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ON CONVERSATION.

Few things produce, in fact, so small a portion of their possible benefits as conversation. Indeed, though we have abundance of chat or talk in our social meetings; of conversation, truly deserving the name, we have very little. On this subject, I offer the following remarks and directions to the younger readers of the Magazine. Full well do I remember the time, when even these would have been useful to me.

The proper ends of conversation I take to be two; namely, instruction, and relaxation from labour. And these ought to be, as much as possible, united. Time is too precious to be wasted in mere amusement; and our very relaxations should be something better than trifling; should be marked with something worthy of rational and immortal beings. The tongue has been, with great felicity, called "the glory of our frame." Shall we degrade so high a gift, by employing it to so low and culpable a purpose, as the murdering of time? They who do so, will have a serious account to render for the abuse.

The prime and most obvious requisite to good conversation is knowledge. We should converse with a view to improvement as well as entertainment; and there is an exquisite pleasure, to minds rightly trained, in the communication and reception of bright ideas and valuable information. No individual can know every thing. But every one who enters a company ought to contribute some share of sentiment to the

common stock. I am far from wishing that conversation should be always, or even most commonly, moulded into a trial of intellectual strength, in the way of argument and disputation. This would destroy its ease and sweetness. Yet if conversation be not an intellectual commerce, it degenerates into flatness and insipidity. And what can ignorance contribute to such a commerce? It is really a piece of daring hardihood, for a lazy, stupid animal, to enter the society of men of sense; a hardihood, however, which will meet its punishment in the disgust and contempt which it cannot fail to excite. I speak not of that involuntary ignorance which may arise from youth, or other inevitable circumstances; and which merits a very different consideration.

And this leads me to observe, that the next best substitute for knowledge in the social circle, is a modest, candid spirit, ready to acknowledge ignorance, and willing to be instructed. There is something exceedingly lovely and attractive in such a temper. The humble enquirer, too, has a ready access to all the stores of information, with which he may be surrounded. There are persons whose minds are full of important matter, but who have not the faculty of a graceful, spontaneous communication. A key must be applied to unlock their treasures. That key is ingenuous curiosity. To such a mind nothing can be more soothing, nothing more gratifying. If you are ignorant, be not ashamed to let it be seen; but question respectfully those who can inform you, and who will delight in answering your questions. This is the way to gain wisdom. And I add, it is far more honorable in the eyes of all judicious people, than the sullen, unsocial silence with which ignorance often endeavors to conceal itself, or to pass itself off upon the company for profound reflection.

As I do not address myself to coarse, impious, or debauched minds, I shall not condescend formally to denounce profaneness, obscenity, double entendre, and the like abominations. Away with these, to their appropriate caverns of filth and vulgarity.

But there are moral qualities which must be brought into view; as they are equally necessary with mental furniture, in order to agreeable and useful conversation. The first of these is a sacred regard to truth. In relating matters of fact, many seem to think it allowable to embellish the story, more or less, by the addition of fictitious circumstances. These may illustrate the narrator's inventive powers, and please the hearer for a moment, by adding an air of the marvellous to common events. But they soon diminish that confidence

which we should aim to enjoy ; and moreover involve the guilt of sporting with truth and falsehood. You may, for our amusement, play with your own veracity, until you seriously impair it, and render us unable to place reliance upon your simplest assertions. In matters of discussion the case is not very different. If you must argue a point, argue it honestly. Contend with your best skill, for what you conscientiously believe to be truth, and for no other end whatever. Sophistry is a hateful exercise of mental power. Suppose you indulge in it, and with success—suppose that in a cause which you know to be wrong, you have reduced your opponent to silence ; what have you gained in the contest ? A victory for which you ought to blush ; and the indignation of every enlightened and upright beholder. It is not easy, I acknowledge, to admit the force of evidence against a preconceived opinion. But we must labour to do it always, if we would advance in wisdom. It is still less easy to own that we have been in error, and that we are defeated by the weapons of truth. But in proportion as this is difficult, it is truly noble and magnanimous. How highly do I honor the man, who can say, I have been wrong, and am glad to be set right ! After all, why should it be so great a trial of our candor and humility to use this language ? Is it not the same thing, asks a fine writer, as to say, I am wiser to day than I was yesterday ? Alas, pride is frequently as foolish as it is wicked.

Learn to conform your speech and deportment in company, to your relative situation. In our republican country, we have broken down many of the distinctions of rank which exist, and the consequent submissions which are required, in the old world. But are we not in danger of carrying this levelling principle too far ? Surely some deference is due to those who fill important offices in society, especially to those who fill them with dignity. Surely it is right that youth should pay regard to grey hairs, and bend with reverential attention to the voice of long observation and experience. Far greater is the honor, which you will obtain by such a behaviour, than any which you can derive from obtruding your unflinched ideas upon your superiors in age or station.

Endeavor to contribute your portion to the feast of conversation. An excessive disposition to be silent, and to listen to others, is not indeed a very common fault, But it is sometimes committed. If the company is not more numerous than it ought to be, and if it consists of the right kind of materials, all will expect and wish, that each individual take his part in the discourse. Politeness induces them to wait to

hear you in your turn. And if you have nothing to say, and nothing to ask, they are disappointed. They conclude that you are too silly for the place you occupy; or still worse, that you are proudly indifferent about pleasing your company, or receiving pleasure from them.

But on the other hand, take care, I beseech you, not to arrogate more than your proper share of the time and attention of those around you. Let not eagerness to speak prompt you to interrupt another; or to seize the discourse before you ascertain that he has finished what he had to say. This is a rudeness very frequently exemplified when a lively interest is excited; but no frequency of its exhibition can ever render it tolerable. Above all, avoid the making of set speeches in conversation. The practice is so magisterial and overbearing, so destructive of the very nature of conversation, that it infallibly inspires us with strong feelings either of ridicule or resentment. To escape this snare, cultivate the talent of expressing your thoughts in as few and as well-chosen words as possible.

It becomes me, who have no wit in the world, to speak with great modesty of the use of so rare and so important a faculty. It is a delicate and dangerous weapon, and one which should be cautiously employed. Let it be directed, with its sharpest point, against presumption and arrogance; against licentiousness and folly; but let it never inflict a wound upon virtue, or unassuming weakness. Have you the command of quick and pungent repartee? Use it for innocent pleasantry, or to reduce impertinence to order. But beware how you sting those, who are not meddling with you, and who are unable to retort upon you. There is something mean as well as cruel in such conduct. You may raise a laugh by your smartness; but this is a poor compensation for the probable loss of a friend, and the disapprobation of all who have witnessed the deed. The man who is known to indulge in the indiscriminate severity of wit, and to sport with the pain of his victims, excites alarm wherever he goes; and obliges all companies to unite against him in a common hostility.—All freedom and ease are to be exchanged for gloomy restraint; or the mischievous wit is to be banished from the circle, as a nuisance which mars its enjoyments.

In the mean while, cherish in your breast that charity which "thinketh no evil." We have heard much of evil-speaking, in all its detestable variety of forms. I wish we could get a good lecture on evil-hearing also. There is in some minds a vile suspiciousness; a restless jealousy; a propensity to hunt for insults and injuries, and to find them

where they do not exist. This disposition to watch for mischief, and to torture whatever is said to the worst possible meaning, and even to meanings that are impossible upon any reasonable construction, is death to the benefit and the pleasure which ought to be the ends of conversation.

As there is a general tendency in conversation to sink into frivolity, and into depths still lower than that; such, for instance, as scandal against our neighbor; it becomes a rule of the utmost importance, that we take care to keep our discourse up to the level of something dignified and useful. Yes; in those moments when we most completely unbend our minds, and remove all customary restraints from the current of thought and of speech, let us remember that the great God is still present with us; that his eye is continually upon us; and that "for every idle word" he will bring us into judgment. That we are tied up never to speak of any thing but religion, or that we are forbidden to indulge in the cheerfulness of social intercourse, I do not believe. But it is the command of God that "our speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt; that no corrupt communication proceed out of our mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." These are serious admonitions indeed. And here I cannot help remarking what a peculiar weight of responsibility lies upon those individuals, who are endowed with high conversational talents; who can, with ease and acceptance, turn the course of speech into whatever channel they please. Let them especially aim at the glory of God, and the good of mankind when they enter into company. Let their authority repress every thing improper and pernicious; and their fascinating powers give a tone of sobriety and good sense, and, if possible, of christian piety, to every conversation in which they bear a part. By the way, let it be added, that a christian should very seldom be found in any circle, from which the sublime doctrines of our salvation are systematically excluded.

I may be told, that so many rules about conversation, tend to check that ease which is its principal charm. The objection is plausible, but admits of a ready and complete answer. It is by a careful attention to good rules, that we form the habit of doing any thing with grace and facility. In this way men are trained to reading, to writing, to eloquence itself in its loftiest exertions; so that the rules come to be no longer embarrassing, as being no longer a necessary accompaniment of the process. I certainly wish conversation to flow with ease, as well as propriety. But this must be the

fruit of a mind rightly disciplined and informed ; and of a heart subjected to the fear of God, and expanded with universal benevolence.

MELANCTHON.

## THE HISTORY OF ADEN.

CONTENTMENT AND PIETY ESSENTIAL TO HAPPINESS.

### AN ALLEGORY.

On the eastern verge of the City of Mecca, near the holy well of Zemzem, stood the dwelling of Merab. He was fam'd for the hospitality of his board ; and he did not waste in frivolous superfluity that portion of his abundance, which would satisfy the wants of the poor and maimed who gathered in his avenues. He was one of the wealthiest of his countrymen, and was known to inherit the spirit and munificence of a Koreishite. His camels, as they journeyed in the caravans of Mecca, were distinguished by the richness of their trappings, and the compactness of their costly burdens—His storehouses were filled with the treasures of Africa, and the spices of India ; with the grapes of Tayeff, and the fruits of Sana. The fame of his knowledge was commensurate with that of his wealth. Great learning had assisted the penetration of his judgment, by nature strong and sound, and the benevolence of his heart made him delight in that science, whose end is the happiness of mankind—Merab was now old, and the evening of his life was serene and mild—The opening virtues of his son Aden, shed happiness and lustre round the decline of Merab. He found his cares repaid, and his labors rewarded. His talents were not uselessly devoted to the formation of the mind of Aden ; and his knowledge was not thrown away in his instruction—Merab delighted to follow the fervid fancy of his son, which he guided and chastened by the maxims of his sounder judgment—He listened to his youthful remarks with lively anticipations—Thus in peace and in hope set the sun of Merab ; and Aden consigned, with filial sorrow, the spirit of his father to the promises of the Prophet.

When the poignancy of his grief had been blunted by time, and had subsided into tender regrets and soothing recollections ; the mind of Aden was again bright, and he felt his usual health returning—His prospects lengthened before him, and his mind expanded with them. Curiosity and a thirst of knowledge fired his breast ; and to visit foreign climes, became