

JOHN BATE

TALKERS: WITH
ILLUSTRATIONS

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PREFACE

The power to talk, like every other natural power of man, is designed for profit and pleasure; but in the absence of wisdom in its government, it fails to fulfil either.

The revelations of human life in the past show that the improper employment of this power has brought upon individuals, families, churches, and empires some of their most grievous evils. The revelations of human life in the present show that this power is still unwisely used, and the cause of similar lamentations and woes. Every man in his own circle, to go no farther, may learn the sad effects following the abuse of the faculty of speech. That member of the body, when “set on fire of hell” (and how often is this!) what conflagrations it brings about wherever its sparks and flames are spread! As a lucifer match in the hands of a madman, when struck, may be the occasion of blowing up castles or burning down cities, so the tongue may “set on fire the course of nature.”

Not only are talkers the cause of evils on such a large scale, but of evils which, while not so distinguished, are still evils – annoyances that mar the happiness and disturb the peace of individuals and societies – thorns in the flesh – contagion in the atmosphere, which, if they do not create disease, cause fear and alarm. Any one, therefore, who contributes to the lessening of these evils, does a beneficent work, and deserves the patronage and co-operation of all lovers of his species.

The prominence given to the use and abuse of the power of speech, in the Scriptures, at once shows the importance of the subject.

The connection between talkers and Christianity teaches that this book belongs as much to Christianity in its interests as to ethics in its interests.

If in any of the illustrations there may seem to be an excess of colouring, the reader is at liberty to modify them in his own mind as much as he may desire; only let him not forget that “fact is stranger than fiction,” and that what may not have come within the range of his experience, others may be familiar with.

It may be that the style in which some of the characters appear will not please the taste of every one. It would be a wonder of wonders if it did. Taste in respect to style in writing differs, perhaps, as much as taste in respect to style in dress. By the bye, one likes Dr. Johnson’s idea of dress, which is, that a man or a woman, in her sphere, should wear nothing which is calculated to attract more attention and observation than the person who wears it. This is the author’s idea of style in writing; whether he has embodied it in the following pages others must judge. His aim has been to show the *character* more than the *dress* in which it appears.

If in two or three instances a similarity of character should be observed, let it be remembered that it is in talkers in society as in pictures in an album, in general features they are alike, but in particular expression each one is distinctly himself and not another.

Should it be thought that the number of talkers might have been reduced, the answer is, that difficulty has been experienced in keeping them within the number given. One after another has risen in such rapidity, that a selection has only been made. Some have not been admitted which claimed sympathy and patronage among the rest.

The author has not purposely introduced any talker whose faults were unavoidable through defect of nature or providential circumstances. The faults described are such as have been acquired; such as might have been escaped; such as each is responsible for.

Let not the reader imagine that because the writer has dealt so freely with the faults of talking in others, he thinks himself perfect in this art. Far from it. Did he know the writer as well as the

writer knows himself, he would perhaps have little difficulty in recognizing him as one of the number whom he describes.

It may be observed by some that three or four illustrations have been used which have already appeared in print, the authorship of which could not be ascertained.

It is hoped that this book will find its way chiefly into the hands of young talkers. The old are so *fixed* and *established* in their way of talk, that, however their faults may be shown, they will not be likely to reform. It is seldom that a tongue which has been accustomed to talk for many years in a certain way can be changed to talk in an opposite one. There may be modifications of the evil, but few real cures. But in the case of young folk it is different. They, being somewhat pliable in that member of the body, may, by seeing the fault portrayed in others, so dislike it as not to fall into it, and covet earnestly the more “excellent way” of speech.

“But might you not have effected your purpose better by presenting examples of talkers without fault? Would not old and young more readily have been corrected and improved?” This might have been done, but for two simple obstacles in the way. First, the impossibility of finding the talkers without fault; and then, the almost certain fact that no one would have imitated them, had they been found. The defects of talkers are noticed with greater quickness of perception than their excellencies, and more is often learned from the former than from the latter. Cato says that “wise men learn more from fools than fools from wise men.” Montaigne tells us that “Pausanias, an ancient player on the lyre, used to make his scholars go to hear one that lived near him, and played ill, that they might learn to hate discords.” He says again of himself, “A clownish way of speaking does more to refine mine than the most elegant. Every day the foolish countenance of another is advertising and advising me. Profiting little by good examples, I make use of them that are ill, which are everywhere to be found. I endeavour to render myself as agreeable as I see others fickle; as affable as I see others rough; and as good as I see others evil.”

Should such use be made of the faults of talkers as Montaigne would doubtless have made, much good may be expected to arise from their study.

When it is remembered that Scripture affirms the man who offends not in word is a “perfect man,” the author feels that he has aimed at a laudable object in writing this book. Should there only *one* perfect man arise in society through his effort, he flatters himself that a work will have been done which thousands of books have failed to accomplish. But, on the other hand, should *every* reader lay aside his book not a “perfect man,” he will only fulfil the words of the same Scripture, which say, “The tongue can no man tame.”

“Then if the tongue *cannot* be tamed, why attempt the task?” The answer to this is: a little evil is better than a big one; and a tongue partially tamed is better than a tongue altogether wild. Therefore, while the author has no expectation of taming any man’s tongue *altogether*, he has the hope of taming a great many a *little*, and, in the aggregate, of doing something towards elevating the talking civilization of the nineteenth century.

“Will you have a little tongue?” asked a lady of a gentleman one day at the dinner-table. “I will, ma’am, if it is cured,” was the answer. Alas! tongue will be at immense discount in the world if it is not received until it is “cured.” One must be content to take it as near “cured” as it can be obtained. Not only must there be mutual efforts to cure one another’s, but each must try to cure his *own*.

And now, reader, the author asks you to peruse his book, and to make the best use you can of it; and he suggests, *when you have done this, be careful that you do not so talk about it as to illustrate some one or more of the characters within it.*

J. B.

November, 1877.

I. **THE MONOPOLIST**

“Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing: more than any man in Venice; his reasons are as two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff; you shall seek all day ere you find them; and when you have them, they are not worth the search.”

– Shakespeare.

The Monopolist enters into conversation with plenitude of speech enough to make one think he has obtained a royal patent to do so. He talks without much regard to what he says, or how he says it. Give him your attention in the least degree, and he will show no lack of will or power to surfeit you. It is not because he has anything to say worth your hearing that he keeps up his talk, but only from his strange love of talking. His conversation consists mainly in the exercise of his tongue, as the faculties of his mind are generally dormant in proportion as that works. He talks so much that you need do nothing but listen. He seldom asks questions, and if he does, he cannot tarry for answers. While one is speaking he either breaks in upon his discourse, heedless of what he is saying; or he employs himself in gathering words to commence talking again. And scarcely has the speaker finished his utterance ere he begins and goes on at a rate that taxes both the ears and patience of his listener. At the festive board he is not content to do one thing at a time. He fills his mouth with food for his stomach, and with windy words for the company; which two acts done at the same time prevent necessary mastication, and produce a temporary collision of the contrary elements in his guttural organs.

Monopolist is a talker with whom I am somewhat acquainted. I have on different occasions met with him, and am, therefore, prepared to speak of him as I have found him.

Some fifteen or sixteen years ago, as my memory serves, in the middle of a severe winter, I met this gentleman as I was going to see a friend about some business of pressing importance. I told him my business required haste, and he must excuse me stopping just then. But taking me by the hand, he held on until he was fairly on the track of talking. What he talked about I cannot remember, though I am pretty sure there was very little connection or sense in what he said. He spoke in such a rapid manner that all I could say was “Yes,” “No,” “Ah,” “Eh,” “Indeed,” “Is it possible?” and some of these, too, only half uttered because of the rapid flow of his words in my ears. I did try once to make a remark in response to a question he hurriedly asked; but I had scarcely spoken three syllables (being slow of speech as I am) when he began at an express rate to tell a story of a friend of his, in which I felt no more interest than the man in the moon. I remember how I shivered with cold; shuffled to keep myself warm, and made frequent attempts to leave him, while with one hand he held the button of my coat, and with the other wiped the perspiration from his brow. I finally took advantage of a suspense while replacing his handkerchief; so abruptly wishing him “good-bye,” I went on my way, leaving him to resume his discourse to himself. How long he stood talking after I left him he never told me.

One morning, not long ago, when in a studious mood upon a subject I was anxious to complete, my wife informed me a certain gentleman had called to see me. On entering the room, I saw, to my inner sorrow, the very identical person who, above all others, I cared the least to see at that time. Had he possessed a grain of ordinary discernment, which the Monopolist does not, he would have seen from my manner I was little inclined to give him even a courteous reception, not to say a long interview. In fact I gave him several broad hints I was very busy, and could ill spare much time in his company. But what did he care for hints? He had commenced his talking journey, and must go through with it; so away he went in his usual style, talking about everything in general and nothing in particular, until he had out-talked the morning hours, and allayed my mental afflatus by the vocal

effusions of his inane, twaddling loquacity. He then took a lingering departure, bid me “good-bye, hoping that he had not intruded upon my duties of the morning.” Alas!

About a year or so after the incident referred to above, I invited a few select friends to spend an evening at my house. Among the number were the Rev. Mr. Peabody and Mrs. Peabody, Professor Jones, of Merton College, and Mrs. Jones, Mr. and Mrs. Hungerford, Mr. and Mrs. Thuckton, with others. I was very pleased with the character of my company, and anticipated considerable pleasure during the evening. Mr. Peabody, Professor Jones, and Mr. Hungerford were gentlemen of more than ordinary attainments, and capable of communicating much varied and interesting intelligence in conversation.

The early part of the evening passed in a manner apparently agreeable to all present. But, alas, the happiness was destined to be short-lived! for who should be ushered into the room by the servant but an unexpected caller? I knew him well at first sight. He stepped into the room with his usual display of self-assurance and self-gratulation. After the ceremony of introduction to those who did not know him, he took his seat in the most conspicuous part of the company.

I thought to myself, “The pleasure of the evening is now at an end, excepting what he will have in hearing himself talk.” I could see in the very expression of his face that he was full-primed, and ready for a long discharge. There was a short pause after he had taken his seat (as there generally is in all company after the introduction of a stranger); but not being accustomed to this sort of thing, he began with a rapid utterance of some common-place observations, which elicited no response, excepting a gentle bend of the head from Mr. Thuckton, to whom he seemed more particularly to direct his attention. This was enough to assure him what he had said met with approval. He now commenced in good earnest, and went on so fast and so long, one wondered how the effort was sustained by the ordinary vocal powers and breathing functions of a mere mortal.

Every now and then the thought seemed to cross his mind, “Now I have something to say of great importance.” At which time he threw his head back, winked with his left eye, cast a significant glance at Mr. Hungerford, and said, “Mark, sir, what I am going to say:” then, bending forward, placed his hands on his knees, and lo the “mountain in labour brought forth a mouse.”

He had a most singular way of snapping with his thumb and finger, according to the nature of his talk; and when he reached a climax in an argument, or made a statement with emphasis, he brought down his hands with such violence on his knees as to make one fear the consequences. The gentlemen smiled at the snapping and thumping. The ladies were annoyed at his want of decorum and good breeding, and my son, a boy six years old, asked in his innocence, “Who in the room is letting off pop-guns?”

At this juncture he gave himself a respite, thinking, perhaps, common decency called for it, so that some one else might have a chance of speaking as well as himself. But the fact was he had talked all the talk out of the company, and no one cared to enter on the arena of conversation to be instantly pushed off by his egregious monopoly. He was, however, determined there should be talk, even if he did it all himself. He asked Mr. Thuckton a question, but before he had time to give an answer, Monopolist was half-way through his own views on the subject. He then appealed to Mr. Hungerford as to the correctness of a certain sentiment he had expressed a moment before, and while Mr. Hungerford was cautiously replying, he set off in a circuitous route to show he was unquestionably right in what he had affirmed. He proposed a question to Professor Jones upon a scientific difficulty. The Professor began calmly to answer, and all the time he was speaking, I observed Monopolist fidgety to go on, and ere he had finished he broke out of his restraint and found relief in hearing himself say his own thoughts on the subject.

His conduct was becoming unbearable. I had never seen him in such an objectionable light. I almost wished he had gone to Bombay rather than have called at my house that evening. I expected an intellectual “feast of fat things” from my friends, and just as I was in the act of tasting, in came this talker and substituted his fiddle-faddle of saws and stories, which he had repeated, perhaps, a hundred

times. We were jaded with his superfluity of loquaciousness, and were not sorry when the time of departure arrived. He was last of the company to retire, and he did so with much self-complacency, doubtless thinking to himself, as he walked home, "How great are my powers of conversation! I have talked more than the Rev. Peabody; more than Professor Jones; more than Mr. Hungerford, or any of the company. They scarcely talked at all. I am surprised they had so little to say. I wonder what they thought of my powers." Such probably were the reflections with which he entertained himself after he left my house that evening.

The next day I met Mr. Hungerford, and almost the first thing he said was, —

"What is the name of that individual who called upon you last night?"

"He is called Monopolist."

"A very appropriate name indeed; for he is the greatest case of monopoly in conversation I ever met with or heard of. He is insufferable, unpardonable. He did nothing but talk, talk, talk, to the almost absolute exclusion of every one else, —

'He was tedious
As a tir'd horse, a railing wife;
Worse than a smoky chimney.'"

"I know him of old, Mr. Hungerford. I regretted very much his call at that time; but I did hope for once he would restrain himself and keep within the bounds of propriety. But I do think he went beyond anything I have seen of him on any former occasion."

"If you are a friend of Monopolist," said Mr. Hungerford, "let me suggest that you give him some suitable advice upon the subject."

"It is what he needs," I remarked, "and when I meet with him again I will bear it in mind."

Some time after this I met Professor Jones. He had not forgotten Monopolist. In course of conversation he said, —

"Mr. Golder, is that gentleman who called at your house the last time I had the pleasure of visiting you yet living?"

"Yes, sir, he is still living, for anything I know to the contrary."

"Well, sir, I have thought and spoken of him many times since that evening. He certainly exceeded on that occasion anything I ever heard in talkativeness. I should not like again to endure the torment I suffered after his entrance into the company that night. I do not consider myself very slow of speech; but you know how difficult it was for me to interject even a sentence after he came. And my friend, Mr. Peabody, with all his intelligence and natural communicativeness, was placed in the same dilemma. Neither of us was quick enough to compete with him. Everybody, in fact, was crowded out by his incessant talking; and, after all, what did it amount to?"

'Talking, he knew not why, and car'd not what.'"

"I think equally as strong as you do, Professor, respecting him, and I am determined the first opportunity I have to lay before him a few counsels, which if he take will be of service to him in the correction of his great fault."

My reader must not think the conduct of Monopolist, as above described, peculiar to the times and occasions mentioned. I have only spoken of him as he appeared to me. I do not speak for any one else. Yet if so disposed I could relate facts heard from others equal to, if not surpassing, those given above.

As I have promised to give Monopolist a little advice, I will now enter upon my task. I hope he will mortify that talking member of his body for a few moments while I am discharging this necessary duty. After I have done he may speak on to his heart's content, that is, in my absence.

Mr. Monopolist, – It is an old maxim that a man has two ears and but one mouth, to teach him that he should hear twice as much as he should talk. This is a very wise maxim, and worthy your serious meditation. You have doubtless heard it before, but not attended to it. Would it not be much to your credit in company, and much to the comfort of those with whom you converse, if you allowed this maxim to have its due weight upon your mind? Common sense, if such you have, must certainly intimate when you exceed the bounds of propriety in the volume of your talk. How would you like another to impose his talk upon you to the extent you impose your talk upon him? When you talk I have noticed you are so pleased with yourself as to think very little of what you say, or of how people hear. If you talked about fifty or seventy-five per cent. less than you do, you would be welcomed into the circles of society with fifty or seventy-five per cent. greater pleasure than you are. Do not imagine, because people *seem* to listen, therefore they *like* to hear you talk. It is nothing of the kind. They must at least have a *show* of good behaviour. Were they to forget their manners in being listless, as you do in talking so much, there would be an end to all decorum. (Do not be impatient. Do be quiet for once.) Have you not sometimes seen one or more go to sleep in company while you have been talking? Did not that show they were unable to resist the soothing influence of your long-continued and thoughtless words? And have you not sometimes talked upon subjects in such a peculiar and protracted manner that when you have done, your hearers have been so absent-minded that they have not known anything you have said? Has not this taught you that you have been a drag upon their mental powers? Have they not said in the words of Job, “O that you would altogether hold your peace, and it should be your wisdom”? (Job xiii. 5.)

Conversation is a means of mutual interchange of thought and feeling upon subjects which may be introduced. And if the right subject be brought forward, each one could contribute his quota to the general stock. But to do so we must talk *with* people and not *at* them. We must be willing to hear as well as to be heard. We must give others credit to know something as well as ourselves. We must remember it is not he who talks most that talks best. One man may give a long, wordy, dry essay on a topic of conversation, and another may speak a sentence of a score words which shall contain far more sense than his long discourse.

“Words learned by rote a parrot may rehearse,
But talking is not always to converse.
Not more distinct from harmony divine,
The constant creaking of a country sign.”

....

“If in talking from morning till night,
A sign of our wisdom it be,
The swallows are wiser by right,
For they prattle much faster than we.”

“The talking lion of the evening circle,” observes an English writer, “generally plays off his part as obviously to his own satisfaction as to the nausea of the company who forbear to hear him. Were he a distinguished and illustrious talker like Johnson and Coleridge, he might be excused, though in their case they laid too much embargo upon the interchange of thought; but when the mind is an ordinary one, the offence is insufferable, if not unpardonable. Those that talk much cannot often talk well. There is generally the least of originality and interest about what they say. It is the dry, old, oft-repeated things which are nearly as well stereotyped upon the minds of the hearers as they are upon their own. And even those who have the gift of talking sensibly as well as loquaciously should

remember that few people care to be eclipsed, and that a superiority of sense is as ill to be borne as superiority of fortune.”

“He that cannot refrain from much speaking,” says Sir W. Raleigh, “is like a city without walls, and less pains in the world a man cannot take, than to hold his tongue; therefore if thou observest this rule in all assemblies thou shalt seldom err; restrain thy choler, hearken much and speak little, for the tongue is the instrument of the greatest good and greatest evil that is done in the world.”

“As it is the characteristic,” says Lord Chesterfield, “of great wits to say much in few words, so it is of small wits to talk much and say nothing. Never hold any one by the button or the hand in order to be heard out; for if people are unwilling to hear you, you had better hold your tongue than them.”

“The evil of this” (much speaking), says Bishop Taylor, “is very considerable in the accounts of prudence, and the effects and plaisance of conversation: and the ancients described its evil well by a proverbial expression; for when a sudden silence arose, they said that Mercury was entered, meaning that, he being their ‘loquax numen,’ their ‘prating god,’ yet that quitted him not, but all men stood upon their guard, and called for aid and rescue, when they were seized upon by so tedious an impertinence. And indeed, there are some persons so full of nothings, that, like the strait sea of Pontus, they perpetually empty themselves by their mouth, making every company or single person they fasten on to be their Propontis, such a one as was Anaximenes, who was an ocean of words, but a drop of understanding.”

You would do well to study the lesson, *When to talk, and when to be silent*. Silence is preferred by the wise and the good to superfluity of talking. You may read strange stories of some of the ancients, choosing silence to talking. St. Romualdus maintained a seven years’ silence on the Syrian mountains. It is said of a religious person in a monastery in Brabant, that he did not speak a word in sixteen years. Ammonas lived with three thousand brethren in such silence as though he was an anchorite. Theona was silent for thirty years together. Johannes, surnamed Silentarius, was silent for forty-seven years. I do not mention these as examples for your imitation, and would not have you become *such* a recluse. These are cases of an extreme kind, – cases of moroseness and sullenness which neither reason nor Scripture justify. “This was,” as Taylor observes, “to make amends for committing many sins by omitting many duties; and, instead of digging out the offending eye, to pluck out both, that they might neither see the scandal nor the duty; for fear of seeing what they should not, to shut their eyes against all light.” The wiser course for you to adopt is the practice of silence for a time, as a discipline for the correction of the fault into which you have fallen. Pray as did the Psalmist, “Put a guard, O Lord, unto my mouth, and a door unto my lips.” “He did not ask for a wall,” as St. Gregory remarks, “but for a door, a door that might open and shut.” It is said of Cicero, he never spake a word which himself would fain have recalled; he spake nothing that repented him. Silence will be a cover to your folly, and a disclosure of your wisdom.

“Keep thy lips with all diligence.”

“A man that speaketh too much, and museth but little and lightly,
Wasteth his mind in words, and is counted a fool among men:
But thou when thou hast thought, weave charily the web of meditation,
And clothe the ideal spirit in the suitable garments of speech.”

Note well the *discretion of silence*. What man ever involved himself in difficulties through silence? Who thinks another a fool because he does not talk? Keep quiet, and you may be looked upon as a wise man; open your mouth and all may see at once that you are a simpleton. Ben Jonson, speaking of one who was taken for a man of judgment while he was silent, says, “This man might have been a Counsellor of State, till he spoke; but having spoken, not the beadle of the ward.”

Lord Lytton tells of a groom who married a rich lady, and was in fear as to how he might be treated by the guests of his new household, on the score of his origin and knowledge: to whom

a clergyman gave this advice, “Wear a black coat, and hold your tongue.” The groom acted on the advice, and was considered a gentlemanly and wise man.

The same author speaks of a man of “weighty name,” with whom he once met, but of whom he could make nothing in conversation. A few days after, a gentleman spoke to him about this “superior man,” when he received for a reply, “Well, I don’t think much of him. I spent the other day with him, and found him insufferably dull.” “Indeed,” said the gentleman, with surprise; “why, then I see how it is: Lord – has been positively talking to you.”

This reminds one of the story told of Coleridge. He was once sitting at a dinner-table admiring a fellow guest opposite as a wise man, keeping himself in solemn and stately reserve, and resisting all inducements to join in the conversation of the occasion, until there was placed on the table a steaming dish of apple-dumplings, when the first sight of them broke the seal of the wise man’s intelligence, exclaiming with enthusiasm, “Them be the jockeys for me.”

Gay, in his fables, addressing himself to one of these talkers, says, —

“Had not thy forward, noisy tongue
Proclaim’d thee always in the wrong,
Thou might’st have mingled with the rest,
And ne’er thy foolish sense confess’d;
But fools, to talking ever prone,
Are sure to make their follies known.”

Mr. Monopolist, can you refrain a little longer while I say a few more words? I have in my possession several recipes for the cure of much talking, that I have gathered in the course of my reading, four of which I will kindly lay before you for consideration.

1. *Give yourself to private writing*; and thus pour out by the hand the floods which may drown the head. If the humour for much talking was partly drawn forth in this way, that which remained would be sufficient to drop out from the tongue.

2. In company with your superiors in wisdom, gravity, and circumstances, restrain your unreasonable indulgence of the talking faculty. It is thought this might promote modest and becoming silence on all other occasions. “One of the gods is within,” said Telemachus; upon occasion of which his father reproved his talking. “Be thou silent and say little; let thy soul be in thy hand, and under command; for this is the rite of the gods above.”

3. Read and ponder the words of Solomon, “He that hath knowledge spareth his words; and a man of understanding is of excellent spirit. Even a fool when he holdeth his peace is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding” (Prov. xvii. 27, 28). Also the words of the Son of Sirach, “Be swift to hear, and if thou hast understanding, answer thy neighbour; if not, lay thy hand upon thy mouth. A wise man will hold his tongue till he see opportunity; but a babbler and a fool will regard no time. He that useth many words shall be abhorred; and he that taketh to himself authority therein shall be hated” (Ecclesiasticus v. 11-13). “In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin” (Prov. x. 19).

4. Attend more to business and action. It is thought that a diligent use of the muscles in physical labour may detract from the disposition, time, and power of excessive speech. Paul gives a similar suggestion, “And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands as we commanded you” (1 Thes. iv. 11).

With these few words of advice I now leave you, my friend Monopolist, hoping they may have their due effect upon your talking faculty, and that when I meet you again in company I shall find you a “new edition, much amended and abridged:” “the half better than the whole.”

II.

THE FALSE HUMOURIST

“There are more faults in the humour than in the mind.”
– *La Rochefoucauld.*

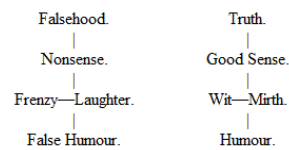
Among the various kinds of talk there is, perhaps, none in which talkers are more liable to fail than in humour. It is that in which most persons like to excel, but which comparatively few attain. It is not the man whose imagination teems with monsters, whose head is filled with extravagant conceptions, that furnishes innocent pleasure by humour. And yet there are those who claim to be humourists, whose humour consists only in wild irregular fancies and distortions of thought. They speak nonsense, and think they are speaking humour. When they have put together a round of absurd, inconsistent ideas, and produce them, they cannot do it without laughing. I have sometimes met with a portion of this class that have endeavoured to gain themselves the reputation of wits and humourists by such monstrous conceits as almost qualified them for Bedlam, rather than refined and intelligent society. They did not consider that humour should always lie under the check of reason; and requires the direction of the nicest judgment, by so much the more it indulges in unrestrained freedoms. There is a kind of nature in this sort of conversation, as well as in other; and a certain regularity of thought which must discover the speaker to be a man of sense, at the same time he appears a man given up to caprice. For my part, when I hear the delirious mirth of an unskilful talker, I cannot be so barbarous as to divert myself with it, but am rather apt to pity the man than laugh at anything he speaks.

“It is indeed much easier,” says Addison, “to describe what is not humour than what is; and very difficult to define it otherwise than as Cowley has done wit, by negatives. Were I to give my own notions of it, I would deliver them after Plato’s manner, in a kind of allegory – and by supposing humour to be a person, deduce to him all his qualifications, according to the following genealogy. Truth was the founder of the family, and the father of Good Sense. Good Sense was the father of Wit, who married a lady of collateral line called Mirth, by whom he had issue, Humour. Humour, therefore, being the youngest of this illustrious family, and descendant from parents of such different dispositions, is very various and unequal in his temper: sometimes you see him putting on grave looks and a solemn habit, sometimes airy in his behaviour, and fantastic in his dress; inasmuch that at different times he appears as serious as a judge, and as jocular as a merry-andrew. But as he has a great deal of the mother in his constitution, whatever mood he is in, he never fails to make his company laugh.”

In carrying on the allegory farther, he says of the false humourists, “But since there is an impostor abroad, who takes upon him the name of this young gentleman, and would willingly pass for him in the world: to the end that well-meaning persons may not be imposed upon by cheats, I would desire my readers, when they meet with this pretender, to look into his parentage and examine him strictly, whether or no he be remotely allied to truth, and lineally descended from good sense; if not, they may conclude him a counterfeit. They may likewise distinguish him by a loud and excessive laughter, in which he seldom gets his company to join with him. For as true Humour generally looks serious, while everybody laughs about him; false Humour is always laughing, while everybody about him looks serious. I shall only add, if he has not in him a mixture of both parents, that is, if he would pass for the offspring of Wit without Mirth, or Mirth without Wit, you may conclude him to be altogether spurious and a cheat.

The impostor of whom I am speaking descends originally from Falsehood, who was the mother of Nonsense, who gave birth to a son called Frenzy, who married one of the daughters of Folly, commonly known by the name of Laughter, from whom came that monstrous infant of which I have

been speaking. I shall set down at length the genealogical table of False Humour, and, at the same time, place by its side the genealogy of True Humour, that the reader may at one view behold their different pedigree and relations: —



I might extend the allegory, by mentioning several of the children of False Humour, who are more in number than the sands of the sea, and might in particular enumerate the many sons and daughters of which he is the actual parent. But as this would be a very invidious task, I shall only observe in general that False Humour differs from the True, as a monkey does from a man.

First of all, he is exceedingly given to little apish tricks and buffooneries.

Secondly, he so much delights in mimicry, that it is all one to him whether he exposes by it vice and folly, luxury and avarice; or, on the contrary, virtue and wisdom, pain and poverty.

Thirdly, he is wonderfully unlucky, inasmuch that he will bite the hand that feeds him, and endeavour to ridicule both friends and foes indifferently. For, having but small talents, he must be merry where he can, not where he should.

Fourthly, being entirely devoid of reason, he pursues no point either of morality or instruction, but is ludicrous only for the sake of being so.”

III. *THE FLATTERER*

*“Who flatters is of all mankind the lowest,
Save him who courts the flattery.”*

Hannah More.

The Flatterer is a false friend clothed in the garb of a true one. He speaks words from a foul heart through fair lips. His eyes affect to see only beauty and perfection, and his tongue pours out streams of sparkling praises. He is enamoured of your appearance, and your general character commands his admiration. You have no fault which he may correct, or delinquency which he may rebuke. The last time he met you in company, your manners pleased him beyond measure; and though you saw it not, yet *he* observed how all eyes were brightened by seeing you. If you occupy a position of authority whence you can bestow a favour which he requires, you are “most gracious, powerful, and good.” His titles are all in the superlative, and his addresses full of wondering interjections. His object is more to please than to speak the truth. His art is nothing but delightful trickery by means of smoothing words and complacent looks. He would make men fools by teaching them to overrate their abilities. Those who walk in the vale of humility amid the modest flowers of virtue and favoured with the presence of the Holy One, he would lift into the Utopian heights of vanity and pride, that they might fall into the condemnation of the Devil. He gathers all good opinions and approving sentiments that he might carry them to his prey, losing nothing in weight and number during their transit. He is one of Fame’s best friends, helping to furnish her with some of her strongest and richest rumours. But conscience has not a greater adversary; for when it comes forth to do its office in accusation or reproof, he anticipates its work, and bribes her with flattering speech. Like the chameleon, he changes his appearance to suit his purpose. He sometimes affects to be nothing but what pleases the object of his admiration, whose virtues he applauds and whose imperfections he pretends it to be an advantage to imitate. When he walks with his friend, he would feign have him believe that every eye looks at him with interest, and every tongue talks of him with praise – that he to whom he deigns to give his respects is graced with peculiar honour. He tells him he knows not his own worth, lest he should be too happy or vain; and when he informs him of the good opinions of others, with a mock-modesty he interrupts himself in the relation, saying he must not say any more lest he be considered to flatter, making his concealment more insinuating than his speech. He approaches with fictitious humility to the creature of his praise, and hangs with rivetted attention upon his lips, as though he spake with the voice of an oracle. He repeats what phrase or sentence may particularly gratify him, and both hands are little enough to bless him in return. Sometimes he extols the excellencies of his friend in his absence, but it is in the presence of those who he is pretty certain will convey it to his ears. In company, he sometimes *whispers* his commendations to the one next him, in such a way that his friend may hear him in the other part of the room.

The Flatterer is a talker who insinuates himself into every circle; and there are few but are fond of his fair speech and gaudy praise. He conceals himself with such dexterousness that few recognise him in his true character. Those with whom he has to do too frequently view him as a friend, and confide in his communications. What door is not open to the man who brings the ceremonious compliments of praise in buttery lips and sugared words – who carries in his hand a bouquet of flowers, and in his face the complacent smile, addressing you in words which feed the craving of vanity, and yet withal *seem* words of sincere friendship and sound judgment?

Where is the man who has the moral courage, the self-abnegation to throw back honied encomiums which come with *apparent* reality, although from a flatterer? “To tell a man that he cannot be flattered is to flatter him most effectually.”

“Honey’d assent,
How pleasant art thou to the taste of man,
And woman also! flattery direct
Rarely disgusts. They little know mankind
Who doubt its operation: ’tis my key,
And opes the wicket of the human heart.”

“The firmest purpose of a human heart
To well-tim’d artful flattery may yield.”

“’Tis an old maxim in the schools
That flattery’s the food of fools;
Yet now and then your men of wit
Will condescend to take a bit.”

The Flatterer is a lurking foe, a dangerous friend, a subtle destroyer. “A flattering mouth worketh ruin.” “He that speaketh flattery to his friends, even the eyes of his children shall fail.” “A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet.” The melancholy results of flattery are patent before the world, both on the page of history and in the experience of mankind. How many thousand young men who once stood in the uprightness of virtue are now debased and ruined through the flattery of the “strange woman,” so graphically described by Solomon in Prov. vii., “With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life” (vers. 21-23). “She hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death” (vers. 26, 27).

And as the virtuous young man is thus led into ruin by the flattering tongue of the strange woman; so the virtuous young female is sometimes led into ruin by the flattering tongue of the lurking enemy of beauty and innocence. I cannot give a more striking and pathetic illustration of this than the one portrayed by the incomparable hand of Pollok: —

“Take one example, one of female woe.
Loved by her father, and a mother’s love,
In rural peace she lived, so fair, so light
Of heart, so good and young, that reason scarce
The eye could credit, but would doubt, as she
Did stoop to pull the lily or the rose
From morning’s dew, if it reality
Of flesh and blood, or holy vision, saw,
In imagery of perfect womanhood.
But short her bloom – her happiness was short.
One saw her loveliness, and with desire
Unhallowed, burning, to her ear addressed
Dishonest words: ‘Her favour was his life,
His heaven; her frown his woe, his night, his death.’

With turgid phrase thus wove in flattery's loom,
He on her womanish nature won, and age
Suspicionless, and ruined and forsook:
For he a chosen villain was at heart,
And capable of deeds that durst not seek
Repentance. Soon her father saw her shame;
His heart grew stone; he drove her forth to want
And wintry winds, and with a horrid curse
Pursued her ear, forbidding her return.
Upon a hoary cliff that watched the sea,
Her babe was found – dead; on its little cheek,
The tear that nature bade it weep had turned
An ice-drop, sparkling in the morning beam;
And to the turf its helpless hands were frozen:
For she, the woeful mother, had gone mad,
And laid it down, regardless of its fate
And of her own. Yet had she many days
Of sorrow in the world, but never wept.
She lived on alms; and carried in her hand
Some withering stalks, she gathered in the spring;
When they asked the cause, she smiled, and said,
They were her sisters, and would come and watch
Her grave when she was dead. She never spoke
Of her deceiver, father, mother, home,
Or child, or heaven, or hell, or God; but still
In lonely places walked, and ever gazed
Upon the withered stalks, and talked to them;
Till wasted to the shadow of her youth,
With woe too wide to see beyond – she died;
Not unatoned for by imputed blood,
Nor by the Spirit that mysterious works,
Unsanctified. Aloud her father cursed
That day his guilty pride which would not own
A daughter whom the God of heaven and earth
Was not ashamed to call His own; and he
Who ruined her read from her holy look,
That pierced him with perdition manifold,
His sentence, burning with vindictive fire.”

The flattering talker possesses a power which turned angels into devils, and men into demons – which beguiled pristine innocence and introduced the curse – which has made half the world crazy with self-esteem and self-admiration. A power which has dethroned princes, involved kingdoms, degraded the noble, humbled the great, impoverished the rich, enslaved the free, polluted the pure, robbed the wise man of his wisdom, the strong man of his strength, the good man of his goodness. It is emphatically the power of the Destroyer, working havoc, devastation, woe, and death wherever it has sway, spreading disappointment, weeping, lamentation, and broken hearts through the habitations of the children of men. “He is,” as an old writer quaintly observes, “the moth of liberal men’s coats, the ear-wig of the mighty, the bane of courts, a friend and slave to the trencher, and good for nothing but to be a factor for the devil.”

Mr. Sharp was a young student of amiable spirit, and promising abilities. Soon after he left college he took charge of an important church in the large village of C – , in the county of M – . He had not been long among his people before he won the good-will of all; and his popularity soon extended beyond the pale of his own church. Meantime, he did not appear to think of himself more than he ought. He was unassuming in his spirit, and devoted to his work, apparently non-affected by the general favour with which he was received.

There was a member of his church whom we shall call Mr. Thoughtless; a man of good education, respectable intelligence, and in circumstances of moderate wealth. He was in the church an officer of considerable importance and weight. He was, however, given to the use of soft words, and complimentary speeches. In fact, he was a flatterer. He used little or no wisdom in his flattery, but generally poured it forth in fulsome measure upon all whom he regarded his friends. Mr. Sharp was a particular favourite with him, and he frequently invited him to his house. He did not observe the failing of his host, but considered him a very kind man, sweet-tempered, one of his best friends, the only member of his Church from whom he received any encouragement in his ministerial labours. Mr. Sharp became increasingly attached to him, and passed the greater part of his leisure hours in his company. The fact was, Mr. Thoughtless did not restrain his expressions of “great satisfaction” and “strong pleasure” in the “character and abilities” of Mr. Sharp. He was the “best minister ever among them” – “every one admired him” – “what a splendid sermon he preached last Sabbath morning” – “the congregations were doubled since he came” – he was “delighted with his general demeanour” – he “really thought his abilities were adequate to a larger Church in a city, than theirs in the country” – but he must not be “considered in speaking these things to flatter, for he should be ashamed to say anything to flatter a young minister whom he esteemed so highly,” and besides, he “thought him beyond the power of flattery.” Such were the flattering words which he poured into the undiscerning mind of Mr. Sharp at different times.

Not long after this close friendship and these frequent visits, Mr. Sharp began to manifest a change in his spirit and conduct, which gradually developed into such proportions that some of the Church could not help noticing it.

“I do not think,” said Mr. Smith – a truly godly man – to Mrs. Lane – who also was in repute for her piety – one day in conversation, “that our young pastor is so unassuming and devoted as when he first came among us.”

“Is it not all fancy on your part, Mr. Smith?” asked Mrs. Lane.

“I only hope it may be, but I fear it is true.”

“In what respects do you think he is changed?” asked Mrs. Lane.

“I do not, somehow or other, observe the same tone of spirituality in his preaching and company as were so obvious during the first part of his sojourn with us.”

“Well, do you know,” said Mrs. Lane, “although I asked whether it was not all fancy on your part, yet I have had my apprehensions and fears, similar to yours. I have never mentioned them to any one before. I have been very grieved to see the change, and have prayed much for him. How do you account for it, Mr. Smith?”

“I can only account for it by the supposition that he has been too much under the influence of Mr. Thoughtless, who, you know, is a man given to flattery, and who has by this flattery injured other young ministers who have been with us.”

“It is ten thousand pities,” said Mrs. Lane, “that Mr. Sharp was not warned of the dangers of his flattery.”

“It is just here, you know, Mrs. Lane. Mr. Thoughtless is a man of such influence in our Church, so bland in his way, so fair in his words, so wealthy in his means, that it is little use saying anything to warn against him. Besides, I fear that others have been too flattering in their addresses and compliments.”

Mrs. Lane replied with evident emotion, “I am jealous of our dear minister. He is in jeopardy. O do let us pray for him, Mr. Smith, lest the flattering lips prove his ruin?”

Mrs. Lane was right in her fears. In the course of a few months after this brief conversation, Mr. Sharp had reached a great height of self-importance. He failed in most of the amiable virtues which adorned his early career. He deteriorated in the zeal and spirituality of his preaching. He became florid, self-assured, and self-displaying. He thought his abilities too great for the Church at C – . The congregation had declined, and he assigned to himself as a reason, they could not appreciate the high quality of his preaching. He sought a change; and accepted an invitation to a Church in the city of B – . In this Church he had little acceptance after a few weeks. Surrounded as he was by so many popular ministers of other Churches, he was unable to maintain his ground. He fell into temptation, and committed sin. He was arraigned before his brethren, tried in the presence of the most satisfactory witnesses, and *expelled from the Christian Ministry*.

This deep degradation was afterwards traced in its origin to the flattering, fawning tongue and conduct of Mr. Thoughtless.

Flattery is too frequently indulged in by parents towards their children. How many sons and daughters have been ruined by it would be difficult to say. I will give one case as an illustration.

Mr. Horton was a tradesman in a flourishing business. He looked well after it as a man of the world, and never allowed a “good chance” to escape. He had a son as his first-born. This son was a great favourite with him, for he saw in him the powers which would make a clever man of business. When he first wore jackets, Harry proved himself an adept in small trades, bartering his worn out and damaged toys for the better ones of his playmates.

“I tell you,” said Horton one day to a friend of his in the presence of Harry, “that is the boy who is good at a bargain.”

This was the phrase he often used when he wished to pass an eulogium upon his boy as a little tradesman. Also in other ways he failed not to set up his son as a paragon in business.

Made vain by these flatteries, he went on in increasing zeal and craftiness to be “good at a bargain.”

The flattering words of his father impelled him in all possible ways to make money; so that when grown to manhood he was an adept at sharpness in trade practices. At last, however, he went too far. His cunning, which had grown out of “being good at a bargain,” was employed in a fraud, which was discovered and led to his apprehension. When his trial came on, his father was present, anxiously waiting the issue. When the sentence of his guilt was given, and his punishment stated, he covered his face with his hand in deep emotion of paternal grief. He could not look upon his condemned son, whom he had helped to ruin, whom he had started and encouraged in the way which brought him to this end.

It was a most distressing scene when the father and son met in the dreary prison cell. Each looked at the other with reproach. Each blamed the other for the shame and pain brought upon them.

“This is a ‘bad bargain,’ my boy,” said the old man, tremulously. “You have ruined us all.”

“Ruined you!” responded the son, in a tone that stung the father to the heart. “Who ruined me? I was ruined when you flattered me so in my boyhood, telling me so often how clever I was and good at a bargain, instead of checking me: when you praised my trickery instead of punishing it. Had you then kept back those words of parental flattery and trained me in principles of strict honesty, I should not *now* have been here, paying in prison walls by convict labour and a felon’s name the price of ‘being good at a bargain.’”

In how many other ways the flattering tongues of parents have issued in the ruin of children I have not space to illustrate.

“Take care,” says Walter Raleigh, “thou be not made fool by flatterers, for even the wisest men are abused by these. Know, therefore, that flatterers are the worst kind of traitors; for they will strengthen thy imperfections, encourage thee in all evils, correct thee in nothing, but so shadow and

paint all thy vices and follies as thou shall never, by their will, discern evil from good, or vice from virtue. A flatterer is said to be a beast that biteth smiling. They are hard to distinguish from friends, they are so obsequious and full of protestations; for as a wolf resembles a dog, so doth a flatterer a friend. A flatterer is compared to an ape, who because she cannot defend the house like a dog, labour as an ox, or bear burdens as a horse, doth therefore yet play tricks and provoke laughter.”

“Beware of flattery – ’tis a flowery weed
Which oft offends the very idol vice
Whose shrine it would perfume.”

....

“Of all wild beasts, preserve me from a tyrant;
And of all tame – a flatterer.”

IV. *THE BRAWLER*

*“As empty vessels make the loudest sound, so they that have the least wit
are the loudest babblers.”*

– *Plato.*

This is a Talker whose characteristic consists in the possession of sound lungs and sonorous voice. He is particularly jealous of their failure, and hence, as a means of their preservation, he keeps them in good exercise. “Practice makes perfect;” and believing in this maxim, he uses his vocal functions without squeamish regard to the possibility of their decline. One would imagine from the volume and strength of tongue-power put forth in his conversation that he considered his hearers stone deaf. He does not in fact talk but proclaim. I doubt not that he is sometimes guilty of this outrage from vanity, because he thinks what he has to say is of such vast importance; or he has his own person in such veneration, that he believes nothing which concerns him can be insignificant to anybody else. I do not wonder that some people have had the drum of their ears seriously affected by his brawling. Nor is it surprising that old maids have been thrown into hysterics, and little children scared out of their wits by his vociferousness. Nor should it be set down as a thing extraordinary that strong-nerved men have found it expedient to insist either upon a reduction of the wind in the organ, or a stoppage of the instrument altogether, or a hasty exit of their persons from his presence.

As a preventive of these calamities in the future, and as a means of restoring this unfortunate talker into his proper position in the ranks of modern polite and intelligent society, I have been led to search in my books for a cure of his fault, and I have discovered the following in the *Spectator*: —

“... Plutarch tells us that Caius Gracchus, the Roman, was frequently hurried by his passions into so loud and tumultuous a way of speaking, and so strained his voice as not to be able to proceed. To remedy this excess, he had an ingenious servant, by name Licinius, always attending him with a pitch-pipe, or instrument to regulate the voice; who, whenever he heard his master begin to be high, immediately touched a soft note, at which, ’tis said, Caius would presently abate and grow calm.

“Upon recollecting this story, I have frequently wondered that this useful instrument should have been so long discontinued, especially since we find that this good office of Licinius has preserved his memory for many hundred years, which, methinks, should have encouraged some one to revive it, if not for the public good, yet for his own credit. It may be objected that our loud talkers are so fond of their own noise that they would not take it well to be checked by their servants. But granting this to be true, surely any of their hearers have a very good title to play a soft note in their own defence. To be short, no Licinius appearing, and the noise increasing, I was resolved to give this late long vacation to the good of my country; and I have at length, by the assistance of an ingenious artist (who works for the Royal Society), almost completed my design, and shall be ready in a short time to furnish the public with what number of these instruments they please, either to lodge at coffee-houses, or carry for their own private use. In the meantime I shall pay that respect to several gentlemen, who I know will be in danger of offending against this instrument, to give them notice of it by private letters, in which I shall only write, ‘Get a Licinius.’

“I had almost forgotten to inform you that as an improvement in this instrument, there will be a particular note, which I shall call a hush-note; and that is to be made use of against a long story, swearing, obscenity, and the like.”

V. *THE MISCHIEF-MAKER*

"Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth."

– *James.*

"We should be as careful of our words as our actions; and as far from speaking as doing ill."

– *Tull.*

The presence of this talker is almost ubiquitous. His aim is to create ill-humour, misunderstandings, bickerings, envies, jealousies, suspicions, quarrels, and separations, where exist mutual good-will, concord, love, confidence. His nature and work are in *reality* beneath the society of human beings. It is even questionable whether he is not in these respects below the rank of demons. Yet he boldly enters your presence, sits by your side, looks you askant in the face, asks you questions, communicates information, and feigns himself your friend and the friend of everybody. At the same time he may be concocting a plan of mischief between you and a neighbour with whom you are living on terms of amity; and the next thing you hear after he has left your house is, that you and your neighbour are intending some evil one towards the other. This is all you know of it. The fact is, Mischief-maker is at the bottom of it, and if the friendship between you is not broken, it will not be his fault.

He is in peaceful society like a mischievous child in a well-furnished drawing-room, puts things in confusion, and destroys much that is valuable and worth preserving, and when asked, "Who has done it?" pleads ignorance, or places it upon the shoulders of others, joining you in strong utterances of condemnation of such wanton conduct.

Mr. and Mrs. Blandford had lived together in their village cottage forty years, in the greatest conjugal affection and concord. It was generally known that they had seldom or ever had a quarrel or misunderstanding during the whole of that period. They were hoping that their declining years would be spent in similar blessedness. But, alas! such was not to be their lot.

There lived not far from them a neighbour whose disposition was anything but loving, and who took pleasure in promoting ill-will between those who lived in peace. She had long had her heart set upon provoking a quarrel between this happy pair. She had tried in many secret ways to bring it about, but all failed. At last she hit upon one which accomplished her malicious end, and evinced the more than diabolical nature of her design.

On a certain day she made a neighbourly call upon Mrs. Blandford, and in course of conversation, said, —

"You and Mr. Blandford have lived a long time together."

"We have. Forty years, I think, next December the 14th."

"And all this time, I am told, you have never had a quarrel."

"Not one."

"How glad I am to hear it; truly you have been blest. How remarkable a circumstance! And do you expect that this will continue to the end?"

"I know nothing to the contrary; I really hope so."

"Indeed, so do I; but, Mrs. Blandford, you know that everything in this world is uncertain, and the finest day may close with a tempest. Do not be surprised if this is the case with your wedded life."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this: your husband, I am told, has of late become rather peevish and sullen betimes. So his fellow-workmen say."

“Well, now you mention it, I have noticed something of the kind myself,” said Mrs. Blandford.

“I have thought,” said the neighbour, “that I would just mention it to you, that you might be on your guard, for no one knows what turn this temper may take.”

“Thank you; I think it might be as well for me to be on my guard,” said Mrs. Blandford. “Can you tell me the best way of managing the case?”

“Have you not noticed,” said the neighbour, “that your husband has a bunch of long coarse hair growing on a mole on one side of his neck?”

“Of course I have.”

“Well, do you know, Mrs. Blandford, I am told these are the cause of his change in temper, and as long as they remain there, you may expect him to get worse and worse. Now, as a friend, I would advise you to cut them off the first time you have a chance, and thus prevent any evil occurring.”

“That is a thing I can easily manage, I think, and at your suggestion I will do it,” said Mrs. Blandford, in her simplicity.

A few more words on matters apart from this passed between them, and the neighbour left for home. On her way she met Mr. Blandford, when she talked with him much in the same way as she did with his wife about their domestic happiness.

“But, friend Blandford, I have something very particular to say to you.”

“Indeed! What is it?”

“Why, I have just heard that your wife has lately taken to peculiar ways, and has some evil design upon you; and I think it my duty as a Christian neighbour to give you a gentle warning, that you may be on your guard.”

The old man looked much astonished at this revelation. He could not believe it; yet he could not deny it. He brooded over the matter as he walked home, and considered what he should do to ascertain whether his wife had any “evil design upon him.” At last a thought occurred to his mind, which he carried out. Soon after he reached home, he went and threw himself on the bed as very much tired, and feigned sleep, brooding over the statement of his neighbour, and what it could possibly mean. His wife, thinking he was asleep, and that it would be a good opportunity for cutting off this said foreboding hair, took her husband’s razor, and crept slowly and softly to his side. The old lady was very nervous in holding a razor so close to her dear husband’s throat, and her hand was not so steady as in former years; so between the two she went about it in an awkward way, pulling the hairs rather than cutting them. Mr. Blandford opened his eyes, and there stood his wife with an open razor close to his throat! After what he had heard from his neighbour, and seeing this, he could no longer doubt that his wife intended to murder him! He sprang from the bed in great horror, and no explanation or entreaty could persuade him to the contrary.

From this time to the end of Mrs. Blandford’s life there was no more confidence between them. Jealousy, fear, quarrelling, took the place of harmony, trust, and love.

The neighbour had gratified her wish; and now she did nothing but spread the tidings about everywhere, that “old Mrs. Blandford had made an attempt upon her husband’s life; but he was just in time to save himself; and now they were living like a cat and dog together; and this was the end of their boasted forty years of conjugal peace and happiness.”

In the small town of B – , in one of the northern counties, there lived a very respectable tradesman, a grocer, of the name of Proctor. He was a married man, and had a family of four children. He and his wife were members of the Presbyterian Church. They were considered consistent, godly people by all who knew them.

One winter’s night, Mr. Bounce, well known in the town, was walking by the house of Mr. Proctor, when he happened to hear a noise, and looking at the window of the sitting-room, he saw, to his utter astonishment, Mr. Proctor chasing Mrs. Proctor with a fire-shovel in his hand, in an attitude of threatening wrath. He did not stop to see the end. He did not go in to make inquiry. He did not pause for a day or so until he obtained further light on the matter. No, he went on his way, thinking to

himself, "Here is a fine thing. I could not have believed it, had I not seen it. What a scandal! What a disgrace! Mr. Proctor, a member of a Christian Church, running after his wife, a member of the same Christian Church, with a fire-shovel in his hand! What is to be done? Surely, if this gets wind it will be ruinous to his character, if not to his business! And then, what effect will it have upon the Church?"

I do not say that at this time and in this instance Mr. Bounce had any bad feeling or intention towards the Proctors. Nevertheless we shall see how without these he brought about no small mischief.

As I said, he went on his way thinking as above. He came to the house of his friend Mr. Ready. He had scarcely sat himself down and inquired after the health of Mrs. Ready, when he exclaimed in tones of wonder, "What do you think I have just seen as I passed the house of Mr. Proctor?"

"I am sure I cannot tell," answered Mr. Ready.

"Why, I saw Mr. Proctor chasing his wife round the room with a fire-shovel in his hand, in an attitude of threats."

"You don't mean it!"

"Indeed I do. I saw him as plainly as I see you sitting before me on that chair."

"Well, that is a nice thing, certainly," said Mr. Ready. "And both members of the Church of the Rev. S. Baker!"

"Yes, they are," replied Mr. Bounce.

The matter ended here for the present. Mr. Ready told Mrs. Ready as soon as she came home, and she told her neighbour the same night. The Ready family were not slow in spreading the news wherever they went in the town: and of course Mr. Bounce left no stone unturned to clear the way of the circulation of the fact. So that by these means it was known in most families of the town by the evening of the next day.

It created no little excitement. The minister and elders of the Church heard it with serious concern, and considered that a Church meeting should be called without delay before the thing grew worse. It would be disastrous to permit such a scandal to go unexamined and unpunished if true.

Elder Wiseman thought that before a Church meeting was called, it would be well for their pastor and Elder Judge to wait upon Mr. and Mrs. Proctor and inquire into the facts of the case. To this it was agreed.

The pastor and Elder Judge took the first opportunity and waited upon the Proctors.

The Proctors, seated in their room with their pastor and Elder Judge, seemed very much pleased to see them, and, with their usual blandness of manner, spoke about their respective families while their pastor and Elder Judge looked so grave as to make the Proctors think there was really something very depressing on their minds.

At last the pastor said in a most solemn manner, "Mr. and Mrs. Proctor, I and Elder Judge have called to see you this morning on a matter that is far from agreeable to us and may be to you – a matter that affects the interests of our Church, the interests of Christianity, and the interests of your family. It is indeed a most grave matter. It was thought that we had better call a Church meeting to look into it; but before doing so we decided that you should be seen about it."

"Pray, Mr. Baker," said Mr. Proctor, cutting him short, "pray, what is the matter! Do let us know without any ceremony."

"It is a matter which I am deeply pained to name. It concerns you and your wife. The fact is simply this. It is reported throughout the town that a certain gentleman, whose name I need not state, was passing your house the night before last, when he saw you chasing your wife round the room in a most furious manner, with a fire-shovel in your hand, meaning to inflict bodily harm upon her."

The words had barely escaped the lips of the pastor ere the Proctors, both together, burst into a loud laugh, which even shocked the gravity for a moment of the pastor and Elder Judge.

"But Mr. and Mrs. Proctor," said Elder Judge, "I hope you will look upon this affair in a different way to that."

“We cannot,” said Mr. Proctor; “the thing to which you refer is so perfectly ludicrous. Let me tell you the fact in a word. That night Mrs. Proctor came into the sitting-room from the shop terribly frightened with what she said was a mouse under her dress. In her fright she ran round the room thinking to shake the vermin from her clothes, and I took the fire-shovel and ran after her with a view to kill the mouse. So that is the sum of the matter.”

The pastor and Elder Judge here looked each other in the face and laughed heartily; and seemed relieved of a great burden. Instead of seeking to do his wife bodily harm, Mr. Proctor was only in pursuit of a mouse which had overreached its legitimate boundaries and found its way into a foreign territory.

Although the facts as thus discovered were ludicrous, the results might have been serious. For while the pastor and the elder were thus ascertaining the facts, the Readys, and Smiths, and a whole clique of kindred spirits with Mr. Bounce, were keeping up the circulation of the scandal; and notwithstanding the pastor and his elder instantly began to correct the mischief, it was a long time before the general impression died out that Proctor was chasing his wife with the intention of beating her. In fact, Mr. Bounce himself, and Mrs. Bounce, his wife, with several others, always believed it to the day of their death; and ever and anon tried to do a little business in it by whisperings; but they found no custom, unless with an occasional new-comer into the neighbourhood, or with some one who owed the Proctors a little spite.

Mr. Webster, of Necham, was much given to the habit of making mischief by his talk. At one time he did great damage to a Church and its minister, of which the following may be taken as an illustration: —

“You have had a new minister come among you lately, I understand,” said Mr. Webster one day to Mr. Watson.

“Yes, we have.”

“What is his name?”

“His name is Mr. Good.”

“Did not he come from Stukely to your place?”

“I believe he did,” replied Mr. Watson.

“I thought it was the same man.”

“Do you know him, Mr. Webster?”

“I cannot say that I do, but I have heard of him. I know some of the members of his former Church. In fact, I have just come from the neighbourhood in which he laboured before he came to you.”

It may be well to say here, that Mr. Watson had never heard, as yet, anything prejudicial to his Minister. He, with the whole Church, seemed to think highly of him, and to be satisfied with him in all respects.

“How is he liked?” inquired Mr. Webster.

“I, for one, like him very much,” said Mr. Watson; “and I think all that have heard him do.”

“I hope you may always like him; but if all that is said about him be true, I think you won’t like him long. In fact, I should not like him at all.”

“Mr. Webster, what have you to say against Mr. Good?”

“I have nothing to say, but others have. My information has come from other people, and people, too, on whom I can rely.”

Mr. Watson very naturally began to feel rather curious to learn the meaning of these innuendoes. He did not know but all that Mr. Webster had *heard* was perfectly correct; because he thought it quite possible for Mr. Good to satisfy them for a few weeks and not for years. He was a stranger among them, and when he should be more fully known it may be that he would not prove to be what he now seemed. He began to reason, and then to doubt and suspect.

“What have you heard of Mr. Good?” asked Mr. Watson.

“I will tell you. I am told that he was at Stukely only a few months, when the people resolved to dismiss him from their Church.”

“Indeed!” said Mr. Watson, with astonishment.

“I have heard,” said Mr. Webster, “that he is a quarrelsome kind of man, and always dunning for money; that he didn’t preach well enough for them. In fact there is no end to the stories which they have to say about him.”

“But it may be,” said Watson, “that the fault was not in Mr. Good. There are faulty people, you know, as well as faulty ministers.”

“But from what I hear the fault was all in Mr. Good. I am pretty well acquainted with the folk at Stukely.”

“So you may be, and yet in this instance they may be more blamable than he. I have seen nothing as yet to create suspicion in respect to him. I think he is a good man and a good preacher. And if he continue as he has begun, there is the promise of great prosperity from his labours. We must take men as we find them, Mr. Webster; and whatever we might hear against them, we should believe them innocent until they are proved guilty. I have no doubt that a great proportion of your intelligence is scandal, created and set afloat by some person or persons with whom, perhaps, he had been more faithful than their sins would allow.”

“I hope it may turn out so,” said Mr. Webster; “but from all that I have heard I think you are mistaken in your view of him.”

Mr. Watson would not listen any longer to Webster, but bid him “good morning.” He could not, however, help thinking about what he had said: and although it did not affect his conduct towards his new minister, he could scarcely refrain an occasional thought that possibly there might be some truth in it. But he did not encourage it. Mr. Watson cherished the charity which “thinketh no evil.”

But while Mr. Watson was incredulous of the stories of Webster, there were others belonging to the congregation whose minds were always open to receive ill rumours derogatory to others. Mr. News-seeker and Mr. Reporter, with several of a similar class, soon had interviews with Webster, when they heard that he had been to Stukely. He spoke to them more freely than he did to Mr. Watson, because they had willing ears and believing hearts. As soon as they had heard all he had to say, they went about their business, and almost every one they met the first thing they said was, “Mr. Webster, of Necham, has been to Stukely, the scene of Mr. Good’s last labours. He has heard strange things about him. If they are true, and there seems to be little doubt of them, he will not suit us, and the sooner we get rid of him the better.” This statement excited curiosity at once, and the question was immediately put, “What does he say?”

“He says a great many things, I tell you,” said Mr. Reporter.

“Well now,” said Old Surmise, “do you know that I have had my suspicions several times as to the genuineness of our new preacher. My suspicions are now confirmed. I do not think I can hear him preach any more with pleasure.”

“If you can, I can’t, and I won’t,” said Mrs. Rash, in great excitement.

The matter now spread like the light. It got into everybody’s ears, and came forth from their mouths much magnified. A great change came over the Church and congregation in regard to Mr. Good. Some said one thing and some said another. The balance, however, went against him. What was being said reached his ears, and he was astonished at the things he heard. It deeply affected him, as we may suppose. He observed a change in the congregation and in the feeling of many of the people towards him. In conversation one day with Mr. Watson, he asked him what he thought was the cause of the changed feeling in the Church towards him. Mr. Watson told him what he had heard, but as he did not as yet believe any of the stories, he would like to hear Mr. Good’s own statement of things. Mr. Good gave him a minute and faithful account of everything that had taken place between him and the Church at Stukely. It was just as Mr. Watson expected. He was confirmed in his confidence in Mr. Good, and used all his influence to suppress the scandal which was spreading, and to restore

right feeling in the Church towards their Minister; but Mr. Watson was not equal to this. The fire had burnt too far and too deep to be quenched. The suspicion and prejudice excited could not be destroyed. Mr. Good wept over the state of things. He felt that the tide was too strong for him to stem. He saw that his usefulness was at an end so far as this Church was concerned. He resolved to give in his resignation, and to live a year or two in retirement from the ministry until the storm had swept away into the ocean of air.

A short time after Mr. Good had resigned his ministry, Mr. Webster met with Mr. Watson again.

“You have had fine times,” he said, “in your Church with Mr. Good, haven’t you?”

“What do you mean by ‘fine times’?” asked Mr. Watson.

“O, why, he has been playing the same games with you as he did with the Church at Stukely, hasn’t he?”

“Mr. Good has been playing no games with us, Mr. Webster, nor did he play any with the people at Stukely,” said Mr. Watson, rather warmly.

“Well, I have been informed so, anyhow.”

“So you may have been, Mr. Webster; but your information in this, as in that you brought from Stukely, is almost altogether fabulous. It is scandal which you hear and which you repeat. There is not a word of truth as you state matters. I have heard an account of the whole affair at Stukely from an authority which is as reliable as any you could possibly adduce. I have every reason for thinking that the parties who informed you are influenced by the basest malice and ill-humour. Mr. Good stands as fair now before my eyes and the eyes of all decent people as he did the first day he came amongst us. It is only such as you, who delight in hearing and spreading scandal, that are prejudiced against him; and such, too, as are influenced by your libellous reports. It is a shame, Mr. Webster, that you, a man who pretends to membership in a Christian Church, should be guilty of believing malicious reports respecting a Christian minister, and more particularly that you should spread them abroad in the very neighbourhood where he labours. This is a conduct far beneath a man of honour, of charity, and self-respect.”

“Are you intending this lecture for me, Mr. Watson?” asked Webster, rather petulantly.

“I am, sir: and you deserve it, in much stronger language than I can use. You have been the means of blackening Mr. Good’s character in this place, when it was all clean and unimpeachable. You have been the means of weakening his influence in the pulpit, and out of the pulpit. You have injured him, injured his wife and family; and the good man, through you, has been obliged to give in his resignation as our pastor.”

“Through me, do you say, Mr. Watson?”

“Yes, sir, through you.”

“How can that be?”

“It was you who brought the scandal into the neighbourhood: who told it to Newsman and Reporter and everybody you met with, until your scandal grew as mushrooms in every family of the congregation. It became the talk of all. Many kept from church. They suspected Mr. Good: more than this, they accused him in their conversation of many things inconsistent with a minister; and how could they receive benefit from his preaching, even if they went to hear him? Yes, sir, you have been the cause of the ‘fine times,’ as you call them, in our Church, and not Mr. Good.”

“I am sorry for it.”

“Well, sir, if you are sorry for it, repent of it; forsake the evil of your doing. Give up the itching you have for scandal. Do not repeat things upon mere rumour; you have done more injury in this one case than you will do good if you live to be a hundred years old. Remember, Mr. Webster, what the Wise Man says, “He that uttereth slander is a fool.”

Mr. Webster shrunk away from Mr. Watson as one condemned in his own conscience. He evidently felt the keen remarks thus made; and I hope he became a reformed man in this regard, during his future life.

VI. *THE PLEONAST*

“This barren verbiage current among men.”
– Tennyson.

The habit of this talker is to encumber his ideas with such a plethora of words as frequently prove fatal to their sense. Some of this class employ fine words because they are fine, with perfect indifference to the signification: others do it from “that fastidiousness,” as one says, “which makes some men walk on the highroad as if the whole business of their life was to keep their boots clean.”

Mr. Hill was a man very much accustomed to talk in this way. He had read little, but had studied the dictionary with considerable diligence. His ideas were few and far between, but his words were many and diversified, long and hard, sometimes connected in the most absurd and ludicrous manner. Most of the illiterate who heard him thought he was highly educated and intelligent, while men of taste and judgment considered him greatly deficient in the first rudiments of correct speaking.

Mr. Hill and his friend Mr. Pope made a call one day last spring upon Squire Foster. As they came to the front door of his house Mr. Hill said to Mr. Pope, —

“Will you do me the exuberant honour of agitating the communicator of the ingress door, that the maid may receive the information that some attendant individuals are leisurely waiting at the exterior of the mansion to propose their interrogatories after the resident proprietor.”

“Did you want me to pull the door bell for you?” asked Mr. Pope.

“If you have that extremely obliging state of mind, which will permit you to do that deed of exceeding condescension, I shall experience the deepest emotionals of unprecedented gratitude,” replied Mr. Hill.

“Why didn’t you say, If you please? and have done with it,” replied Mr. Pope, in a manner which indicated impatience at his gibberish.

The servant appeared and opened the door.

“Will you have the propitiousness, the kindness to stay and communicate unto me whether Squire Foster is in his residence?” said Mr. Hill.

The girl looked vacant, not knowing what to make of his question.

“What does the gentleman mean?” asked the servant of Mr. Pope.

“He wants to know if Squire Foster is at home.”

“Yes, sir, he is. Will you walk in?”

Mr. Hill and his friend were showed into the parlour, where they waited the coming of the Squire. After a brief interval “the resident proprietor” made his appearance.

“Ah, ah! how do you do, Mr. Hill? I am very glad to see you,” said the Squire, at the same time shaking him by the hand.

“I am in the highest state of excellent health, extremely obliged, Squire. I am sanguine to hope, sir, that you live in the felicity of enjoying, and possessing, and feeling an undistracted state of the physical constitution. Will you, Squire, give me the pleasure and allow me the happiness of introducing and bringing to your acquaintance my friend Mr. Pope? Squire Foster, — Mr. Pope.”

“How did you leave Mrs. Hill and family?” asked the Squire.

“It gives me no ordinary pain, and no usual grief, and no common sorrow, to inform and instruct you that I left Mrs. Hill, my dear wife, my choice companion, subject to, and suffering from, and enduring under, a severe and trying affectation of her respiratory organs, superinduced by an exaggerant cold, received, and taken, and caught by her the other day of last week, when we were travelling, and riding, and going to the village of Burnley. My little ones, my children, my offspring,

Squire, I am excussitated to say, are in the finest, the best, the happiest state of their juvenile physique that I have ever known, remembered, and borne in mind.”

“How is your son John, the little fellow with whom I was so much pleased when I was at your house last?” enquired Squire Foster.

“He is a unique adolescent – a heavenly cherub. His excessively prodigious development of juvenile intellectual and religious numerous tendencies produce within me the largest, the greatest, the richest exquisite emotions of deep pleurability, and profoundest sensations of unparalleled wonderment.”

“You are very eloquent this morning,” said the Squire, rather sarcastically.

Mr. Hill, considering himself a little flattered by this encomium, said, “My eloquence, sir, is the natural, the habitual, the spontaneous, the unprompted infusions of my own individuality of mental hallucinations, sparkling out in the scintillations which you do me the honour of denominating, and calling, and epithetising as eloquence.”

Mr. Hill was something of a transcendentalist in his way. The Squire was aware of his tendency in this direction, and not having a distinct idea of what his transcendentalism was, he ventured to ask him during the conversation to give him a definition of it. After a brief pause, as though Mr. Hill was meditating for a succinct and clear definition, he said, —

“I would define transcendentalism as the spiritual cognoscence of psychological irrefragability, connected with concomitant ademption of encolumnient spirituality, and etherealized contention of subsultory concretion.”

“That *is* transcendentalism, indeed!” exclaimed the Squire. “It goes beyond my understanding and comprehension.”

“I feel myself in the same predicament,” observed Mr. Pope, who up to this time had been silent during the desultory conversation of the Squire and Mr. Hill.

“From what stand-point (as the Germans would call it) do you gain that view of transcendentalism?” asked Mr. Pope.

“I have gained it from the esoteric stand-point of Christian exegetical analysis; and agglutinating the polysynthetical ectoblasts of homogeneous asceticism, I perceive at once the absolute individuality of this definition.”

“That is perfectly satisfactory,” said Mr. Pope, with a look and in a tone of keen irony.

I will not detain the reader any longer with specimens of the Pleonast in the person of Mr. Hill; but give a few others of a desultory character, with which I have met in reading and otherwise.

A certain gentleman was once speaking to a few friends on the subject of happiness, and in giving his experience as to where it could not be found, he is said have spoken thus, —

“I sought for happiness where it could not be found; I looked for felicity where it could not be discovered; I enquired after bliss in those places, situations, and circumstances which neither bliss, nor felicity, nor happiness ever visited. Thus it remained with little change, and continued without much alteration, all through the days of my youth, the years of my juvenility, and the period of my adolescence.”

“Is that really your experience?” said one who was listening; “and do you intend that as a caution to us against seeking happiness in the same way?”

“Most positively and assuredly I do. Profoundly impressed with the veracity of these sentiments, deeply sensible of their correctness, and heartily persuaded, and assured, and convinced of their consonance with truth, I urge and press upon your attention what I have above and before couched and expressed in such simple, and plain, and intelligible language, and language easily to be understood withal.”

A Pleonast, once speaking of a man who was found drowned in a canal in the neighbourhood where he lived, said, —

“He is supposed to have perpetrated, committed, and done, voluntary, willing, and of himself, destruction, suicide, and drowning, while in a mood of mental aberration, superinduced, brought about, and effected, by long indulgence in and continued habits of inhaling, drinking, and swallowing, to inebriation and drunkenness, intoxicating liquids.”

At one time, complaining of the effect of the air upon his lungs, which were rather delicate, the Pleonast said, —

“The ponderosity, the pressure of the ethereal elements, the regions of the atmosphere, the circumambient world, will not give me or allow me the full, the free, the unrestrained extent of liberty to exercise myself in the respiratory, functional faculties of my earthly human existence.”

The above illustrations may suffice to show how the Pleonast transgresses the propriety of speech in his conversation.

A person in talking should endeavour to use such words as will convey his meaning, and no more. Words are only the clothing of thought, and when too numerous they encumber instead of adorn. When improperly connected, as sometimes they are by the Pleonast, they amuse and entertain rather than instruct and edify. Given thoughts clear and simple, it will not be difficult to find words which will be simple and clear also. Language and thought thus harmonised will render the one that uses them an acceptable talker to be heard, rather than a Pleonast to be ridiculed.

VII. *THE SELF-DISPARAGER*

*“The love of praise, howe’er concealed by art,
Reigns, more or less, and glows in every heart;
The proud, to gain it, toils on toils endure,
The modest shun it, but to make it sure.”*

Young.

This is a talker not unfrequently met with. He speaks in disparaging terms of himself and his doings, not so much because he means you to understand him as he speaks, as that he either feigns humility or desires you to look more favourably upon him than you do, and say to him, “O dear no, you are quite wrong in your judgment. I see very differently; and think, Mr. Baker, that you injure yourself and your performances by talking as you do.”

If you speak in words of honest praise of some good feature of his character, or of something he has done or possesses, he says in effect, “I wish it was even as you say; but you are mistaken. I have no such trait as you refer to, and what I have done is far from deserving the eulogium you have passed upon it. I am a very poor creature, and have no such goodness as you attribute to me, and am not capable of doing any such good work as you say I have done.”

Miss Slater was a young lady generally acknowledged to possess good taste and refined judgment. She was also considered to be honest in spirit and candid in her expression of opinion. What she said she meant, whether in praise or in censure; and no one could say she was a flatterer or a cynic.

On a certain occasion, in conversation with Miss Button, she observed to her, “I was much pleased with that landscape painting which I saw in your parlour the last time I was at your house. Your mother said that it was one you did while at Manor House School.”

“Yes, Miss Slater,” she replied, “it was done by me; but it is a very inferior piece; not half so good as it might have been.”

“I think it is very good indeed: so true to nature. The trees, the clouds, the birds, the river, and in fact the whole of it commends itself to my approval. It does you great credit and contains very good promise for the future, if you continue in the exercise of painting.”

“You are, indeed, quite mistaken in your judgment, Miss Slater. It is really not up to most of my other paintings. I am ashamed of it, and have often said it is not worthy the beautiful frame which father had made for it.”

Now, if Miss Slater had expressed herself in censure upon any particular part, Miss Button would probably have shown signs of uneasiness, if not displeasure.

Under this class of talkers may be mentioned those professors of religion who affect failings which they know they have not, and who acknowledge sins of which they know they are not guilty, for the sake of being reckoned among those who make a merit of “voluntary humility.” They are among the “most unworthy of God’s saints.” They are the “vilest of the vile,” “not fit to have a name or a place among Christ’s people;” “their righteousness is filthy rags;” they are the “chief of sinners.”

Now, there is little doubt that these words are perfectly true; only, the question is, whether they themselves really believe them to be so. It often occurs that these “great sinners,” these “vilest of the vile,” while forward to say such things of themselves, are the last to admit them as true when said of them by others.

This reminds one of an instance in which a member of a Church was giving way to this kind of self-disparagement, when a fellow member responding to him said, “True, my brother, you are among the greatest of sinners;” when he instantly warmed up in self-defence, and replied, “I am no greater sinner than you are; look at home before you accuse other people.”

It also reminds one of the old story of the monk who heard the confession of a certain cardinal. “I am the chief of sinners,” said the cardinal. “It is true,” said the monk. “I have been guilty of every kind of sin,” sighed the cardinal. “It is a solemn fact, my son,” said the monk. “I have indulged in pride, in ambition, malice, and revenge,” continued his Eminence. The provoking confessor assented without one pitying word of doubt or protest. “Why you fool,” at last said the exasperated cardinal, “you don’t imagine I mean all this to the letter?” “Ho, ho!” said the monk, “so you have been a *liar* too have you?”

Now, in all such cases as the above, it is not difficult to perceive the want of sincerity; and to talk in that way is anything but wise and consistent. While, on the one hand, it is unseemly to praise ourselves, it is, on the other, equally uncalled for to disparage ourselves. There is a proper place in which a man should stand in respect to himself as in respect to others. Towards himself let there be a dignified modesty, and towards others a respectful acknowledgment of any *sincere* commendation which may be given of his character and of his works. In all our personal confessions, either before men or God, let us endeavour to mean what we say and not act the hypocrite, that we may obtain the eulogium from others or from ourselves, what “humble and self-renouncing Christians we are.”

Under this class of talkers there is another character which we wish to illustrate, viz., the household-wife, whose “house is never clean, and whose food is never such as is fit to place before you.”

In a certain part of England, long celebrated for being a stronghold of Methodism, there is a small village, very beautiful for situation, and well known among the lovers of rural retreats. In this said village there lived a farmer and his wife, without children, who belonged to the Methodist Church. Squire Hopkins, which we shall call him, was a man of some note in the village, for his intelligence, influence, and character. Even the parson had a good word to say of him, and was not above holding a brief conversation with him, when he met him in the lane on the left side of the church. The Squire was a man who never was ashamed of his name as a Methodist, whether in the presence of the poor, the rich, or the clergyman. He had stood for many years a member, trustee, and steward in the Methodist Church. With all these honours, and the good-will of almost the entire village, the Squire was an unassuming and quiet man. His religion to him was more than all Church honours and worldly good opinions. His house was the home of the “travelling preachers,” when, in their appointments, they came to the village to preach. And a right sort of a home it was too, clean, airy, pleasant, and possessing all things requisite to convenience and comfort. There was, however, one drawback in the happiness of this home. Excellent Sister Hopkins was afflicted with one failing, which could not be hid from those who visited her house. The weakness to which we allude was on the one side of it, *the love of praise*; and on the other side, *the disparaging of herself and her doings*. This she did that she might obtain the other. *She* disparaged, that *you* might praise. We do not say she did not deserve praise, but that her way of seeking it was neither wise nor commendable.

Sister Hopkins had so habituated herself to this way of speaking, that it was difficult for her to avoid it. As a housewife she was unexceptionable. She was careful to have everything in the most cleanly and orderly condition. She was an excellent cook, and the Squire an excellent provider, so that their table was always well spread, whenever good cheer was required. And yet you could not enter the house without being reminded that her “husband had company yesterday, and she could not keep the rooms half so decent as she would like;” and when you sat down to her table, covered with the best provisions, prepared in the best style of the cookery art, she was sorry that she “had so little, and so badly cooked.” She had been doing this or that, busy here or there, that she “really had not such things as she would have liked to have had, and you must excuse it this time.” It did not signify

how bountiful or well-prepared the meal was, there was always sure to be something wanting which would be a text for a short sermon on self-disparagement.

On one occasion a minister was at breakfast when the table was well stocked with everything which could be desired – coffee of the finest flavour, tea of the richest kind, cream and butter fresh from the dairy, chickens swimming in gravy, with various kinds of preserves, and other things of a spicy and confectionery sort. No sooner had her guest begun to partake of her hospitality than Mrs. Hopkins commenced. She was afraid the coffee was not so good as it might have been, the cream and butter were not so fresh as she should have liked them, the chickens were hardly roasted enough, and as for the preserves, they had been boiled too much, through the carelessness of Mary, the servant. She meant to have had something better for breakfast, but had been disappointed; and it was too bad that there was nothing nice for him to eat.

All this was very heavy for her guest to bear. He simply remarked that “there was no need for apologies; everything was very good, and there was plenty of it.”

We will now introduce another person to the reader in connection with Mrs. Hopkins. It is Superintendent Robson, who had just come on the circuit. He was a good man, plain, homely, practical. Like Mr. Wesley, he no more dare preach a *fine* sermon than wear a fine coat. Such was the action of his religion upon his conscience. He was well known for his common-sense way of teaching the truths of the Bible. He *would* speak just as he thought and as he felt, although he might offend Miss Precision and Mr. Itchingear. He gained the name of being an eccentric preacher, as most preachers do who *never* prevaricate and always speak as they think. The failing of Sister Hopkins had reached the ears of Superintendent Robson. He had no patience with such a failing, and he was resolved to cure her. On his first visit to the village to preach, he stopped, according to custom, at Squire Hopkins’s. Thomas, the ostler, took the preacher’s horse, and the preacher entered the house. He was shown into the best room, and from all appearances felt quite at home. Everything was in perfect order and cleanliness, fit for the reception of a prince. The preacher had not been seated long, scarcely long enough to pass the usual interchange of first salutations and enquiries, when Mrs. Hopkins began in her old style to say she was “sorry that things were so untidy; her house was upside down; she was mortified to be found in such a plight; she really hoped before his arrival to have had all things in such order as she always liked to see them. She hoped he would excuse their being so.” Superintendent Robson looked around and about the room in all directions, to find out the terrible confusion to which his hostess alluded; but he said not a word. Shortly after the dinner was announced as ready; and as this was the first visit of the preacher, particular attention had been given to have a table spread with more than usual good things. The preacher, however, found from the Squire’s wife that there was hardly anything for dinner, and what there was she was ashamed for him to sit down to. The Superintendent heard her in mute astonishment. He lifted his dark eyes, and looking her in the face with penetration and austerity, he rose gently from the table and said, —

“Brother Hopkins, I want my horse immediately; I must leave this house.”

“Why, Brother Robson, what is the matter?”

“Enough the matter! Why, sir, your house isn’t fit to stay in, and you haven’t anything fit to eat or drink, and I won’t stay.”

The preacher mounted his horse and took his departure.

Both the Squire and his lady were confounded at such unexpected conduct. They stood in their room as though thunderstruck, not knowing what to say or what to do. But the preacher was gone, and could not be re-called.

After a few moments poor Sister Hopkins wept like a child. “Dear me,” said she to the Squire, “this is a terrible thing. It will be all over the village, and everybody will be laughing at me. How shall I meet the Superintendent again? I did not mean anything by what I said; it is only my way. I never thought it wrong. Had I known our new minister didn’t like such a way of talk I would not have talked so. Oh, how vexed I am!”

The result of this was that Mrs. Hopkins saw herself as others saw her. She ceased making these empty and meaningless apologies, and became a wiser and better woman. The next time Superintendent Robson went to the Squire's he found a "house fit for him to stay in and things fit for him to eat."

VIII. *THE COMMON SWEARER*

*“Take not His name, who made thy tongue, in vain,
It gets thee nothing, and hath no excuse.”*

Herbert.

He is a transgressor of the third commandment of the Decalogue, “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.” He transgresses without any laudable purpose, and without any necessity. He is thoughtless, foolish, and void of the fear of God. “His mouth,” as an old divine says, “is black with oaths, and the very soot of hell hangs about his lips.” He degrades the most excellent things into the meanest associations. Sometimes he indulges to such an extent in his sin, that the main substance of his speech is swearing. It is more than an adjunct or concomitant of his conversation; it is the body and soul of it. Sometimes you may hear him, with an air of self-complacency, give utterance to his profanity, as though he regarded it an ornament of rhetoric, giving spice and condiment to his thoughts. There are occasions when he considers his talk only reliable in its truthfulness as this evil accompanies it. He would not be a man in his own judgment if he did not swear. He thinks he magnifies his own importance in the estimation of other people; but, alas! he promotes his own shame and disgrace before the eyes of the wise and good.

The common swearer is confined to no rank or age in society. I have heard the youth who was barely in his teens indulge in this sin, as though it had been a part of his parental or day-school education. I have heard the young gentleman, so-called, recently returned from the walks of a University, pollute his lips and character with this shameful vice. I have heard the man who laid claim to wealth, to intelligence, to respectability, and to honour, pour forth his swearing words. I have heard the man who has stood in official relation to the state, and who considered himself a “justice of the peace,” break the holy commandment with impunity. I have even heard one, called by the misnomer, “lady,” do disgrace to her sex by this sinful fault in conversation. In the household, with a group of little ones whose minds were just unfolding to receive first impressions, I have heard the parents swear as though they were licensed to do so by reason. In company, where common civility ought to have restrained, I have heard the utterances of the swearer’s horrid voice. In the street, where public decency ought to have deterred, I have again and again heard the revolting expressions of this talker’s leprous tongue. In the shop, while transacting business, I have heard him give vent to his blasphemies, when a kind reproof has only seemed for the time to enrage his demoniacal spirit to more fiery ebullitions. How humiliating is this sin to human nature! How it severs from everything that is holy and honourable! How it insults and blasphemes the glorious Lord of earth and heaven! How closely it allies to “the prince of the power of the air”!

“It might puzzle a philosopher,” says Ogden, “to trace the love of swearing to its original principle, and assign its place in the constitution of man.

“Is it a passion, or an appetite, or an instinct? What is its just measure, its proper object, its ultimate end?

“Or shall we conclude that it is entirely the work of art? a vice which men have invented for themselves without prospect of pleasure or profit, and to which there is no imaginable temptation in nature?

“If it be an accomplishment, it is such an one as the meanest person may make himself master of; requiring neither rank nor fortune, neither genius nor learning.

“But if it be no test of wit, we must allow, perhaps, that it wears the appearance of valour. Alas! what is the appearance of anything? The little birds perch upon the image of an eagle.

“True bravery is sedate and inoffensive: if it refuse to submit to insults, it offers none; begins no disputes, enters into no needless quarrels; is above the little, troublesome ambition to be distinguished every moment; it hears in silence, and replies with modesty; fearing no enemy, and making none; and is as much ashamed of insolence as cowardice.”

The swearer may ask, “Where is the evil of an oath when it is used for the support of truth?” If your character is good, the person with whom you converse will require no oath. He will depend upon the simple and bare declaration of the matter: and if you swear, it will take a per-centage from your character in his estimation, and he will not believe the statement any the sooner for the oath connected with it. Can you think that the high and holy name of God is intended to be debased by association with every trivial and impertinent truth which may be uttered? “No oath,” says Bishop Hopkins, “is in itself simply good, and voluntarily to be used; but only as medicines are, in case of necessity. But to use it ordinarily and indifferently, without being constrained by any cogent necessity, or called to it by any lawful authority, is such a sin as wears off all reverence and dread of the Great God: and we have very great cause to suspect that where His name is so much upon the tongue, there His fear is but little in the heart.”

Again, the same author says, “Though thou swearest that which is true; yet customary swearing to truths will insensibly bring thee to swear falsehoods. For, when once thou art habituated to it, an oath will be more ready to thee than a truth; and so when thou rashly boltest out somewhat that is either doubtful or false, thou wilt seal it up and confirm it with an oath, before thou hast had time to consider what thou hast said or what thou art swearing: for those who accustom themselves to this vice lose the observation of it in the frequency; and, if you reprove them for swearing, they will be ready to swear again, that they did not swear. And therefore it is well observed of St. Austin, ‘We ought to forbear swearing that which is truth; for, by the custom of swearing, men oftentimes fall into perjury, and are always in danger of it.’”

Take a few considerations, with a view to show the evil of swearing, and to deter from the practice of it.

1. *Consider that Name by which the Swearer generally commits his sin.* “The name of God,” says Jeremy Taylor, “is so sacred, so mighty, that it rends mountains, it opens the bowels of the deepest rocks, it casts out devils, and makes hell to tremble, and fills all the regions of heaven with joy; the name of God is our strength and confidence, the object of our worshippings, and the security of all our hopes; and when God hath given Himself a name, and immured it with dread and reverence, like the garden of Eden with the swords of cherubim, and none durst speak it but he whose lips were hallowed, and that at holy and solemn times, in a most holy and solemn place; I mean the high priest of the Jews at the solemnities when he entered into the sanctuary, – then He taught all the world the majesty and veneration of His name; and therefore it was that God made restraints upon our conceptions and expressions of Him; and, as He was infinitely curious, that, from all appearances He made to them, they should not depict or engrave any image of Him; so He took care that even the tongue should be restrained, and not be too free in forming images and representments of His name; and therefore as God drew their eyes from vanity, by putting His name amongst them, and representing no shape; so even when He had put His name amongst them, He took it off from the tongue, and placed it before the eye; for Jehovah was so written on the priest’s mitre, that all might see and read, but none speak it but the priest. But besides all this, there is one great thing concerning the name of God, beyond all that can be spoken or imagined else; and that is, that when God the Father was pleased to pour forth all His glories, and imprint them upon His Holy Son, in His exaltation, it was by giving Him His holy name, the Tetragrammaton, or Jehovah made articulate, to signify ‘God manifested in the flesh;’ and so He wore the character of God, and became the bright image of His person.

“Now all these great things concerning the name of God are infinite reproofs of common and vain swearing by it. God’s name is left us here to pray by, to hope in, to be the instrument and conveyance of our worshippings, to be the witness of truth and the judge of secrets, the end of strife and the avenger of perjury, the discerners of right and the severe exactor of all wrongs; and shall all this be unhallowed by impudent talking of God without sense or fear, or notice, or reverence, or observation?”

2. *The uselessness of swearing.* “Surely,” says Dr. Barrow, “of all dealers in sin the swearer is palpably the silliest, and maketh the worst bargains for himself; for he sinneth gratis, and, like those in the prophet, *selles his soul for nothing*. An epicure hath some reason to allege; an extortioner is a man of wisdom, and acteth prudently in comparison to him; for they enjoy some pleasure, or acquire some gain here, in lieu of their salvation hereafter: but this fondling offendeth heaven, and abandoneth happiness, he knoweth not why or for what. He hath not so much as the common plea of human infirmity to excuse him; he can hardly say he was tempted thereto by any bait.”

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