

On Conversation

S. Trainor, '39

The gift of speech is one of the many distinguishing factors between man and beast. This gift, if properly employed, tends greatly to increase man's enjoyment. We have all met, however, people whose conversations have every effect on us save a pleasing one. There is, then, an art in conversation, which, when acquired, pleases the listener.

One of the primary requisites of a good conversationalist is that he be able to adapt himself to the standards of his listener. If a person were talking to a common farmer he would not hold his interest very long by extolling a classic painting; farmers like to talk about their farm, their stock and the weather.

Another art which helps in making a good conversation is that of being an interested listener. It takes at least two persons to make a conversation. If a man were talking to you in such a way that every now and then you would be expected to say something on the subject, he would not be pleased by indifference or a changing of the subject on your part.

A sympathetic listener, who says very little and absorbs all, generally succeeds in the role of a conversationalist. People are prone to complain of their troubles; they also need some one who will listen to them. When told by Mr. X of his frightful backache, we are generally unaffected. We usually drop the matter with an indifferent "That's too bad." But the man who asks Mr. X about the cause of his trouble, who keeps him talking about his unfortunate condition, is the one who pleases. The most important rule for being a good conversationalist is, then, to learn to listen.

A good talker will stick to one topic for a reasonable length of time. These are some people whose conversations are like leaves in a wind, they simply must bounce away from the subject, tell you something new, and then with a contented "as I was saying," get back to the subject for another full minute. They are like people who are troubled with nervous breakdowns, and should be treated as such—left alone.

Our observations so far have been affirmative. These are also some "don'ts" which it would be well to consider.

If one wishes to please he should not monopolize the first person pronoun in a conversation. A certain writer once defined a bore as one who insists on talking about himself when you want to talk about yourself. A bore, then, is a bad conversationalist.

There are many people who go around oozing confidences about the most trivial things. If it were anyone else but you they would not dream of telling it, but "just between the two of us," and in the end you are simply weighed down with the responsibility of such a secret.

Another great fault which should be guarded against is that of mentioning every trivial detail. Some people cannot tell a story or a joke without an hours introduction. Thus they always spoil a good dish with too much sauce. With such people nothing may be omitted. There is a time when we ought to be silent and a time when we may speak; but there is no time when all things should be spoken.

The fruits which a good conversationalist gives and reaps are many. For such a man we have a warm feeling; we find him pleasant and attractive. He is like a good book, only more enjoyable. We hear him and, get more enjoyment by seeing, in flesh, the source of our pleasure.



Industry

Over each lake
A cloud—
Commercial smoke.

Over each town
A haze—
Soft coal and coke.

Under a hill
A maze—
Where miners choke.

Within each heart
An ache—
Light-craving folk.

Sister Helene O. P., in "*The Torch*."