thus—

"Thank you ; I should like some very much." Or—

"Thank you ; I have just had some." Or—

"No, I have not had any yet. It is so kind of you to offer to take me to the tea-room." Or—

"Thank you ; I think I should." Or—

"Certainly ; I should be very happy." Or—

"Yes, with pleasure, if you don't think we shall find the supper-room too crowded."

When introductions are made at evening receptions it is usually for the avowed reason of attentions, such as the foregoing, being offered and accepted, although occasionally they have not this intent. When ladies are introduced to each other at evening receptions, the short interchange of remarks generally refer to the surroundings. The company present, the beauty of the jewels, the beauty of the wearers, the lovely dresses, the flowers, the music, and so forth. Such conversation as this, if it may be so called, should be originated without the slightest effort, being based upon present facts.

"Do you know who that lady in pink is? I mean the one with that magnificent necklet of pearls."

"Oh, that is the wife of M. de A——. He has just been appointed ambassador over here, from Y——. She is very handsome." Or—

"Can you tell me who that man is? I have

seen him so often lately. He is very distinguished looking, isn't he?"

"Oh, he is General von B——. That is the man they talked so much about in Paris last year in connection with that duel." Or—

"What lovely orchids those are! I suppose they came up from Staffordshire this morning?" Or—

"How loudly the band plays! One can hardly hear one's self speak. I think we are rather too near it. Shall we move on to the next room, if we can?" Or—

"What a great crowd it is! it is impossible to find any one one knows." Or—

"Oh, how do you do? I was just saying how impossible it was to find one's friends. Is your wife here?"

And thus the conversation flows on in various channels, based upon everything and every one, and only between intimate friends does it become more interesting or assume anything approaching to the title it bears.

When meeting slight acquaintances on a crowded staircase, it is generally felt a slight observation should accompany a recognition; but this is not always ready at the right moment. The merest triviality, however, suffices; thus—

“How do you do? Are you going?”

“No; we are only making for the tea-room.”

Or—

“How do you do? What a charming party it is!”

“How do you do? I was not sure it was you until you spoke. I am so near-sighted.” Or—

“What a crowded party it is! what a great number of people are here!” Or—

“How do you do? Is that your brother? I thought I recognized him.” Or—

“The supper-room is very crowded. We have just come from it. Are you making your way there?” Or—

“How very hot it is! The coolest place is the tea-room,” etc., etc.

A rambling incoherent remark reflects no credit upon the one making it, and as often as not falls to the ground; and there is very much in arranging a sentence previous to uttering it, so that it may be terse and complete, the point of the observation being rather at its close than its opening.

Ladies are understood to be very much at their ease at luncheon, not being overweighted by the knowledge that they are expected to be fairly

agreeable, if not amusing, for the space of two hours.

Some women have a habit when arriving late at a luncheon-party of being profuse and diffuse in their apologies, and of entering into explanations as to the why and the wherefore of their tardy arrival, in place of making some brief and apologetic excuse.

The conversation at wedding luncheons or breakfasts is rather restricted to *têtes-à-têtes* than not. This is necessarily so, from the fact that couples are sent in to breakfast, as they are in to dinner. Admiring the bride, praising the bridegroom, passing compliments on the bridesmaids, and encomiums on the presents, are appropriate materials for conversation, provided they are not too freely drawn upon and are used with discretion, always remembering that the members of the bride's family are the best listeners on this subject. But conversations at these gatherings are naturally founded upon present facts, and to offer examples of such would be beside the question.

## CHAPTER XII.

### EGOTISTICAL TALKERS.

DOMESTIC matters are always of interest to ladies, and form a very fertile topic of conversation between intimates, and under such circumstances they are thoroughly appropriate, and admit of being widely discussed ; and they have their uses, inculcate caution, forbearance, and patience in all that concerns domestic arrangements.

This subject, however, although of paramount importance to themselves, is devoid of interest to strangers, and therefore should not be made the only theme of conversation when they are present. At a luncheon, for instance, where perhaps five or six people are met together, two or three of whom are strangers to the rest, a talkative lady, who has not an idea beyond her nursery and her household, will monopolize the attention of the hostess and usurp the conversation by an open and animated exposition of some

recent experience of her own, the scene of action being either the kitchen or the nursery. Wherever these ladies are encountered—and the class is a numerous one, so that the probability of meeting one of them amounts to almost a certainty—they will, if they can only make an opportunity, bore every one with whom they come in contact.

A wise woman neither teases her husband with such petty details, nor takes the world at large into her confidence; and, when desirous of unburdening her soul to some female friend and counsellor, does so in the privacy of a *tête-à-tête*.

At small luncheon-parties, so small that every observation is heard by all, and where, when one person insists on talking down the others, she is generally allowed to have her way, it cannot be supposed that dialogue such as the following can prove other than intensely tiresome to those thus obliged to listen to it:

“I am sorry to say my butler is going. He has only been with us two months, and he has turned out so very unsatisfactory.”

“Really!” might be the languid retort.

“Yes, indeed, there is no end to his delinquencies. He smokes my husband’s best cigars, he comes in about two in the morning, and I don’t think

he is particularly sober ; in fact, I know he is not."

"How very provoking!" might be the rejoinder.

"Yes, is it not? and we had such a good character with him. I shall never believe in written characters again ; one must have a personal one. I think we shall have to part with the footman also. He is not nearly so good a servant as he was before we had this butler. We never had a fault to find with him ; now he is very inattentive and forgetful."

However much these grievances may affect those whom they strictly concern, they are of very little interest to the company in general ; not that a short narrative of startling misconduct on the part of a head domestic is devoid of interest to ladies, but from the desultory style in which it is handled the point is lost, and the subject becomes more than tedious, while men do not pretend to tolerate it. Or—

"I am so vexed at having to part with my cook. She is quite a treasure in some ways, but she has such a frightful temper ; she quarrels with the servants, and she will not allow me to find fault with anything she does."

"It is very difficult to get a really good cook,"



remarks her hostess, desirous that this conversation should be addressed to herself, and to her only.

"I have made up my mind this time that she must go. It really amounts to either parting with her or with all the other servants. Now, what do you think she did the other day? I ordered luncheon at 1.30 punctually, and it seems that she and the footman quarrelled about putting the plates in the plate-warmer."

"What a bore! Won't you have a cutlet? You don't seem to be eating anything."

"Oh yes, I am, thank you. I was going to tell you about this dreadful quarrel they had. And we did not get any luncheon till 2.30; and the butler said after luncheon that he would not stay if she did, and neither would the footman; and I know what my maid thinks about her."

"How disagreeable it is when servants quarrel!" might be the response.

Another example of an inveterate talker, perhaps equally irritating, is the lady who may be looked upon as a talking abridgement of "Who's Who?" She delights in dilating upon the subject of the relationships and connections of her friends and acquaintances. This subject is to many as

bewildering as it is puzzling, the people under discussion being seldom of sufficient interest for their various degrees of relationships and their numerous family ties to be constantly borne in mind ; but this want of interest by no means damps the ardour of a lady bent on improving the mind and assisting the memory of the company in general from her fund of information.

She requires but very little to start her on her way. She is not one of those ladies who are at a loss for a subject, as she has always her especial subject at command. She merely requires a slight hint as to the locality or particular county from which one or other of the guests may belong, when the individual is addressed by her with—

“ Oh, I know that part of Gloucestershire very well. My husband’s sister-in-law married a clergyman down there—the rector of Chillingly ; but he died soon afterwards, and his widow married again—a cousin of Sir John B——, who has a very pretty place down there.”

The answer to remarks such as the foregoing is usually—

“ Oh, really ! ” Or—

“ Indeed.” Or—

“ Oh yes.” Or—

"I think I met Sir John B—— at dinner. He is a very pleasant sort of man."

The latter remark, an unfortunate admission of knowing Sir John B——, made to a woman of this type would give her the opportunity she loves, and would enable her to draw largely upon information gained from "Burke's Landed Gentry," or "Walford's Country Families," supplemented by a little personal knowledge, which she knows how to make the most of, thus—

"Sir John B——'s sister, you know, married Colonel F——. His mother married again, a Mr. G——, and she left everything she could to her second husband, so the F——s were very disappointed, and he tried to contest the will. Colonel F——'s sister married Mr. H——, a cousin of Lord D——. Lady D—— was that rich Miss M——, whose father made all his money in mines."

"He would not make his money in mines now," might be the response, in the hope of changing the subject from the pedigree line it was taking. "I think every one is pretty well tired of them by this time."

An antagonist of this type is not so easily daunted, and takes advantage of the smallest opening to continue—

"Indeed, yes. Do you know Mr. K. B——? I heard he was nearly ruined, after the large fortune he was supposed to have made. Do you know who he married? I couldn't quite make out?"

"I really can't tell you. I don't know him personally," might be the answer. "He has grown-up sons and daughters, I fancy."

Or if the answer conveyed the desired information.

"I believe she was a certain Mrs. C. G——."

"Oh, really! Do you mean the widow of General C. G——, who was killed in the Soudan?"

"I think she was, but I am not sure," might be the answer. Or—

"I think not; I never inquired. I know some one who knows the K. B——s very well, and the next time I see her I shall make a point of asking her whether Mrs. K. B—— was the widow of General C. G—— or not."

A lady whose ideas run in this groove is ever anxious to add to her stock of knowledge, and she generally possesses a certain kind of cleverness worthy of a better cause, which enables her to put an indirect question when it would be almost impertinent to put a direct one, and having

extracted the information as to where one of the guests has been staying, she would follow it up with the further question of—

“Who was Mrs. L. T——?”

This inquiry is a very favourite one with a lady of this description, and she is ever putting the question of, “Who was she?” in reference to every married woman mentioned in her hearing; while, with regard to every man who may be mentioned, as she cannot say, “Who was he?” seeing that he is what he was, she changes the form of inquiry into, “Who was his father?” or, “Whose son is he?”

By this means she amasses a vast number of bald facts on the subject of connections, relationships, and inter-marriages; she also greatly concerns herself with the question of dower, and as to whether a certain young lady brought her husband any money on her marriage, or whether she was a dowerless bride.

Then, too, there are the rambling or verbose talkers, women well educated according to the general standard of home education—amiable, good-natured, pleasant people in all the relations of life—but who have never been credited with too much intelligence from their youth upwards,

and who, when relating the simplest incident, or when endeavouring to express any opinion or even intention of their own, become involved and hazy in their conversation, through a habit of not concentrating their ideas.

They usually take the longest and most circuitous route to arrive at a given point, and when the goal has been at length reached, and the thread has been wearily followed through many windings, and turning, and vagarious wanderings from the main line, they, fearing that they have not been sufficiently explicit, and having a vague idea that perhaps they have rambled a little on their journey, commence to retrace their steps from the first halting-place, or from some point where they fancy they may have been a trifle obscure.

One of these cheerful ramblers would perhaps commence a discourse with—

“You know I told you we were going to have a bicycle-party last Tuesday, and we should be quite eight in number—no, not eight, ten, if they all came. Well, it didn't come off on Tuesday, after all, because Blanche and Herbert found out that they both had engagements on that day, and we would not go without them, and it was such

a beautiful day—I mean Tuesday was, not Thursday. Thursday it was rather wet, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it was rather. Did you start in spite of the rain?"

"Well, we did; at least some of us did. That is how we came to be only eight, as I told you, I think. We thought it would clear up and be a fine day after all, at least we hoped it would; and we thought if it did not, we might come home by train."

"What time did you start?" might be a leading question to help a rather incoherent recital.

"Well, we were to have started at ten, but we did not really get off till eleven, in fact a quarter-past eleven, because Blanche and Herbert were so late. Just as she was about to start she had a telegram from her uncle, saying he was coming to town on Monday, could she put him up for a few days; and she knew she could not, as she had asked her married sister Amy—you remember Amy, don't you?—and her husband to come that day."

"Oh yes, I remember her; but you were telling me about your party."

"Yes; and I wanted to tell you about the

accident we had. Just as we were going up a hill, Blanche and Herbert were in front, and I was following next, and Miss W—— was close to me, and the rest were rather far behind—but not very far; and I heard a cry, and I looked round. I thought it was from Mrs. A——, and I lost my balance. And Blanche cried out, ‘Take care, take care!’ And she jumped off; but was picked up almost unconscious, and her bicycle was broken.”

“Poor Blanche! I am very sorry to hear it. Was she much hurt?”

“No, *she* wasn’t hurt at all.”

“I thought you said she was picked up unconscious?”

“Oh no; it was Mrs. A—— who had the fall. She was jerked off in going over a large stone. She seemed quite ill, so I stayed with her and Miss W——. And Herbert and Blanche and the others went to the town—at least, Herbert and Blanche and two of the others did so, and the others stayed with us; but they soon got a fly and took her to the station, and Miss W—— went with her, as she felt much better. And we all came home on our bicycles, and she was shaken and bruised, but nothing worse than that—at least she said so.”

“Did this happen going or coming back?”



"Oh, coming back. Did not I tell you we had luncheon at the club, and a long rest, and that Herbert's cousin was there? He was not one of our party, but we met him there; and poor Mrs. A—— was in bed for three days."

"What! at the club, do you mean?"

"Oh no; when she got back. And she had just bought a new bicycle, and it was broken to pieces."

A touch of irony, or a *soupçon* of sarcasm, is lost upon ladies of this temperament, their perceptive powers not being keen enough to detect it; and, as they are devoid of humour, they fail to see the point of any joke, even when it is turned against themselves.

Imperviousness to the shafts of ridicule stands a woman of this sort in good stead, as her *amour propre* is never wounded, her equanimity never ruffled, and when she says a foolish thing, her unconsciousness of having said anything more foolish than usual saves her from being disconcerted or put out of countenance, as a more sensitive or highly-strung woman would naturally be.

Then, too, there is another type of woman who has a happy knack of unconsciously touching upon a person's weak point, and if there is one thing

amongst all others that should not be approached, she is sure to arrive at it before long ; so, finding herself on delicate ground, she apologizes elaborately, the apology being more exasperating than the offence.

"I must say, I don't like Mrs. C—— at all," remarks a woman of this type to an intimate friend of Mrs. C——, forgetting at the moment that this is so.

"Why not?" might be the response.

"Oh! because I think she is so air-giving and conceited."

"I can't say that I have ever found her so. I always find her particularly pleasant and amiable."

"Oh, of course you do ; she is a great friend of yours. I forgot ; you must not tell her what I say. I ought not to have mentioned her to you ; it was so foolish of me not to have recollected that you are devoted to her." Or—

"I met Mr. M. J—— the other day. What a disagreeable man he is!"

"Why do you think so? What did he say disagreeable?"

"Oh, nothing in particular ; but his manner was so familiar."

"I am surprised to hear you say so. I have

known him so long, and always thought him very nice."

"Oh, I forgot you knew him. How stupid of me! Of course you would stand up for him."

Conversation of this nature must be allowed to drop at once, or considerable friction is likely to ensue if carried on, as it must degenerate into defence on the one part, and attack on the other.

"I shall not invite Mr. H. M——. I don't care for him."

"Don't you? I thought every one liked him. He is so very popular, and such an old friend of mine."

"Is he? Oh, I had forgotten that. I am sorry I said anything about him."

Such remarks as these leave a sore feeling behind, whether the subject is continued and a strong defence attempted, or whether it is tacitly allowed to drop for fear of a distinct unpleasantness ensuing.

"I don't admire Mr. A. B——'s singing; I think it is so affected."

"I think he sings delightfully. I always ask him to sing at my 'At homes.'"

"Oh yes, of course you do; I ought to have remembered it. I heard him at your house; that

is where I did hear him. I should not have said anything about him to you."

The foregoing is a very usual form of heedlessness shown by some women with regard to the feelings and friendships of others; oftener than not it goes a step further, and a story is related in the hearing of, or even to, the one it nearly concerns.

These home-thrusts are more often than not made in the presence of an audience, which gives an additional sting to the idle words; the subject knowing perfectly well that those unacquainted with the story will, on the first opportunity, ask for details of it at the hands of his fair and foolish friend.

"What is that story about?" he knows will be the first question put before he is well out of hearing; and he also knows that the discretion of the lady is not to be relied upon, and that she is not equal to the task of turning such a question aside, but will give the desired details with circumlocution and colouring, without malice, but at the same time wholly without reticence.

Again, if a secret sorrow exists in a family through any calamity, affliction, or disgrace having overtaken one of its members, much unnecessary

pain by random and careless remarks is inflicted ; and when the bow has been drawn at a venture, this type of woman is seldom clever enough to extricate herself from the situation until the arrow has well hit its mark.

*Mal à propos* remarks such as these are sometimes made even by people with tact and discretion, the difference being that on discovering that they have inadvertently said the wrong thing, they are equal to changing the subject without allowing it to be perceived that they are at all conscious of having wounded any one's susceptibilities.

The lady who considers it her province to chronicle all the mischances and mistakes of her friends, seldom puts the best construction upon them, or is inclined to give them the benefit of the doubt ; neither does she inquire too closely into the accuracy of a narrative, lest, were she to do so, there should be nothing left to narrate. Thus many a *canard* circulated to-day is contradicted to-morrow. The bold gossip, however, in time gets bowled out, and her stories, though listened to and laughed at, are never believed. Her friends, aware of her weak point and her special temptation, sav carelessly, "Oh, if that is one of Mrs. K——'s stories, I don't suppose there is much in it."

Kind and generous actions and kindly speeches are not, as a rule, repeated with much alacrity by the gossip-loving world ; there is no capital to be made out of such, no merit accrues to the narrator, and no amusement to be extracted from the recital of another's goodness ; thus, gossip turns a deaf ear to all that is praiseworthy, lending a willing one to all that is the reverse.

In contrast to the gossipy lady, may be mentioned the one who prides herself upon telling her friends "home truths." Estimable as her character may be, she yet succeeds in placing goodness, as she personifies it, in an unamiable light, and those who stand in fear of her probe, give her as wide a berth as they well can.

There is, perhaps, nothing easier than to put a girl, a woman, or even a man, for the matter of that, out of conceit with their clothes. You but tell a man that you notice a wrinkle in the shoulder of his coat, or that the set of the sleeve is not quite perfect, than the coat is at once despatched to the tailor, and it is doubtful if it is ever thoroughly again received into favour ; while, to disparage any article of a woman's attire, from a bonnet to a boot, is fatal to any satisfaction she may feel in wearing it, even if she has the strength of mind to venture

on doing so. There is no merit attached to telling home truths, which are as uncalled for as they are unwelcome.

Another type of woman frequently encountered in society is the plausible, yet selfishly insincere one, designated by those who know her best as rather a humbug. Although not intending to be directly untruthful, she is very far from being accurate, and it is even doubtful if she endeavours to go in that direction. Strangers consider her delightful until they have known her long enough to discover that she is dangerous, and that the pleasant things she says *to* them, she has an unpleasant habit of unsaying *of* them ; thus, wishing to ingratiate herself, she would say—

“I so wish your daughter would sing at our amateur concert. It would be very kind if she did, and she would be a great acquisition.”

While to another friend she would say—

“I was obliged to ask Miss A. B—— to sing at our concert, although she has not the smallest idea of singing. But I thought they would be offended if I did not pay them the compliment ; and I can only hope they will not be in town when it comes off.” Or—

“It is so good of you to ask me. Nothing would

give me greater pleasure than to come, but unfortunately I am engaged. You must tell me all about it ; I am so interested in the subject, and in the different speakers."

While she would say to a friend—

"Mrs. A—— wanted me to go to one of those meetings, but I invented an engagement on the spot. The subject does not interest me in the least. I never was so bored in my life as at the one I went to at her house," etc.

It would be superfluous to do more than allude to the ultra-fast and fashionable women of society, whose conversation runs almost entirely in one particular groove—the last club story, the last matrimonial separation, or divorce case. These do not come under the denomination of "gossipy ladies," as to them the petty details of ordinary gossip have but little or no interest ; they prefer something of a far more exciting nature, and thrilling events, with their friends for the heroes and heroines thereof, is the talk to their taste—a taste greatly encouraged by certain society men, whose pleasure it is to collect the various club stories and *on dits* for the amusement of their fair friends.

What effect these topics have upon those who



thus constantly indulge in them, is self-evident from the frivolous fast tone which prevails in the sets to which these ladies belong.

Men, generally speaking, do not bore women or even each other to the same extent that women are too often wont to do. Women inflict their tediousness indiscriminately upon their own sex and upon the opposite sex as chance may favour them ; but men seldom, if ever, broach to a woman the subject that is uppermost in their minds, unless aware that she knows something about it, or that it would be of interest to her. Men usually indulge in society talk when in the society of women, while to each other they freely discourse upon that which most concerns them.

Two men, for instance, thorough racing men, would probably converse in a manner almost unintelligible to non-racing men and to ladies in general, and the latter are often not a little bored when men are thus engrossed in each other's conversation to their exclusion, which they cannot attempt to follow.

Some country gentlemen have also a great propensity to talk "farming," and compare sheep, mangold, turnips, and their crops in detail at a dinner-party or elsewhere, utterly oblivious of the

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presence of ladies, to whom such dialogue must necessarily appear very dry if nothing else.

When a man breaks off, perhaps for a moment, his interesting dialogue with his racing or farming friend to address some trivial remark or platitude to the lady seated near him, she feels neither grateful nor gracious, knowing full well that were she a Rochefoucauld in petticoats, her remarks would not have the fascination for him that those of his bucolic neighbour possess, so her answers are of the briefest, and he feels himself at liberty to turn to the beloved subject, which he does with unflattering alacrity.

Some prosy old gentlemen inflict their prejudices and prosiness upon younger men, but this is the privilege of age, and such garrulity meets with a respectful tolerance and good-humoured forbearance.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION.

OUT-OF-DOOR gatherings offer many opportunities for introductions being made, and the situation in each instance should render it easy enough to enter into conversation at once ; but oftener than not this is not so, and many are at a loss what to say. The weather generally stands them in good stead, although some few are reluctant to take advantage of this forlorn hope, and cast about for something a little more original to start with ; but the effort is, as a rule, futile, and the weather has to be drawn upon, after all, and the variability of our climate does this much for us, in giving us something to talk about. People not particularly clever in originating conversation find that when expected to converse with a casual acquaintance at a casual meeting, they are often compelled to give forth the most vapid of

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commonplaces, having nothing better to say at the moment.

At flower-shows, polo-matches, cricket-matches, archery meetings, lawn-tennis parties, and bazaars, the occasion of such meetings renders making conversation a very easy matter ; but at those casual meetings that so frequently occur between acquaintances, there being no particular fact to go upon outside of actual knowledge of each other's movements, greater necessity exists for the exercise of intelligence and rapidity of thought, in making at the identical moment the most applicable and pleasant observations.

Very slight acquaintances find that to allude to the mutual friend through whom the acquaintance has been made in the first instance, is a safe and sure lead to conversation, and one which both can follow without hesitation ; it is also a friendly recognition of the absent one, and a courtesy which both are pleased to render ; but when an acquaintanceship has existed for some little time, or has progressed towards any degree of intimacy, then this allusion or recognition would be made, if made at all, in a much more familiar style, and in the course of, rather than at the commencement of, a conversation.

With some people acquaintanceship never ripens into friendship—acquaintances never become friends. What they were three years ago they are to-day, neither nearer nor dearer, but yet they cannot be taken upon the same footing as can be new acquaintances. A new acquaintance may develop into a warm friend, but these acquaintances remain acquaintances until the end of the chapter. Although not on ceremony with them, no actual intimacy is called forth by them, either from a want of sympathy in their natures, or from the force of circumstances, or from any other equally cogent reason ; thus, when intimate acquaintances meet they not unfrequently indulge in a light vein of talk.

Some ladies experience a certain awkwardness in breaking off a conversation with an acquaintance at the right moment, before the acquaintance has tired of them, or they of the acquaintance. Others, again, are not quick-witted enough to take note of the signs which an acquaintance sometimes exhibits when desirous of taking his leave, and continue to engage him in some trivial conversation against his inclination, but which he is too polite to break through by taking an abrupt departure and an abrupt farewell. \*

Young men are also occasionally unobservant of the signs which ladies not unfrequently exhibit when they wish to enjoy a little of the society of some other friend or acquaintance of either sex, and ladies, as a rule, when intimate enough to discourse upon domestic or family matters, find the presence of a young man rather *de trop*. Such topics are the most congenial to ladies, but when not sufficiently well acquainted with each other to touch upon these, to them interesting matters, then general subjects supply their place.

A very favourite theme with mere acquaintances is popular preaching, at popular churches, but in the discussion of this theme, both caution and care are necessary to avoid trenching upon the susceptibilities of each other in this respect.

Ladies of a serious turn of mind are very partial to discussing their views and ideas on religious subjects, and with more or less enthusiasm. The "choir" and church music are interesting themes, more especially to those residing in the country; while to all, the schools connected with a church, local charities, and benevolent associations are never failing bonds of interest.

• Music is a great aid to conversation with many ladies, not from the point of view of a

professor, or from that of a self-appointed critic, but rather from a drawing-room standpoint, from which point all ladies have something to say to each other, respecting the newest songs, etc.

Another equally fertile subject with ladies is the light literature of the day, the current stories in the magazines, and new novels in general. Dress is also an interesting subject, together with favourite shops and latest fashions—all of which come in for their share of attention.

Conversation between ladies is essentially of a practical turn, and does not admit of repartee, whilst between very young ladies the topics chosen generally relate to their pastimes, pursuits, and pleasures, rather than to their ideas and individual feelings.

The conversation which takes place between people slightly known to each other at chance meetings is by no means of an ambitious character, usually commencing with polite inquiries respecting the whereabouts of absent friends. After an interchange of civilities, a lady might inquire of a gentleman if he had seen anything of her friends, the Y——s, lately? Whereupon he would be able to say whether he had or had not met them, and if he had done so, he would have

the opportunity of mentioning where the meeting had occurred, and any little incident connected with it.

If the question had been addressed to the lady, she would then have something tangible to start with; or if he had been in out-of-the-way places he would have out-of-the-way things to tell her; if he had travelled, observed and remembered, his conversation would be unusually pleasant, were the intelligence of the lady equal to calling forth his reminiscences by well-directed questions and leading remarks.

At out-door meetings, where usually two or more ladies are sitting or walking together, it not unfrequently happens that the conversation with an acquaintance who chances to join them is almost entirely sustained by one lady only, the friend or friends who may be with her merely supporting her with an occasional word or two.

When equal to doing more than this, the opening is always afforded them, though it would be idle and useless to attempt to draw into conversation one who, when she did speak, would be certain to say the wrong thing; and it is worthy of remark that those who have the least



to say, in the way of agreeable conversation, have an unfortunate facility for saying the wrong thing when they happen to speak, giving a good-natured friend no little trouble in adroitly covering up their *gaucheries*. The *rôle* of one who says something foolish on every occasion is decidedly that of a listener until she has acquired the art of making sensible conversation.

When a second man joins a group consisting, perhaps, of two or three ladies and but one man, if unacquainted with the new-comer, the one who has been talking to the ladies generally withdraws, leaving the coast clear for his successor; but if the new-comer is a friend of his, he would remain by the side of the ladies, and although he might not engross their attention entirely as before, he would get a very fair share of it, and a lady who can engage two men in conversation with her at one and the same time, providing that her beauty is not the chief attraction, is rather clever than not.

When a husband and wife are joined out walking by a friend or acquaintance, the conversation is then carried on by the two men, the lady seldom having a chance of being anything more than an intelligent listener.

Even in the conversation *à trois*, when the lady is not related to either of the gentlemen, but an acquaintance only, unless she exerts herself to be agreeable, and keeps the thread of the conversation well in her own hands, only allowing each man to have just as much, or just as little, of the talk as she pleases, she finds that before a few moments have elapsed they have all the talk to themselves, in which she cannot very well join, however inclined to do so. When this occurs, she feels prompted to say "good-bye" to them both, and leave them to each other's society, which departure would probably be taken with much equanimity; but when not wishing to relinquish a pleasant chat with acquaintances, she might join in the conversation in some such way as this—

The one man will say—

"Oh, how are you? I did not know you were in town." Or—

"How are you? Where are you staying?" Or—

"How are you?"

And the wife of the speaker might join in with—

"Oh, how do you do? My husband was talking about you this morning."

Or the husband might continue with—

“I must introduce you to my wife. I don’t think you have met her.”

To which she might respond—

“How do you do? My husband has often mentioned you to me. You have been abroad until lately, have you not?”

At an introduction such as the foregoing, a young wife should endeavour to recollect any little fact that her husband may have told her connected with the stranger introduced to her; but if she is unable to recall anything of the kind, she must then turn to generalities, thus, commencing with—

“How do you do? We came to see the meet of the coaching club this morning. Were you here in time to see it?”

The reply to which remark would probably be to this effect—

“I am sorry to say I came a little too late.”  
Or—

“Oh yes; I saw it capitally. It was a very fine show.”

The husband might here give his opinion as to the merits or demerits of the various teams; and if his wife knew anything of the subject—and

most ladies do—she would be able to take her part in the dialogue ; but should she know nothing about it, she should endeavour to make a timely diversion by addressing her husband with some such remark as—

“ Perhaps Mr. A—— would come to luncheon with us to-day ? ”

The husband might second the invitation, and this would give the person in question an opportunity of accepting or declining the wife’s suggestion ; and if the latter, he should give his reasons for so doing. Or she might say—

“ If you once get my husband on the subject of horses, he will never talk about anything else.”

This would be a hint to the husband to change the conversation to a subject in which his wife could join.

“ We are going to see the new piece at the ‘ C—— ’ to-night. My wife is awfully fond of the theatre ; we go very often.”

“ Yes, I confess I am ; but I don’t think he cares about it as much as I do.”

“ Oh, doesn’t he ! I think he is sure to like *The Daughter of Eve*—it is wonderfully good. I went last night to see it.”

Slight facts of this nature must invariably be drawn upon on strangers being introduced to one another, however intimate they may be with the one by whom the introduction is made.

#### AT A FLOWER-SHOW.

Introductions are very frequently made at this description of gathering, but there is little difficulty in commencing and carrying on a conversation, as abundant material for this purpose is readily at hand. Two young ladies, for instance, if joined by a gentleman slightly known to both of them, might commence a conversation in this wise—

“How do you do?” said almost simultaneously by all three.

Mr. A—— might say—

“I have only just arrived. Have you been through all the tents and seen who have taken the first prizes?”

Or Miss B—— might remark—

“The show seems a very good one. We have not seen the fruit or vegetables yet. We have been looking at these lovely roses.”

Misc C—— might remark—

“It is very late for such beautiful blooms. Let us see who has taken the first prize,”

"Oh, Sir Henry D——'s gardener has got the first, and Mrs. L—— the second!" Mr. A—— might remark. "He generally does at all these local shows. Shall we go and look at the fruit that is in the next tent?"

"Did you drive over or come on your bicycle?" Miss B—— might remark. "I suppose all your people are here?"

"Oh yes, my sisters are here; but they have gone to see the 'merry-go-rounds.' They drove over, but I came on my bicycle."

Miss C—— might remark—

"We thought we would go through the show first. It will be crowded and hot a little later on."

Mr. A—— might rejoin—

"It is a good plan to get it over as soon as you can; then, I think, we should go over and see the sports. They are great fun," etc.

Nothing can be more simple or commonplace than the remarks which do duty for conversation on these occasions between slight acquaintances on first meeting; although in the country the tone is less formal at such gatherings than in town, as little services can be rendered, such as showing the way to a meadow where athletic sports are held and finding out what is going on at the moment,

or opening a gate for passing and re-passing, or conducting the ladies to a convenient place from which to view the sports, or games, or whatever is taking place. This gives opportunities for more friendly talk than is the case at larger flower-shows held in town, which are of quite a different character to the foregoing.

The conversation at a town horticultural show between three ladies slightly known to each other is equally banal. It is principally limited to the beauty of the flowers, the beauty of the day, and the excellence of the band ; thus—

“How do you do?” Again a simultaneous greeting, to which no response is expected.

“What a lovely day it is!” remarks one.

“Yes, how fortunate it is,” responds another.

“The tents are almost too crowded to see anything, and I wanted so much to see the orchids.”

“The scent of the hyacinths is quite overpowering,” remarks another ; “but how lovely they are!”

Then each lady makes a further observation with regard to the different exhibits, asking—

“Have you seen this?” Or—

“Have you seen that?”

Then a few personal remarks are made relative

to movements or inquiries after the various members of each other's families, if well enough acquainted to do so.

"We thought of going to listen to the band," is one way of breaking off a conversation. Or—

"I find it so hot in this tent, I think I shall go into the gardens. Good-bye, if I don't see you again."

At public gatherings of this description, it should always be remembered that slight acquaintances seldom wish to carry on a long conversation with each other, and a few trivial remarks to the point are all that is necessary. Thus to release an acquaintance, or release one's self, without undue abruptness is a considerate thing to do under all circumstances.

#### AT GARDEN-PARTIES.

Garden-parties in town are essentially society functions where conversation takes place as at other society entertainments, therefore slight acquaintances are as a matter of course on ceremony with each other. In the country, garden-parties are distinctly local gatherings, and even between the slightest acquaintances there is some



local interest to form a topic of conversation. After—

“How do you do?” has been said by two ladies meeting at a garden-party in town, the dialogue might take this form—

“What a delightful afternoon it is after the rain!”

“Yes, it is; but I think the air is a little chilly.”

“What charming grounds these are! It is the first time I have been here.”

“Yes, they are very beautiful, and the house is so interesting. Did you notice the old gateway in the inner-court as you came in?”

“Yes; Mr. B—— was with us. He was saying something about it. You have met him, have you not?”

“I am not quite sure; I think I have.” And then a few remarks would naturally follow respecting mutual friends or some topic of mutual interest.

Such short conversations as these are usually interrupted by friends of either lady, thus enabling the two to separate, which they might do with a smile and a slight bow, but without any further leave-taking in case they should come across one another again later on in the afternoon.

If these interruptions do not occur, the conversation might be brought to a close by one or other of the ladies remarking—

“I see Mrs. A—— over there. I think I must go and speak to her.” Or—

“I am going into the house to get some tea. Have you had any yet?”

And the rejoinder might be—

“Yes, I have already been in.” Or—

“No, I have not. I think I will go too.”

When two ladies are introduced to each other, by a mutual friend, at one of these functions, the conversation is not confined to the surroundings in the first instance, as the one who has made the introduction invariably remains with the friends introduced, and thus the conversation takes a more personal turn, and might commence thus—

“You know Mrs. A——, don’t you, Edith?”

“I ought to,” Edith might reply; “I have heard of her so often.”

To which Mrs. A—— might remark—

“I am so glad to meet you; my sister has told me what great friends you are.”

This might lead Mrs. B—— to inquire after Mrs. A——’s sister.

“Is your sister here this afternoon?” Or—

"I met your sister one day last week ; I thought she was looking very well."

To which Edith might remark—

"I have been making a lot of things for a bazaar at which she is going to hold a stall, and she has asked me to help her to sell at it."

"How very good of you. She wants a great many things I know. I am trying to do what I can for her also."

"The bazaar is for the new wing of the convalescent hospital," might remark Mrs. B——.

"Yes, it is," Mrs. A—— might say ; "and my sister is so very much interested in it."

"What a lovely place this would be to hold a bazaar in," Edith might rejoin ; and this remark would naturally turn the conversation from the bazaar, before mentioned, to the *environs*, the lawn, the trees, the mansion, the company, or a conversation might be maintained upon personal topics until the three ladies separated.

The personal topics might range from mutual friends, personal engagements, and society gatherings at which they were present or intended to be present, or charitable undertakings in which they were mutually interested.

## AT COUNTRY GARDEN-PARTIES.

At country garden-parties the conversation between two ladies, but recently introduced, generally turns upon local subjects, those living in the same neighbourhood having much in common, though comparative strangers.

"Have you been following the play?" might remark one lady, alluding to the cricket going on. "What a long time Colonel A—— has been in, has he not?"

"I am afraid I am rather stupid about cricket. I never know which side is in," the other might rejoin. "I am always so bewildered at the applause. I never know what has been done to merit it, though I have been looking on all the time."

"Oh, do you not? We have so much cricket in this neighbourhood. I hope you will learn to like it, or I am afraid you will find our cricket-matches rather dull."

"No doubt I should like it if I understood the game; but, do you know, I think it is more amusing to see who is here, and to walk about in the shade. Don't you find it very hot sitting in

the open here, with the sun blazing down upon you all the time?" Or—

"There is croquet going on over there," might remark one lady to another. "Would you care to play. If so, we will ask Miss A—— to make up a set."

"Thank you, I should like to play very much, but not just yet; perhaps when it is a little cooler," might be the rejoinder.

"You know Miss A——," the first lady might observe, "do you not?"

"She called with her mother; but I was out, so I have not really met her." Or—

"I hope you like your house," a lady might remark. "I am afraid you will find the situation rather bleak in the winter; but you have a lovely view."

"Yes, every one seems to say we shall find it very cold, as all the bedrooms face north; we did not consider this at the time. But it is a dear old house, and I like the fine hall and the drawing-room so much."

"I quite agree with you, it is a most interesting place; it has never been restored; it was built in the reign of Queen Mary. The C——s lived there for many years. We knew them well. We

were so sorry when Mr. C—— died," etc., etc.

Or—

"I hope you will be able to come to the I—— Flower Show next week. It is to be held in Sir G. C——'s beautiful grounds, and I expect there will be a very large attendance. We take a great interest in it, as our villagers are amongst the exhibitors."

"I am very much afraid we shall not be able to come to it, as we are going away for a few days next week, to stay with my husband's sister."

"Oh, really! I am sorry. It is going to be such a very good show."

"I am sorry too. I hope you will have a fine day for it."

"I am sure I hope so, for last week the D—— Show was quite spoilt by the rain; it poured in torrents, and the ground was so wet."

"So I heard. Mrs. F—— told me what a failure it was. It must have been so disappointing to the poor people," etc. Or—

"We are on our way to the tennis-ground; the tournament has been going on all the morning; this is the second day of it. You play, I suppose?"

"I used to, but I have rather given it up lately.

I should like to look on for a little. Shall we go and find some chairs? I think there are one or two vacant over there."

"It is very pleasant here. These grounds are so pretty, are they not? Have you been to see the roses? Mr. A—— prides himself upon the beautiful specimens he rears; he is quite a celebrated amateur rose-grower."

"Oh, is he? I must ask him to show them to me."

"He will be delighted; nothing he likes so much as to show his roses to his friends, and they really are worth seeing."

"I thought it was difficult to grow roses in this county?"

"Oh no; the soil suits them rather than not. I know in some places you cannot do anything with them to speak of," etc. Or—

"I did not know you were down here, or I should have driven over to call upon you."

"We only returned last week. I have been so much engaged that I have not been able to go and see any one yet."

"I am glad you arrived in time for the ball at B——. I hope you are going to have a party for it. My husband is one of the stewards," etc. Or—

"Are you going to make any stay down here? I hope you are. We have a great many local gaieties coming off during the next six weeks."

"I am sorry to say we are not. We are going abroad immediately; in fact, we have let our house for three months."

"Oh, really! I am sorry; we shall quite miss you. Who has taken it? Any friends of yours?"

"No; I don't know them in the least. I think it is a large family with some grown-up sons."

"Have they taken the shooting also?"

"Not the pheasant shooting. We hope to be back towards the end of October." Or—

"We have been making a tour of the grounds. How pretty the lake is, and the foreign birds in the aviary! Have you seen them?"

"Oh yes, I have; they are very beautiful," etc. Or—

"Mr. H—— took us to see the houses. What a fine show of grapes he has, and the melons in the pits are splendid. He says he only keeps five gardeners, and there is so much glass."

"Yes, and how lovely the conservatory is; such masses of bloom," etc. etc.

The subjects that present themselves upon which to converse are so numerous, that even those but



very slightly acquainted ought not to find the smallest difficulty in commencing and carrying on a conversation of a few minutes' duration. Nothing is expected from them beyond the most trivial commonplaces, and these relative to the moment and to the place.

#### CONVERSATION AT BAZAARS.

Conversation on these occasions naturally relates to the interest of the moment, *i.e.* the bazaar itself, and is of a very desultory character. Thus after two slight acquaintances have exchanged preliminary greetings, one or other might remark—

“What a good bazaar it is! The stalls are laden with things, and there are so many people it is impossible to get near them.”

“A friend of mine is helping at Lady B——’s stall. She has some very good foreign pottery. Have you noticed it?”

“Oh yes, I did when I first came in.”

“I hope you are going to buy something at her stall?”

“I have bought a great many things already. I do not know if I must allow myself to be tempted,” etc. Or— •

"Oh, how do you do? I thought I recognized you, I was not quite sure. What a pretty bazaar it is! Were you in time to see the Princess?"

"No, I am sorry to say, I was not. I have only just come in."

"Oh, what a pity! We saw her so well. She made several purchases at two or three of the stalls."

"You have made many purchases? I see you are quite laden."

"Yes. I must take them home. I think I shall come again to-morrow, as I want to buy some of those Bavarian wood-carvings at Mrs. C——'s stall." Or—

"How loud the band plays—one cannot hear one's self speak. It is of no use trying to buy anything while it is playing."

"There is a seat there, shall we sit down for a few minutes? As you say, the din is quite deafening."

"There are a great many people here, are there not? I expect they will have a very good day."

"Yes; one of the stall-holders told me they did a great deal of business this morning. You see, they began at twelve."

"I am so glad. I hope the next two days will be

as fine as it is to-day ; it makes such a difference to the takings."

"I can quite fancy it does. Last year I came on the third day and the hall was almost empty ; it poured with rain all day. Very few came."

"How depressing ! I hope it won't be the same this year. I promised to buy some poor children's clothing for a friend of mine. Is it at all reasonable ? "

"Yes, I think it is ; but that stall is so besieged that I have hardly been able to get near enough to it to judge whether it is or not. I have bought a very lovely piece of embroidery at Mrs. C——'s stall. It was not at all dear, I thought. I gave thirty shillings for it," etc. Or—

"How do you do ? " a lady might remark to a man. "I did not know that you cared for bazaars ? "

"Neither do I particularly ; but I have to support a friend of mine who is very busy here to-day."

"How kind of you ! Men have always so much more money to spend than we have."

"I don't know about that. I am afraid I must make haste and get away before I am quite ruined. I have put into half a dozen raffles already."

"Oh, have you ! I hope you will win everything."

"Oh, I hope not. What should I do with a counterpane, a doll, and two or three cushions? I should not know what to do with them!"

"Oh, you should give them to your friends; or, better still, give them back to be raffled for again."

"Well, let us wait until I have won them, and then I will see about it," etc.

Or a stall-holder, slightly acquainted with a lady, might remark plaintively—

"Won't you let me tempt you to buy something at my stall?"

"I don't know. I am afraid I have spent nearly all the money I brought with me." Or—

"You must not ask me; I have spent so much already."

"Ah, but not at my stall! Don't you think you would like this quaint figure? It is Viennese ware. You shall have it for twelve shillings and sixpence. May I pack it up for you?"

"Well, no; I don't think I must have it. What is the price of that vase?"

"That is seventeen shillings and sixpence; it really ought to be a guinea."

"I'm afraid I must not think of it to-day. What is the price of that white fan?"

"Oh, that is only five shillings. It is the last

one I have. They have sold so well, and they are so pretty."

"Yes. Well, then, suppose I have that!"

"Thank you; it is so kind of you. Now cannot I persuade you to look at this Indian box? It is only ten shillings and sixpence, and it is such a useful thing."

"No, really! Thank you very much," etc.  
Or—

"Can I show you anything? This cushion is only thirty shillings."

"It is beautifully worked; but I'm afraid I don't want a cushion. I have so many."

"No; then would you care for this blotting-book? It is only half a guinea, and it is very pretty. Is it not?"

"Yes, very! I think I should like to have it. Will you take care of it for me while I go round the stalls?" Or—

"Will you take a ticket for this raffle? They are only five shillings each. We are going to raffle that large screen over there. The panels are beautifully painted."

"Do you know, I am so unlucky! and I have put into so many raffles already this afternoon that I must not let myself be persuaded." Or—

"We only want five more tickets for this lovely cushion. Will you take one? They are only half a crown each."

"I don't mind if I do. What numbers have you left?"

"We have from thirty-five to forty. Which number will you have?"

"Well, thirty-nine, I think." Or—

"You will take a ticket for this raffle, won't you? We only want ten more to make it up. They are only seven shillings and sixpence each, and it is for this beautiful satin quilt. You see how handsome the embroidery is. The price was fifteen pounds, but as this is the last day of the bazaar, it must be raffled for."

"Thank you very much; I can't afford a ticket. I have bought so many things already, and have spent nearly all the money I brought with me. You must not ask me," etc., etc.

Enough examples have been given in the various chapters of the present work to show how surroundings can be readily drawn upon for the purpose of starting a conversation, or of supplying subjects for making a few sensible or practical remarks, failing anything more interesting to talk about; but a clever man or woman introduces a

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little originality into ordinary and every-day topics. If a woman talks of dress, she talks of it not only as an "art," a fashion, but as the outward emblem of the inner woman, and as an indication of individual character. Into the question of health, a man usually introduces some practical remark. Of "the human face divine," the features could be taken by him as an outcome of the soul within, and facial workings as the hieroglyphics of temper, trials, and feelings, and the human voice as demonstrating the harmony or discord of moral feelings.

Even the well-worn topic of the weather can, in practised hands, become interesting, if not original, by some hint being given as to the laws that regulate it. Thus there is no topic, however prosaic, that cannot be made a channel for agreeable or even intellectual conversation.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### VULGARISMS OF SPEECH.

CERTAIN words and certain expressions, inoffensive in themselves, have degenerated into so-called vulgarisms, through constant use and misuse, while others have become vulgarized, suffering from an exaggerated pronunciation. Again, words which have a stamp of vulgarity, if used in one sense, are restored to their original position when used in another.

The misapplication of words is doubtless one of the main reasons of their becoming vulgarized ; added to which, a word or expression that is constantly in the mouth of all, like a style or make of a dress adopted by all, speedily becomes denominated vulgar or common. Thus, words and expressions are tabooed by general consent, which, had they been allowed to retain their original place, would never have forfeited their reputation or have fallen into disfavour.



There are many words and expressions which are still on the borderland of vulgarity from the same cause, and which only require a little further pressure to cause them to join the ranks of the discarded ones, perhaps to be rehabilitated at some future day, and to resume their proper place all the fresher for their enforced rest.

The terms "ladies" and "gentlemen" become in themselves vulgarisms when misapplied; and simple as they are, yet the improper application of the wrong term at the wrong time—the calling a man "a gentleman" when he should be called "a man," or speaking of a man as "a man" when he should be spoken of as "a gentleman"; or alluding to a lady as "a woman" when she should be alluded to as "a lady," or speaking of a woman as "a lady" when she should properly be termed "a woman"—makes all the difference in the world to ears polite.

Tact and a sense of the fitness of things decide these points, there being no fixed rule to go upon to determine when a man is a man or when he is a gentleman; and although he is far oftener termed the one than the other, he does not thereby lose his attributes of a gentleman, of being "a man raised above the vulgar, a man of good

breeding, a man of extraction, or a man of birth."

In common parlance a man is always a man to a man, and never a gentleman; to a woman he is occasionally a man and occasionally a gentleman; but a man would far oftener term a woman "a woman" than he would term her "a lady." When a man makes use of an adjective in speaking of a lady, he almost invariably calls her a woman; thus, "I met a rather agreeable woman at dinner last night," not "I met an agreeable lady." But he might say, "A lady, a friend of mine, told me," etc., when he would not say, "A woman, a friend of mine, told me," etc. Again, a man says, "Which of the ladies did you take in to dinner?" not, "Which of the women?" etc.

Speaking of people *en masse*, they are referred to in conversation as "men and women," and not as "ladies and gentlemen," the compromise between the two being to speak of them as "ladies and men." Thus a lady says, "I have asked two or three ladies and several men;" not, "I have asked several men and women."

Speaking of numbers, it would be very usual to say, "There were a great many ladies and but very few men present;" or, "The ladies were in

the majority, so few men being present." Again, a lady says, "I expect two or three men\* to dinner;" but not, "I expect two or three gentlemen to dine with us." Again, "Are there many men here friends of yours?" not, "Are there many gentlemen here friends of yours?"

When people are on ceremony with each other, they might, perhaps, in speaking of a man, call him "a gentleman," but otherwise it would be more usual to speak of him as "a man." Ladies, when speaking of each other, usually employ the term "woman" in preference to that of "lady." Thus, in speaking of each other, they say, "She is a very good-natured woman," "What sort of a woman is she?" the term "lady" being entirely out of place under such circumstances.

Again, the term "young lady" gives place, as far as possible, to the term "girl," although it greatly depends upon the amount of intimacy existing as to which term is employed.

"I have asked several pretty young ladies to come to my dance," is not said; but "I have asked several girls," or "several pretty girls," *is* said.

"Who is that girl? I should like to be introduced to her," is the right thing to say; not, "Who is that young lady?"

When speaking to inferiors, the term "young lady" is the correct one to employ ; thus—

"I expect a young lady this afternoon." Or—

"Has the young lady who came with me gone up to the drawing-room?" Or—

"Let me know when the young ladies arrive." Or—

"This young lady has torn her dress. Will you kindly mend it?"

It is seldom the term "young lady" can be employed between equals, but there are times when it is quite admissible ; thus—

"I heard a young lady—Miss Smith—sing that song." Or—

"I have a young lady staying with me." Or a man might say—

"I should like to be introduced to that young lady, if you don't mind." Or—

"There were two or three young ladies present, but I did not hear their names."

When referring to very slight acquaintances, it would be considered over-familiar to speak of them as "girls," and thus the term "young lady," when used between equals, denotes that they are on ceremony with each other.

It is correct to say "elderly ladies," not "elderly

women ;" but "A dear old lady" and "A dear old woman" are equally said.

The term, "Young married lady," or "Young married woman," is also equally correct.

Amongst the tabooed words, "stylish" and "genteel" are relegated to the show-room, where they are very much at home in each other's company, although considered decidedly vulgar when met with elsewhere. "Stylish," being bred in the show-room, is the right word in the right place ; but it is hard upon unfortunate "genteel," that, conveying in itself so much, it should have met with such a fate.

When to the word "nice" is added either "awfully" or "too," it becomes a vulgarism, but only when used in this way, otherwise it is in every-day use, and is in no wise considered a vulgarism. Take the following examples, which are very general expressions—

"She is a very nice girl."

"I thought her very nice."

"What a nice woman she is !"

"What a nice house they have !"

"Thank you ; that will be very nice."

"It was rather a nice party."

"We had such a nice time down there."

"That looks very nice."

'What a nice-looking girl that is!'

"Jolly" is well enough on the lips of a school-boy, to whom it now of right belongs, a right which no one disputes ; but slang proper is and never can be anything else than vulgar, and those who delight in its use for the embellishment of their speech, to all intents and purposes intend to be vulgar. "If we accommodate ourselves to the vulgar in our speech, why not also in our deportment?"

"Good morning" and "Good afternoon" are open to similar variations as are the words "ladies" and "gentlemen," "men" and "women." There are times when the application of these words is correct, and times when it is considered incorrect. At a morning call, for instance, both these expressions would be out of place, unfashionable, and odd, "How do you do?" and "Good-bye" being the recognized formulas between friends and acquaintances; while between strangers, or between business men, or between people meeting on business matters, or between inferiors and superiors, the "Good morning" and "Good afternoon" are the only expressions in use by way of salutation, farewell, or dismissal.

The verb "To take" is open to being considered

a vulgar verb when used in reference to dinner, ~~tea~~ or general refreshments. "Will you take some tea?" "Will you take any refreshments?" "Will you take some mutton?" "Will you take some soup?" in fact, any request which has for its object the fortifying of the inner man, if prefaced by "Will you take," is not considered to be *comme il faut*, the verb in favour for the offering of these civilities being the verb "To have."

Why the one verb should be in fashion and the other out of favour is not difficult of comprehension, and society may be congratulated upon its insistence on having the right verb in the right place, providing the verb "to 'take" be taken to mean, from dictionary definitions, "to seize what is not given," to "catch by surprise or artifice," to "lay hold on," "to snatch, to seize, or to get hold of a thing in almost any way," leaving out of the question any other application of this verb; and the verb "to have," when used in this sense, taken to mean "to obtain, to enjoy, to possess;" thus all enjoyment appears to be derived through the verb "To have," and not through the verb "To take."

"Don't 'you know," "You know," "Don't 'you see," "I say," are blemishes of speech whenever

they are used ; but some people contract the habit of making use of these expressions unconscious and continuously—perpetually introducing them in their conversation.

The word “Fellow,” however much in use it may be between men, sounds very objectionable from the lips of women ; and some women are given to the foolish conceit of speaking of every man they may happen to know as a “Dear fellow,” a “Charming fellow,” a “Handsome fellow,” or a “Clever fellow.”

“Beau” and “Belle” are terms now no longer in use ; for “Beau” the only equivalent is the slang term “Ma’sher,” while the term “Beauty” has displaced the term “Belle.”

Out of the nursery it is not customary for children to style their parents other than by the good old-fashioned reverential names of “Father” and “Mother.” “Papa” and “Mamma” are now nursery names only ; but “Pa” and “Ma,” those unpleasant abbreviations, are now happily quite out of date.

The courteous “Thank you” and the curt “Thanks” are equally in use. The former is the more friendly expression, and the latter the more distant one. Take the following examples—



Thank you ; it is very kind of you."

"Thank you very much ; I should like it of all things."

"No, thank you ; I don't think I will."

"No, thanks ; I have already had some."

"Thanks. I am sorry to say I am engaged."

"Thanks. Pray don't take the trouble."

"Thanks. If you won't mind doing so."

To ignore the letter "h" is so palpable a vulgarism of speech that it is almost superfluous to allude to it, and yet it is surprising how many well-informed and even well-educated people entirely dispense with its use, evidently oblivious that they are guilty of committing' so vulgar an error.

To repeat the name of a person with whom one is carrying on a conversation is a social mistake, and is really aggravating to fastidious people. Strictly speaking, it is unnecessary to mention the name of the person even once, the pronoun "you" being considered all-sufficient to denote to whom the conversation is addressed. Take the following examples.

"Oh, Miss A——, I expected to have seen you this morning. We had a very nice musical ride."

To commence a phrase with "Oh, Miss A.

would be correct, were it said to arrest the attention of a lady, but not correct when engaged in conversation with her.

"And do you know, Miss A——, I thought of going there next Wednesday afternoon, and if you could manage to come, Miss A——, we should be very pleased."

"Thank you very much, Miss A——, for the address you sent me. I was going to write to you for it."

"I am afraid, Miss A——, we must be going."

"Have you seen it, Miss A——?"

"I like that book very much, Miss A——."

"What a cold day we have had, Miss A——?"

"How do you do, Miss A——?"

In all the above instances the words "Miss A——" are superfluous, and this repetition of a name at the commencement or ending of every sentence is somewhat exasperating and tedious to the one thus addressed.



