

"Oh, bother!" getting the colour of a brick, "I wish you would let me say what I was going to say."

The count, feeling aggrieved, moved two steps nearer to her, and she moved a step off; still, that gave him the advantage, which he availed himself of by taking one of her hands in his.

"Go on," he said encouragingly.

"Don't you think we should go and find Uncle Gilead and try and thank him for all his generosity?"

"Yes; but presently will do for that; we have a lot to talk over first. Suppose we sit down, eh?"

Dorothy shook her head reproachfully, but did as he wished, all the same; and then followed a conversation not intended for walls to hear, so it escaped me; but I saw lots. Presently he raised his voice again—

"Dorothy, did you ever care for any one before me?"

"No;" quite pat.

"Did you ever flirt with any one?"

"N-o;" not quite so pat.

"Oh! Dolly," implying so much that she hastened to add—

"Anyway, I won't again—at least, not till next time." And up she jumped, leaving him with his arm encircling space. He did not seem to find that so amusing, and he calculated to lessen the distance, I reckon; but she slipped a table between them, and sat down opposite to him.

"Victor, do you think a flirt such a very dreadful character?"

"Dreadful!"

"Then why have you chosen me?"

"I am glad to get you at any price—on any terms. Besides, I don't believe you are a flirt."

I don't pretend to be an authority on such matters, but I presume Dorothy was honest in answering—

"Indeed I'm afraid I am; I can't help it, you know. Victor. I always want some one near to admire and—adore me." Her frankness was charming.

"Well, you will always have some one now."

"But I have never flirted with *you*, Victor. You believe that?"—very eagerly. "Did uncle tell you all?"

"Well, I hope so," replied the count grimly, "for I shouldn't have cared for much more in that strain; as it was, you were only pulled up just in time."

"Still, thanks to Uncle Gilead, I was; but you have forgiven me now, haven't you?"

The silence that followed so excited my curiosity that I rose to the tippest of tiptoe, with the unhappy result that I got seized with cramp, and descended with the fire-irons into the fender, making such a tremendous clatter that they supposed a sea-serpent had flashed down the chimney, and, acting on this assumption, the count came running in with drawn sword, followed by my niece, screaming.

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"Dearest uncle, I think you are quite the nicest man that ever lived, and I love you better than any."

"Now see here, Dorothy, don't you try to get off any more of this humbug on me, for I shan't believe it. And don't you get into another difficulty of this sort again, for it stands to reason I couldn't fix it straight a second time."

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Ah, well! I am living all alone. No! I have not yet succumbed to the allurements "over the way;" but if protection does not soon arrive in the persons of the count and countess, I guess this will be the last spinning of a solitary spider.

HOW TO MAKE CONVERSATION.*



ONVERSATION is an intellectual battledore and shuttlecock. If one player is inert, uninterested, or ignorant, he fails to return his fellow-player's well-aimed blow, the shuttlecock falls to the ground, and the game is at an end. So in conversation, there must be give and take. You cannot give what you have not got, and "nought from nought, nothing."

A *morning call* is essentially a visit from a lady to a lady, and naturally begins with inquiries after children or mutual friends.

You pass on to some topic that you know to be of interest: flowers, pets, parish work. All these sub-

jects may be enlarged on. Flowers may lead to some speciality: roses, orchids, ferns, mosses, hothouses, vineries, new gardening apparatus, fresh modes of culture, botany or botanical literature.

Most women have pets—either dogs, cats, birds, or horses. Poultry, bee-keeping, and the anxieties of the dairy will interest some.

Parish work has so many branches, that if you have met with a worker, you certainly may get some information, if you cannot give it. Temperance work, Sunday schools, district visiting, the Girls' Friendly Society, or Young Women's Christian Association, mothers' meetings, savings banks: one or all are of interest to the parish worker.

Perhaps your visit is to some one in whom mission work at home or abroad, Dr. Barnardo's boys and girls, the sick in the hospital, or the poor in the work-

* To this paper was awarded the Prize of THREE GUINEAS offered for the best paper of suggestions of the most original and suitable topics of conversation.

house, have a staunch advocate. I have heard it said of a lady, "She skilfully steers the conversation round to the 'Deep Sea Missions.'"

Some of our friends may be able to dilate on the beauties of the School of Needlework, whilst others may appreciate the British Museum. One friend may have some clever daughters, who are delighted to describe the Scientific Dressmaking System, amuse you with an account of their Cookery Lessons, or give you a graphic sketch of the students at the School of Art.

When two ladies meet, there is of course a comparison of social notes. Who is coming, who is going, in the neighbourhood? The newest baby, the coming marriage, the latest sorrow, fêtes, concerts, parties, tennis, are discussed, and also I am afraid must be added, servants—a most objectionable subject.

In spring you question your friends as to the most desirable holiday retreat, or you talk of their proposed trip to Norway or America.

If you have a mutual interest in the Army or Navy, you announce the latest promotions and retirements, and speculate as to who will be appointed to the vacant posts.

Schools will frequently be discussed; the advantages of public and private schools; modern education; the pressure of examinations; Oxford and Cambridge; Girton and Somerville; and above all, that perplexing question to the modern parent, What is to be done with the dull boys and girls?—a question which will probably lead to some remarks on emigration, and the various openings in the different colonies.

Between ladies, some talk on dress is allowable; and it would be well, whilst avoiding the extravagance of some dress reformers, if women would endeavour to cultivate amongst their friends a healthy opinion as to women's and children's clothing.

The intellectual woman does not always make a good conversationalist, but most probably she can give you plenty of information on the subject in which she takes a special interest, if you have the tact to draw her out: history, mathematics, social science, archæology, the higher education of women, the training of lady doctors and nurses; or it may be that she organises emigration, is a member of the Kyrle Society or the British Association.

Geology, entomology, natural history, physiology, music, sculpture, painting, all have their votaries. We meet every day with the enthusiastic collector of old china, engravings, autographs, old books, stamps. There may be such divergence between our neighbours' tastes, that one may have a good collection of drawings of fonts, and another may have expended her energies in amassing many varieties of *buttons*. Whatever may be the tone of the mind, a good conversationalist will endeavour to tune his conversation to the same pitch, or if that pitch is low, he will strive to raise it.

Conversation in the *drawing-room before dinner* can only be fragmentary. Guests are arriving, and the announcement of dinner may cut short the most interesting discussion.

A hostess will often be able to start a conversation between strangers by a few words skilfully added to a bare introduction. "Mrs. A., whose pictures we admired so much at the Exhibition;" or "Miss B., like yourself, belongs to the Browning Society." The hostess will also have photographs, engravings, sketches, miniatures, magazines, scattered about, to attract attention and offer topics ready at hand. It is much the custom to admire the artistic arrangement of the room, its elegant draperies, curious furniture, pretty ornaments, and old china. Even the softly-shaded lamps may claim attention and turn conversation to the modern facilities for lighting, to the wonders of the Electric Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in 1882, and the instantaneous illumination of the Collinderies last year.

Amongst friends, there will be an exchange of family news and congratulations, the success of A. at college, B. at Woolwich, C.'s engagement.

The last cricket or golf match, yesterday's hunt, the proposed bazaar, "that delightful picnic on Wednesday," Mrs. D.'s garden-party on Thursday, the Academy, Grosvenor, and other exhibitions of the day, *the book of the season*, the last-discovered prima-donna, any subject that is occupying the public mind, and does not require much thought or long argument, befits such conversation.

To talk well across a *dinner-table* is an art. A good conversationalist will go provided with a certain amount of material. Here comes in the opportunity for the good story and the clever repartee.

Last year, the Queen's Jubilee must have been talked over at hundreds of dinner-tables. The statues erected, foundation-stones laid, the processions, fireworks, bonfires, dinners, and teas, must have occupied hours of talk; whilst references to former jubilees, coronations, and other State pageants must have been numerous. Even now, the Queen's presents are before the public, and may not such gifts as that of the Khedive—a necklace and earrings of gold lotus-flowers, scarabs, and sphinxes—carry our conversation to the land of the Pharaohs, with its ancient civilisation, its wonderful ruins, its present decrepitude? or may not the old ivory fan, painted by the daughters of George III., presented by Lady Holland, bring to our recollection Holland House, and the group of celebrities connected with it? whilst their many witticisms may be recalled to add the necessary spice to our reminiscences.

If the lady or gentleman at your side is young, amateur photography is a subject on which you are pretty sure to meet with some response; most people have a friend who photographs, even if they do not themselves dabble in photography.

Travels are always a safe subject. You have been to Fiji, and your neighbour to Iceland, and you exchange experiences; or you have both been to Switzerland, and during the whole of dinner you ascend mountains, cross glaciers, criticise hotels, and gaze at waterfalls. Perhaps, however, you have to do with an anxious mother, who consults you as to the danger of her boy riding a bicycle, and wishes you to

endorse her opinion that a walking tour is the best holiday trip for him.

Most people have some knowledge of music, enough at least to *talk* of Rubinstein's playing, of Wagner, and "the music of the future"; or to uphold their preference for popular music.

The "Greenery Yallery, Grosvenor Gallery" young man or young woman may afford you some amusement, unless you are yourself inclined that way, in which case you will no doubt have something to say about the æsthetic.

Possibly, at a dinner-table, the ruffles and wristlets of your *vis-à-vis* may be admired by the person sitting next to you, and if you have some knowledge of Point, Mechlin, and Alençon, you can continue the subject, or else turn it off to the poor lace-makers of Ireland, and the efforts made to help them.

Flowers adorn every dinner-table. The quick eyes of those interested in their culture will detect the new and choice specimen; or it may be a simple lover of flowers, who is delighted at the effect produced, and whose enthusiasm will lead you on to speak of the grouping of plants at flower-shows, and the comparative merits of bedding-out and old-fashioned gardening.

In towns, the streets, the shops, the advertisements—who, for instance, would meet those striking advertisements, the hooded friar, or the three barristers driving through London, without having a word of amusement or indignation to say on the subject—new buildings, the railway, the tram, the omnibus, all suggest topics of conversation to the thoughtful.

In the country, the subjects discussed are different—the prospects of the shooting season, the fox the keeper saw yesterday, the Agricultural Show, the visit of the Archæological Society, the last joke at the Board of Guardians, the coming of age of Lord E., the restoration of F. Church, the Volunteer Parade, the new regiment quartered in the county town, its past victories, its present character, the last box of books from London, and the advantages of circulating libraries, sixpenny telegrams, and parcel post.

Conversation in the *train*—if between strangers—would generally be carried on by gentlemen. Probably it would be started by a courteous offer of a newspaper, with some remark on public affairs, which might be responded to by the intelligence that an opposition paper denies the statements mentioned. The value of newspaper intelligence, and comparisons of their literary style, will probably follow.

The country through which the train passes, suggests fresh topics every few minutes. Suppose a start is made at Southampton, our travellers discuss the docks and shipping they are leaving behind. Two nurses in their grey costume, on the platform of one of the next stations, remind them of Netley, its hospital, its abbey. At Bishopstoke, they reflect on the intricacies of railway junctions, retail the latest accidents, and talk of the advantage of insuring against them.

Now they are in the chalk cuttings, and discourse on the flora and fauna of the cretaceous system. They emerge at Winchester, to speak of its ancient im-

portance as the capital of the kingdom, of its cathedral, of St. Cross, of the colleges of St. Mary, and of their founder, William of Wykeham.

They fly past quiet villages, with grey churches nestling amid the green trees, past the ripening corn-fields, catching every now and then a glimpse of a big house, and their theme is English country life.

The train has reached Basingstoke, and they wonder, as they look at the ruins that adjoin the railway station, what the monks would have said if they could have had a glimpse of the noise and bustle that now so closely invade their sanctuary. Probably one of our travellers is a thorough-going conservative, and will lament over the "good old times," their quiet and their leisure; in which case, some fellow-traveller is sure to maintain that "these are the better days," and asks his companion if he desires to return to post-chaises, and run the risk of being stopped by highwaymen. This, perhaps, may compel him to acknowledge that life is now safer, and that there is far less crime; and so they may go on to talk of prisons, reformatories, and what after all is the best thing, preventive work.

At Farnbro', the station for Aldershot, some reference to military matters will be *à propos*; whilst as they pass Woking they will reflect on our funeral customs, or advocate the establishment of cremation.

As London is approached, they talk of its enormous extent, its rapid encroachment on the surrounding country, its wealth or poverty; they rejoice in the many opportunities for study and advancement it offers, or deplore its vice and misery. Now they are slowly crossing the Thames, which suggests such wide-apart subjects as Sir Thomas More, and many another prisoner, passing down to the Tower, and—the Universities Boat-race.

There is St. Paul's, to call to our memory Sir Christopher Wren, Nelson, and Wellington, who lie at rest in the heart of the great City. But our travellers have reached Charing Cross: their conversation must come to an end with their journey; but on many another journey, on each different line of rail, may not the traveller as he goes past town and village find in the passing landscape food for thought, and subjects for conversation?

In the old coaching-days, a celebrated conversationalist was taking a journey. As soon as the coach was started, he began to talk to his fellow-traveller. He talked first on one subject, and then on another, without eliciting any response from his companion. At last, getting impatient, he said, "I have talked of religion, politics, agriculture, but you have said nothing. Is there any subject you can talk on?" Waking up, the man inquired, "Do you know anything new about leather?" If we find our companions do not take up our ball of conversation, whether it be during a *morning call*, at a *dinner party*, or in the *train*, let us do our best to find out in what directions their interests lie; and, *failing all others*, I would suggest they might show some animation if you ventured upon that most *original, uncommon, and un-English* subject, *the weather*.

J. BIBBY.