

The poet Lycophon once declared that he would hang himself if a man could be found who could understand his "Cassandra." The world at present has no patience with such men. If a man writes or speaks now-a-days in such a manner as not to be readily understood, his words are useless and fruitless as nobody will take the trouble to search out his hidden meaning.

Never make a vague or unmeaning assertion or statement. Always speak to the point whatever may be the topic of conversation. When we say speak to the point in conversation, we do not mean that a person is to practise habitual silence unless he has something particular and necessary to say, and then give expression to his thought in the shortest, surliest way possible. Spartan brevity is as detrimental to pleasant, entertaining conversation as Athenian loquaciousness. The mean between these two extremes is the best and safest course to pursue if you would be entertaining and at the same time command attention.

In conversation, as a rule, provincialisms and all such superfluous, unmeaning expressions as "good gracious," "by Jupiter," "well now I'll be confounded," etc. etc., should be avoided. I say as a rule, because these expressions should be avoided, necessarily, only in good society. If you are by chance among people who use these expressions, and even worse ones, you will be counted odd and less than a gentleman by them if you do not talk as the rest of the company do. It is related of Montaigne, that, while in Paris, he frequently called the street arabs, boys from the most degraded ranks of society, into his parlor to give his own boys lessons in the street dialects. When questioned by a friend as to the object of this singular conduct, Montaigne replied that he wished his boys to become so cultured that they might be able to adapt themselves to any society and feel perfectly at home in it. I shall not discuss the wisdom of such a course of training for boys;

but the story suggests a thought which some would-be elegant conversationalists might do well to ponder, *i. e.* that conversation to be agreeable must often be brought down to a level with that of your companion. But ordinarily there is no need of lowering the tone of conversation. The great failing of most conversationalists, even of educated men, is a lack of elegance and correctness of expression. This is one thing which makes the art of conversation so difficult to acquire in its higher degree of perfection. Many persons seem to think that little talent is displayed in good conversation; but it is a mistake. There are fewer good conversationalists in society than authors and speech-makers. Everyone, unless he be dumb, can converse, but very few people can converse well; and it is quite as difficult a matter to learn the art of conversation, as to learn the art of writing. Dr. Johnson, who in his time was reckoned the best conversationalist in England, said that he had only acquired his proficiency in the art by resolving when a youth never to say anything unless he could say it in the most elegant and proper of ways. It is only by close observation and long practice that we can become very proficient conversationalists.

To speak so that another can hear you, is an important thing in conversation. It is not only very disagreeable, but likewise embarrassing, for one listening to you to be obliged to stand to with "*auribus arrectis*," as Virgil says, in order to hear what you may be saying, or else be under the necessity of asking you to repeat your words. It is Hannah More, I think, who has somewhere remarked that one of the minor virtues is to speak so that you can be heard.

Conversation should be adapted to the time and company. Some people, thinking with Montaigne no doubt, that "the and fly quite as quickly upon being meddled with.

Inadvertence or absence of mind in speaking may often cause another as much