

## IV

# TALK AND TALKERS

## I

“ Sir, we had a good talk.”—JOHNSON.

“ As we must account for every idle word, so we must for every idle silence.”—FRANKLIN.

**T**HERE can be no fairer ambition than to excel in talk; to be affable, gay, ready, clear and welcome; to have a fact, a thought, or an illustration, pat to every subject; and not only to cheer the flight of time among our intimates, but bear our part in that great international congress, always sitting, where public wrongs are first declared, public errors first corrected, and the course of public opinion shaped, day by day, a little nearer to the right. No measure comes before Parliament but it has been long ago prepared by the grand jury of the talkers; no book is written that has not been largely composed by their assistance. Literature in many of its branches is no other than the shadow of good talk; but the imitation falls far short of the original in life, freedom and effect. There are always two to a talk, giving and taking, comparing experience and according conclusions. Talk is fluid, tentative,

continually "in further search and progress;" while written words remain fixed, become idols even to the writer, found wooden dogmatisms, and preserve flies of obvious error in the amber of the truth. Last and chief, while literature, gagged with linsey-woolsey, can only deal with a fraction of the life of man, talk goes fancy free and may call a spade a spade. It cannot, even if it would, become merely æsthetic or merely classical like literature. A jest intervenes, the solemn humbug is dissolved in laughter, and speech runs forth out of the contemporary groove into the open fields of nature, cheery and cheering, like schoolboys out of school. And it is in talk alone that we can learn our period and ourselves. In short, the first duty of a man is to speak; that is his chief business in this world; and talk, which is the harmonious speech of two or more, is by far the most accessible of pleasures. It costs nothing in money; it is all profit; it completes our education, founds and fosters our friendships, and can be enjoyed at any age and in almost any state of health.

The spice of life is battle; the friendliest relations are still a kind of contest; and if we would not forego all that is valuable in our lot, we must continually face some other person, eye to eye, and wrestle a fall whether in love or enmity. It is still by force of body, or power of character or intellect, that we attain to worthy pleasures. Men and women contend for each other in the lists of love, like rival mesmerists; the active and adroit decide their challenges in the sports of the body; and the sedentary sit down to chess or conversation. All sluggish and pacific pleasures are, to the same

degree, solitary and selfish; and every durable bond between human beings is founded in or heightened by some element of competition. Now, the relation that has the least root in matter is undoubtedly that airy one of friendship; and hence, I suppose, it is that good talk most commonly arises among friends. Talk is, indeed, both the scene and instrument of friendship. It is in talk alone that the friends can measure strength, and enjoy that amicable counter-assertion of personality which is the gauge of relations and the sport of life.

A good talk is not to be had for the asking. Humours must first be accorded in a kind of overture or prologue; hour, company and circumstance be suited; and then, at a fit juncture, the subject, the quarry of two heated minds, spring up like a deer out of the wood. Not that the talker has any of the hunter's pride, though he has all and more than all his ardour. The genuine artist follows the stream of conversation as an angler follows the windings of a brook, not dallying where he fails to "kill." He trusts implicitly to hazard; and he is rewarded by continual variety, continual pleasure, and those changing prospects of the truth that are the best of education. There is nothing in a subject, so called, that we should regard it as an idol, or follow it beyond the promptings of desire. Indeed, there are few subjects; and so far as they are truly talkable, more than the half of them may be reduced to three: that I am I, that you are you, and that there are other people dimly understood to be not quite the same as either. Wherever talk may range, it still runs half the time on these eternal lines. The theme being set, each plays on himself as on

an instrument; asserts and justifies himself; ransacks his brain for instances and opinions, and brings them forth new-minted, to his own surprise and the admiration of his adversary. All natural talk is a festival of ostentation; and by the laws of the game each accepts and fans the vanity of the other. It is from that reason that we venture to lay ourselves so open, that we dare to be so warmly eloquent, and that we swell in each other's eyes to such a vast proportion. For talkers, once launched, begin to overflow the limits of their ordinary selves, tower up to the height of their secret pretensions, and give themselves out for the heroes, brave, pious, musical and wise, that in their most shining moments they aspire to be. So they weave for themselves with words and for a while inhabit a palace of delights, temple at once and theatre, where they fill the round of the world's dignities, and feast with the gods, exulting in Kudos. And when the talk is over, each goes his way, still flushed with vanity and admiration, still trailing clouds of glory; each declines from the height of his ideal orgie, not in a moment, but by slow declension. I remember, in the *entr'acte* of an afternoon performance, coming forth into the sunshine, in a beautiful green, gardened corner of a romantic city; and as I sat and smoked, the music moving in my blood, I seemed to sit there and evaporate *The Flying Dutchman* (for it was that I had been hearing) with a wonderful sense of life, warmth, well-being and pride; and the noises of the city, voices, bells and marching feet, fell together in my ears like a symphonious orchestra. In the same way, the excitement of a good talk lives for a long while after in the

blood, the heart still hot within you, the brain still simmering, and the physical earth swimming around you with the colours of the sunset.

Natural talk, like ploughing, should turn up a large surface of life, rather than dig mines into geological strata. Masses of experience, anecdote, incident, cross-lights, quotation, historical instances, the whole flotsam and jetsam of two minds forced in and in upon the matter in hand from every point of the compass, and from every degree of mental elevation and abasement—these are the material with which talk is fortified, the food on which the talkers thrive. Such argument as is proper to the exercise should still be brief and seizing. Talk should proceed by instances; by the apposite, not the expository. It should keep close along the lines of humanity, near the bosoms and businesses of men, at the level where history, fiction and experience intersect and illuminate each other. I am I, and You are You, with all my heart; but conceive how these lean propositions change and brighten when, instead of words, the actual you and I sit cheek by jowl, the spirit housed in the live body, and the very clothes uttering voices to corroborate the story in the face. Not less surprising is the change when we leave off to speak of generalities—the bad, the good, the miser, and all the characters of Theophrastus—and call up other men, by anecdote or instance, in their very trick and feature; or trading on a common knowledge, toss each other famous names, still glowing with the hues of life. Communication is no longer by words, but by the instancing of whole biographies, epics, systems of philosophy, and epochs of history, in bulk. That which is understood excels that which is spoken in

quantity and quality alike; ideas thus figured and personified, change hands, as we may say, like coin; and the speakers imply without effort the most obscure and intricate thoughts. Strangers who have a large common ground of reading will, for this reason, come the sooner to the grapple of genuine converse. If they know Othello and Napoleon, Con-suelo and Clarissa Harlowe, Vautrin and Steenie Steenson, they can leave generalities and begin at once to speak by figures.

Conduct and art are the two subjects that arise most frequently and that embrace the widest range of facts. A few pleasures bear discussion for their own sake, but only those which are most social or most radically human; and even these can only be discussed among their devotees. A technicality is always welcome to the expert, whether in athletics, art or law; I have heard the best kind of talk on technicalities from such rare and happy persons as both know and love their business. No human being ever spoke of scenery for above two minutes at a time, which makes me suspect we hear too much of it in literature. The weather is regarded as the very nadir and scoff of conversational topics. And yet the weather, the dramatic element in scenery, is far more tractable in language, and far more human both in import and suggestion than the stable features of the landscape. Sailors and shepherds, and the people generally of coast and mountain, talk well of it; and it is often excitingly presented in literature. But the tendency of all living talk draws it back and back into the common focus of humanity. Talk is a creature of the street and market-place, feeding on gossip; and its last resort is still in a

discussion on morals. That is the heroic form of gossip; heroic in virtue of its high pretensions; but still gossip, because it turns on personalities. You can keep no men long, nor Scotchmen at all, off moral or theological discussion. These are to all the world what law is to lawyers; they are everybody's technicalities; the medium through which all consider life, and the dialect in which they express their judgments. I knew three young men who walked together daily for some two months in a solemn and beautiful forest and in cloudless summer weather; daily they talked with unabated zest, and yet scarce wandered that whole time beyond two subjects—theology and love. And perhaps neither a court of love nor an assembly of divines would have granted their premises or welcomed their conclusions.

Conclusions, indeed, are not often reached by talk any more than by private thinking. That is not the profit. The profit is in the exercise, and above all in the experience; for when we reason at large on any subject, we review our state and history in life. From time to time, however, and specially, I think, in talking art, talk becomes effective, conquering like war, widening the boundaries of knowledge like an exploration. A point arises; the question takes a problematical, a baffling, yet a likely air; the talkers begin to feel lively presentiments of some conclusion near at hand; towards this they strive with emulous ardour, each by his own path, and struggling for first utterance; and then one leaps upon the summit of that matter with a shout, and almost at the same moment the other is beside him; and behold they are agreed. Like enough, the progress is illusory, a mere cat's cradle having been wound and unwound

out of words. But the sense of joint discovery is none the less giddy and inspiring. And in the life of the talker such triumphs, though imaginary, are neither few nor far apart; they are attained with speed and pleasure, in the hour of mirth; and by the nature of the process, they are always worthily shared.

There is a certain attitude, combative at once and deferential, eager to fight yet most averse to quarrel, which marks out at once the talkable man. It is not eloquence, not fairness, not obstinacy, but a certain proportion of all of these that I love to encounter in my amicable adversaries. They must not be pontiffs holding doctrine, but huntsmen questing after elements of truth. Neither must they be boys to be instructed, but fellow-teachers with whom I may wrangle and agree on equal terms. We must reach some solution, some shadow of consent; for without that, eager talk becomes a torture. But we do not wish to reach it cheaply, or quickly, or without the tussle and effort wherein pleasure lies.

The very best talker, with me, is one whom I shall call Spring-Heel'd Jack. I say so, because I never knew anyone who mingled so largely the possible ingredients of converse. In the Spanish proverb, the fourth man necessary to compound a salad, is a madman to mix it: Jack is that madman. I know not what is more remarkable; the insane lucidity of his conclusions, the humorous eloquence of his language, or his power of method, bringing the whole of life into the focus of the subject treated, mixing the conversational salad like a drunken god. He doubles like the serpent, changes and flashes like the shaken kaleidoscope, transmigrates bodily into



the views of others, and so, in the twinkling of an eye and with a heady rapture, turns questions inside out and flings them empty before you on the ground, like a triumphant conjuror. It is my common practice when a piece of conduct puzzles me, to attack it in the presence of Jack with such grossness, such partiality and such wearing iteration, as at length shall spur him up in its defence. In a moment he transmigrates, dons the required character, and with moonstruck philosophy justifies the act in question. I can fancy nothing to compare with the *vim* of these impersonations, the strange scale of language, flying from Shakespeare to Kant, and from Kant to Major Dyngwell—

“As fast as a musician scatters sounds  
Out of an instrument—”

the sudden, sweeping generalisations, the absurd irrelevant particularities, the wit, wisdom, folly, humour, eloquence and bathos, each startling in its kind, and yet all luminous in the admired disorder of their combination. A talker of a different calibre, though belonging to the same school, is Burly. Burly is a man of great presence; he commands a larger atmosphere, gives the impression of a grosser mass of character than most men. It has been said of him that his presence could be felt in a room you entered blindfold; and the same, I think, has been said of other powerful constitutions condemned to much physical inaction. There is something boisterous and piratic in Burly's manner of talk which suits well enough with this impression. He will roar you down, he will bury his face in his hands, he will

undergo passions of revolt and agony; and meanwhile his attitude of mind is really both conciliatory and receptive; and after Pistol has been out-Pistol'd, and the welkin rung for hours, you begin to perceive a certain subsidence in these spring torrents, points of agreement issue, and you end arm-in-arm, and in a glow of mutual admiration. The outcry only serves to make your final union the more unexpected and precious. Throughout there has been perfect sincerity, perfect intelligence, a desire to hear although not always to listen, and an unaffected eagerness to meet concessions. You have, with Burly, none of the dangers that attend debate with Spring-Heel'd Jack; who may at any moment turn his powers of transmigration on yourself, create for you a view you never held, and then furiously fall on you for holding it. These, at least, are my two favourites, and both are loud, copious intolerant talkers. This argues that I myself am in the same category; for if we love talking at all, we love a bright, fierce adversary, who will hold his ground, foot by foot, in much our own manner, sell his attention dearly, and give us our full measure of the dust and exertion of battle. Both these men can be beat from a position, but it takes six hours to do it; a high and hard adventure, worth attempting. With both you can pass days in an enchanted country of the mind, with people, scenery and manners of its own; live a life apart, more arduous, active and glowing than any real existence; and come forth again when the talk is over, as out of a theatre or a dream, to find the east wind still blowing and the chimney-pots of the old battered city still around you. Jack has the far finer mind, Burly the far more honest; Jack

gives us the animated poetry, Burly the romantic prose, of similar themes; the one glances high like a meteor and makes a light in darkness; the other, with many changing hues of fire, burns at the sea-level, like a conflagration; but both have the same humour and artistic interests, the same unquenched ardour in pursuit, the same gusts of talk and thunderclaps of contradiction.

Cockshot<sup>1</sup> is a different article, but vastly entertaining, and has been meat and drink to me for many a long evening. His manner is dry, brisk and pertinacious, and the choice of words not much. The point about him is his extraordinary readiness and spirit. You can propound nothing but he has either a theory about it ready-made, or will have one instantly on the stocks, and proceed to lay its timbers and launch it in your presence. "Let me see," he will say. "Give me a moment. I *should* have some theory for that." A blither spectacle than the vigour with which he sets about the task, it were hard to fancy. He is possessed by a demoniac energy, welding the elements for his life, and bending ideas, as an athlete bends a horseshoe, with a visible and lively effort. He has, in theorising, a compass, an art; what I would call the synthetic gusto; something of a Herbert Spencer, who should see the fun of the thing. You are not bound, and no more is he, to place your faith in these brand-new opinions. But some of them are right enough, durable even for life; and the poorest serve for a cock-shy—as when idle people, after picnics, float a bottle on a pond and have an hour's diversion ere it sinks. Which-ever they are, serious opinions or humours of the

<sup>1</sup>The Late Fleeming Jenkin.

moment, he still defends his ventures with indefatigable wit and spirit, hitting savagely himself, but taking punishment like a man. He knows and never forgets that people talk, first of all, for the sake of talking; conducts himself in the ring, to use the old slang, like a thorough "glutton," and honestly enjoys a telling facer from his adversary. Cockshot is bottled effervescency, the sworn foe of sleep. Three-in-the-morning Cockshot, says a victim. His talk is like the driest of all imaginable dry champagnes. Sleight of hand and inimitable quickness are the qualities by which he lives. Athelred, on the other hand, presents you with the spectacle of a sincere and somewhat slow nature thinking aloud. He is the most unready man I ever knew to shine in conversation. You may see him sometimes wrestle with a refractory jest for a minute or two together, and perhaps fail to throw it in the end. And there is something singularly engaging, often instructive, in the simplicity with which he thus exposes the process as well as the result, the works as well as the dial of the clock. Withal he has his hours of inspiration. Apt words come to him as if by accident, and, coming from deeper down, they smack the more personally, they have the more of fine old crusted humanity, rich in sediment and humour. There are sayings of his in which he has stamped himself into the very grain of the language; you would think he must have worn the words next his skin and slept with them. Yet it is not as a sayer of particular good things that Athelred is most to be regarded, rather as the stalwart woodman of thought. I have pulled on a light cord often enough, while he has been wielding the broad-axe;

and between us, on this unequal division, many a specious fallacy has fallen. I have known him to battle the same question night after night for years, keeping it in the reign of talk, constantly applying it and re-applying it to life with humorous or grave intention, and all the while, never hurrying, nor flagging, nor taking an unfair advantage of the facts. Jack at a given moment, when arising, as it were, from the tripod, can be more radiantly just to those from whom he differs; but then the tenor of his thoughts is even calumnious; while Athelred, slower to forge excuses, is yet slower to condemn, and sits over the welter of the world, vacillating but still judicial, and still faithfully contending with his doubts.

Both the last talkers deal much in points of conduct and religion studied in the "dry light" of prose. Indirectly and as if against his will the same elements from time to time appear in the troubled and poetic talk of Opalstein. His various and exotic knowledge, complete although unready sympathies, and fine, full, discriminative flow of language, fit him out to be the best of talkers; so perhaps he is with some, not *quite* with me—*proxime accessit*, I should say. He sings the praises of the earth and the arts, flowers and jewels, wine and music, in a moonlight, serenading manner, as to the light guitar; even wisdom comes from his tongue like singing; no one is, indeed, more tuneful in the upper notes. But even while he sings the song of the Sirens, he still hearkens to the barking of the Sphinx. Jarring Byronic notes interrupt the flow of his Horatian humours. His mirth has something of the tragedy of the world for its perpetual background; and he

feasts like Don Giovanni to a double orchestra, one lightly sounding for the dance, one pealing Beethoven in the distance. He is not truly reconciled either with life or with himself; and this instant war in his members sometimes divides the man's attention. He does not always, perhaps not often, frankly surrender himself in conversation. He brings into the talk other thoughts than those which he expresses; you are conscious that he keeps an eye on something else, that he does not shake off the world, nor quite forget himself. Hence arise occasional disappointments; even an occasional unfairness for his companions, who find themselves one day giving too much, and the next, when they are wary out of season, giving perhaps too little. Purcel is in another class from any I have mentioned. He is no debater, but appears in conversation, as occasion rises, in two distinct characters, one of which I admire and fear, and the other love. In the first, he is radiantly civil and rather silent, sits on a high, courtly hilltop, and from that vantage-ground drops you his remarks like favours. He seems not to share in our sublunary contentions; he wears no sign of interest; when on a sudden there falls in a crystal of wit, so polished that the dull do not perceive it, but so right that the sensitive are silenced. True talk should have more body and blood, should be louder, vainer and more declaratory of the man; the true talker should not hold so steady an advantage over whom he speaks with; and that is one reason out of a score why I prefer my Purcel in his second character, when he unbends into a strain of graceful gossip, singing like the fireside kettle. In these moods he has an elegant homeliness that rings of the

true Queen Anne. I know another person who attains, in his moments, to the insolence of a Restoration comedy, speaking, I declare, as Congreve wrote; but that is a sport of nature, and scarce falls under the rubric, for there is none, alas! to give him answer.

One last remark occurs: It is the mark of genuine conversation that the sayings can scarce be quoted with their full effect beyond the circle of common friends. To have their proper weight they should appear in a biography, and with the portrait of the speaker. Good talk is dramatic; it is like an impromptu piece of acting where each should represent himself to the greatest advantage; and that is the best kind of talk where each speaker is most fully and candidly himself, and where, if you were to shift the speeches round from one to another, there would be the greatest loss in significance and perspicuity. It is for this reason that talk depends so wholly on our company. We should like to introduce Falstaff and Mercutio, or Falstaff and Sir Toby; but Falstaff in talk with Cordelia seems even painful. Most of us, by the Protean quality of man, can talk to some degree with all; but the true talk, that strikes out all the slumbering best of us, comes only with the peculiar brethren of our spirits, is founded as deep as love in the constitution of our being, and is a thing to relish with all our energy, while yet we have it, and to be grateful for forever.

II<sup>1</sup>

IN the last paper there was perhaps too much about mere debate; and there was nothing said at all about that kind of talk which is merely luminous and restful, a higher power of silence, the quiet of the evening shared by ruminating friends. There is something, aside from personal preference, to be alleged in support of this omission. Those who are no chimney-cornerers, who rejoice in the social thunderstorm, have a ground in reason for their choice. They get little rest indeed; but restfulness is a quality for cattle; the virtues are all active, life is alert, and it is in repose that men prepare themselves for evil. On the other hand, they are bruised into a knowledge of themselves and others; they have in a high degree the fencer's pleasure in dexterity displayed and proved; what they get they get upon life's terms, paying for it as they go; and once the talk is launched, they are assured of honest dealing from an adversary eager like themselves. The aboriginal man within us, the cave-dweller, still lusty as when he fought tooth and nail for roots and berries, scents this kind of equal battle from afar; it is like his old primæval days upon the crags, a return to the sincerity of savage life from the comfortable fictions of the civilised. And if it be delightful to the Old Man, it is none the less profitable to his younger brother, the conscientious gentleman. I feel never quite sure of your urbane and

<sup>1</sup>This sequel was called forth by an excellent article in *The Spectator*.



smiling coteries; I fear they indulge a man's vanities in silence, suffer him to enroach, encourage him on to be an ass, and send him forth again, not merely contemned for the moment, but radically more contemptible than when he entered. But if I have a flushed, blustering fellow for my opposite, bent on carrying a point, my vanity is sure to have its ears rubbed, once at least, in the course of the debate. He will not spare me when we differ; he will not fear to demonstrate my folly to my face.

For many natures there is not much charm in the still, chambered society, the circle of bland countenances, the digestive silence, the admired remark, the flutter of affectionate approval. They demand more atmosphere and exercise; "a gale upon their spirits," as our pious ancestors would phrase it; to have their wits well breathed in an uproarious Valhalla. And I suspect that the choice, given their character and faults, is one to be defended. The purely wise are silenced by facts; they talk in a clear atmosphere, problems lying around them like a view in nature; if they can be shown to be somewhat in the wrong, they digest the reproof like a thrashing, and make better intellectual blood. They stand corrected by a whisper; a word or a glance reminds them of the great eternal law. But it is not so with all. Others in conversation seek rather contact with their fellow-men than increase of knowledge or clarity of thought. The drama, not the philosophy, of life is the sphere of their intellectual activity. Even when they pursue truth, they desire as much as possible of what we may call human scenery along the road they follow. They dwell in the heart of life; the blood sounding in

their ears, their eyes laying hold of what delights them with a brutal avidity that makes them blind to all besides, their interest riveted on people, living, loving, talking, tangible people. To a man of this description, the sphere of argument seems very pale and ghostly. By a strong expression, a perturbed countenance, floods of tears, an insult which his conscience obliges him to swallow, he is brought round to knowledge which no syllogism would have conveyed to him. His own experience is so vivid, he is so superlatively conscious of himself, that if, day after day, he is allowed to hector and hear nothing but approving echoes, he will lose his hold on the soberness of things and take himself in earnest for a god. Talk might be to such an one the very way of moral ruin; the school where he might learn to be at once intolerable and ridiculous.

This character is perhaps commoner than philosophers suppose. And for persons of that stamp to learn much by conversation, they must speak with their superiors, not in intellect, for that is a superiority that must be proved, but in station. If they cannot find a friend to bully them for their good, they must find either an old man, a woman, or some one so far below them in the artificial order of society, that courtesy may be particularly exercised.

The best teachers are the aged. To the old our mouths are always partly closed; we must swallow our obvious retorts and listen. They sit above our heads, on life's raised daïs, and appeal at once to our respect and pity. A flavour of the old school, a touch of something different in their manner—which is freer and rounder, if they come of what is called a good family, and often more timid and

precise if they are of the middle class—serves, in these days, to accentuate the difference of age and add a distinction to gray hairs. But their superiority is founded more deeply than by outward marks or gestures. They are before us in the march of man; they have more or less solved the irking problem; they have battled through the equinox of life; in good and evil they have held their course; and now, without open shame, they near the crown and harbour. It may be we have been struck with one of fortune's darts; we can scarce be civil, so cruelly is our spirit tossed. Yet long before we were so much as thought upon, the like calamity befell the old man or woman that now, with pleasant humour, rallies us upon our inattention, sitting composed in the holy evening of man's life, in the clear shining after rain. We grow ashamed of our distresses new and hot and coarse, like villainous roadside brandy; we see life in aerial perspective, under the heavens of faith; and out of the worst, in the mere presence of contented elders, look forward and take patience. Fear shrinks before them "like a thing reprov'd," not the flitting and ineffectual fear of death, but the instant, dwelling terror of the responsibilities and revenges of life. Their speech, indeed, is timid; they report lions in the path; they counsel a meticulous footing; but their serene, marred faces are more eloquent and tell another story. Where they have gone, we will go also, not very greatly fearing; what they have endured unbroken, we also, God helping us, will make a shift to bear.

Not only is the presence of the aged in itself remedial, but their minds are stored with antidotes, wisdom's simples, plain considerations overlooked

by youth. They have matter to communicate, be they never so stupid. Their talk is not merely literature, it is great literature; classic in virtue of the speaker's detachment, studded, like a book of travel, with things we should not otherwise have learnt. In virtue, I have said, of the speaker's detachment—and this is why, of two old men, the one who is not your father speaks to you with the more sensible authority; for in the paternal relation the oldest have lively interests and remain still young. Thus I have known two young men great friends; each swore by the other's father; the father of each swore by the other lad; and yet each pair of parent and child were perpetually by the ears. This is typical: it reads like the germ of some kindly comedy.

The old appear in conversation in two characters: the critically silent and the garrulous anecdotic. The last is perhaps what we look for; it is perhaps the more instructive. An old gentleman, well on in years, sits handsomely and naturally in the bow-window of his age, scanning experience with reverted eye; and chirping and smiling, communicates the accidents and reads the lesson of his long career. Opinions are strengthened, indeed, but they are also weeded out in the course of years. What remains steadily present to the eye of the retired veteran in his hermitage, what still ministers to his content, what still quickens his old honest heart—these are “the real long-lived things” that Whitman tells us to prefer. Where youth agrees with age, not where they differ, wisdom lies; and it is when the young disciple finds his heart to beat in tune with his grey-bearded teacher's that a lesson may be learned. I have known one old gentleman, whom I may name.

for he is now gathered to his stock—Robert Hunter, Sheriff of Dumbarton, and author of an excellent law-book still re-edited and republished. Whether he was originally big or little is more than I can guess. When I knew him he was all fallen away and fallen in; crooked and shrunken; buckled into a stiff waistcoat for support; troubled by ailments; which kept him hobbling in and out of the room; one foot gouty; a wig for decency, not for deception, on his head; close shaved, except under his chin—and for that he never failed to apologise, for it went sore against the traditions of his life. You can imagine how he would fare in a novel by Miss Mather; yet this rag of a Chelsea veteran lived to his last year in the plenitude of all that is best in man, brimming with human kindness, and staunch as a Roman soldier under his manifold infirmities: You could not say that he had lost his memory, for he would repeat Shakespeare and Webster and Jeremy Taylor and Burke by the page together; but the parchment was filled up, there was no room for fresh inscriptions, and he was capable of repeating the same anecdote on many successive visits. His voice survived in its full power, and he took a pride in using it. On his last voyage as Commissioner of Lighthouses, he hailed a ship at sea and made himself clearly audible without a speaking trumpet, ruffling the while with a proper vanity in his achievement. He had a habit of eking out his words with interrogative hems, which was puzzling and a little wearisome, suited ill with his appearance, and seemed a survival from some former stage of bodily portliness. Of yore, when he was a great pedestrian and no enemy to good claret, he may have pointed

with these minute guns his allocutions to the bench. His humour was perfectly equable, set beyond the reach of fate; gout, rheumatism, stone and gravel might have combined their forces against that frail tabernacle, but when I came round on Sunday evening, he would lay aside Jeremy Taylor's *Life of Christ* and greet me with the same open brow, the same kind formality of manner. His opinions and sympathies dated the man almost to a decade. He had begun life, under his mother's influence, as an admirer of Junius, but on maturer knowledge had transferred his admiration to Burke. He cautioned me, with entire gravity, to be punctilious in writing English; never to forget that I was a Scotchman, that English was a foreign tongue, and that if I attempted the colloquial, I should certainly be shamed: the remark was apposite, I suppose, in the days of David Hume. Scott was too new for him; he had known the author—known him, too, for a Tory; and to the genuine classic a contemporary is always something of a trouble. He had the old, serious love of the play; had even, as he was proud to tell, played a certain part in the history of Shakespearian revivals, for he had successfully pressed on Murray, of the old Edinburgh Theatre, the idea of producing Shakespeare's fairy pieces with great scenic display. A moderate in religion, he was much struck in the last years of his life by a conversation with two young lads, revivalists. "H'm," he would say—"new to me. I have had—h'm—no such experience." It struck him, not with pain, rather with a solemn philosophic interest, that he, a Christian as he hoped, and a Christian of so old a standing, should hear these young fellows talking of his own

subject, his own weapons that he had fought the battle of life with,—“and—h’m—not understand.” In this wise and grateful attitude he did justice to himself and others, reposed unshaken in his old beliefs, and recognised their limits without anger or alarm. His last recorded remark, on the last night of his life, was after he had been arguing against Calvinism with his minister and was interrupted by an intolerable pang. “After all,” he said, “of all the ’isms, I know none so bad as rheumatism.” My own last sight of him was some time before, when we dined together at an inn; he had been on circuit, for he stuck to his duties like a chief part of his existence; and I remember it as the only occasion on which he ever soiled his lips with slang—a thing he loathed. We were both Roberts; and as we took our places at table, he addressed me with a twinkle: “We are just what you would call two bob.” He offered me port, I remember, as the proper milk of youth; spoke of “twenty-shilling notes”; and throughout the meal was full of old-world pleasantry and quaintness, like an ancient boy on a holiday. But what I recall chiefly was his confession that he had never read *Othello* to an end. Shakespeare was his continual study. He loved nothing better than to display his knowledge and memory by adducing parallel passages from Shakespeare, passages where the same word was employed, or the same idea differently treated. But *Othello* had beaten him. “That noble gentleman and that noble lady—h’m—too painful for me.” The same night the boardings were covered with posters, “Burlesque of *Othello*,” and the contrast blazed up in my mind like a bonfire. An unforgettable look it gave me

into that kind man's soul. His acquaintance was indeed a liberal and pious education. All the humanities were taught in that bare dining-room beside his gouty footstool. He was a piece of good advice; he was himself the instance that pointed and adorned his various talk. Nor could a young man have found elsewhere a place so set apart from envy, fear, discontent, or any of the passions that debase; a life so honest and composed; a soul like an ancient violin, so subdued to harmony, responding to a touch in music—as in that dining-room, with Mr. Hunter chatting at the eleventh hour, under the shadow of eternity, fearless and gentle.

The second class of old people are not anecdotic; they are rather hearers than talkers, listening to the young with an amused and critical attention. To have this sort of intercourse to perfection, I think we must go to old ladies. Women are better hearers than men, to begin with; they learn, I fear in anguish, to bear with the tedious and infantile vanity of the other sex; and we will take more from a woman than even from the oldest man in the way of biting comment. Biting comment is the chief part, whether for profit or amusement, in this business. The old lady that I have in my eye is a very caustic speaker, her tongue, after years of practice, in absolute command, whether for silence or attack. If she chance to dislike you, you will be tempted to curse the malignity of age. But if you chance to please even slightly, you will be listened to with a particular laughing grace of sympathy, and from time to time chastised, as if in play, with a parasol as heavy as a pole-axe. It requires a singular art, as well as the vantage-ground of age, to deal these stunning



corrections among the coxcombs of the young. The pill is disguised in sugar of wit; it is administered as a compliment—if you had not pleased, you would not have been censured; it is a personal affair—a hyphen, a *trait d'union*, between you and your censor; age's philandering, for her pleasure and your good. Incontestably the young man feels very much of a fool; but he must be a perfect Malvolio, sick with self-love, if he cannot take an open buffet and still smile. The correction of silence is what kills; when you know you have transgressed, and your friend says nothing and avoids your eye. If a man were made of gutta-percha, his heart would quail at such a moment. But when the word is out, the worst is over; and a fellow with any good-humour at all may pass through a perfect hail of witty criticism, every bare place on his soul hit to the quick with a shrewd missile, and reappear, as if after a dive, tingling with a fine moral reaction, and ready, with a shrinking readiness, one-third loath, for a repetition of the discipline.

There are few women, not well sunned and ripened, and perhaps toughened, who can thus stand apart from a man and say the true thing with a kind of genial cruelty. Still there are some—and I doubt if there be any man who can return the compliment. The class of men represented by Vernon Whitford in *The Egoist*, says, indeed, the true thing, but he says it stockishly. Vernon is a noble fellow, and makes, by the way, a noble and instructive contrast to Daniel Deronda; his conduct is the conduct of a man of honour; but we agree with him, against our consciences, when he remorsefully considers “its astonishing dryness.” He is the best of men, but

the best of women manage to combine all that and something more. Their very faults assist them; they are helped even by the falseness of their position in life. They can retire into the fortified camp of the proprieties. They can touch a subject and suppress it. The most adroit employ a somewhat elaborate reserve as a means to be frank, much as they wear gloves when they shake hands. But a man has the full responsibility of his freedom, cannot evade a question, can scarce be silent without rudeness, must answer for his words upon the moment, and is not seldom left face to face with a damning choice, between the more or less dishonourable wriggling of Deronda and the downright woodenness of Vernon Whitford.

But the superiority of women is perpetually menaced; they do not sit throned on infirmities like the old; they are suitors as well as sovereigns; their vanity is engaged, their affections are too apt to follow; and hence much of the talk between the sexes degenerates into something unworthy of the name. The desire to please, to shine with a certain softness of lustre and to draw a fascinating picture of oneself, banishes from conversation all that is sterling and most of what is humorous. As soon as a strong current of mutual admiration begins to flow, the human interest triumphs entirely over the intellectual, and the commerce of words, consciously or not, becomes secondary to the commercing of eyes. But even where this ridiculous danger is avoided, and a man and woman converse equally and honestly, something in their nature or their education falsifies the strain. An instinct prompts them to agree; and where that is impossible, to agree to differ. Should

they neglect the warning, at the first suspicion of an argument, they find themselves in different hemispheres. About any point of business or conduct, any actual affair demanding settlement, a woman will speak and listen, hear and answer arguments, not only with natural wisdom, but with candour and logical honesty. But if the subject of debate be something in the air, an abstraction, an excuse for talk, a logical Aunt Sally, then may the male debater instantly abandon hope; he may employ reason, adduce facts, be supple, be smiling, be angry, all shall avail him nothing; what the woman said first, that (unless she has forgotten it) she will repeat at the end. Hence, at the very junctures when a talk between men grows brighter and quicker and begins to promise to bear fruit, talk between the sexes is menaced with dissolution. The point of difference, the point of interest, is evaded by the brilliant woman, under a shower of irrelevant conversational rockets; it is bridged by the discreet woman with a rustle of silk, as she passes smoothly forward to the nearest point of safety. And this sort of prestidigitation, juggling the dangerous topic out of sight until it can be reintroduced with safety in an altered shape, is a piece of tactics among the true drawing-room queens.

The drawing-room is, indeed, an artificial place; it is so by our choice and for our sins. The subjection of women; the ideal imposed upon them from the cradle; and worn, like a hair-shirt, with so much constancy; their motherly, superior tenderness to man's vanity and self-importance; their managing arts—the arts of a civilised slave among good-natured barbarians—are all painful ingredients and all help

to falsify relations. It is not till we get clear of that amusing artificial scene that genuine relations are founded, or ideas honestly compared. In the garden, on the road or the hillside, or *tête-à-tête* and apart from interruptions, occasions arise when we may learn much from any single woman; and nowhere more often than in married life. Marriage is one long conversation, chequered by disputes. The disputes are valueless; they but ingrain the difference; the heroic heart of woman prompting her at once to nail her colours to the mast. But in the intervals, almost unconsciously and with no desire to shine, the whole material of life is turned over and over, ideas are struck out and shared, the two persons more and more adapt their notions one to suit the other, and in process of time, without sound of trumpet, they conduct each other into new worlds of thought.

## NOTES

THE two papers on *Talk and Talkers* first appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine*, for April and for August, 1882, Vol. XLV, pp. 410-418, Vol. XLVI, pp. 151-158. The second paper had the title, *Talk and Talkers. (A Sequel.)* For Stevenson's relations with the Editor, see our note to *An Apology for Idlers*. With the publication of the second part, Stevenson's connection with the *Cornhill* ceased, as the magazine in 1883 passed from the hands of Leslie Stephen into those of James Payn. The two papers next appeared in the volume *Memories and Portraits* (1887). The first was composed during the winter of 1881-2 at Davos in the Alps, whither he had gone for his health, the second a few months later. Writing to Charles Baxter, 22 Feb. 1882, he said, "In an article which will appear sometime in the *Cornhill*, 'Talk and Talkers,' and where I have full-lengthened the conversation of Bob, Henley, Jenkin, Simpson, Symonds, and Gosse, I have at the end one single word about yourself. It may amuse you to see it." (*Letters*, I, 268.) Writing from Bournemouth, England, in February 1885 to Sidney Colvin, he said, "See how my 'Talk and Talkers' went; every one liked his own portrait, and shrieked about other people's; so it will be with yours. If you are the least true to the essential, the sitter will be pleased; very likely not his friends, and that from various motives." (*Letters*, I, 413.) In a letter to his mother from Davos, dated 9 April 1882, he gives the real names opposite each character in the first paper, and adds, "But pray regard these as secrets."

The art of conversation, like the art of letter-writing, reached its highest point in the eighteenth century; cheap

postage destroyed the latter, and the hurly-burly of modern life has been almost too strong for the former. In the French Salons of the eighteenth century, and in the coffee-houses and drawing-rooms of England, good conversation was regarded as a most desirable accomplishment, and was practised by many with extraordinary wit and skill. Swift's satire on *Polite Conversation* (1738) as well as the number of times he discusses the art of conversation in other places, shows how seriously he actually regarded it. Stevenson, like many persons who are forced away from active life, loved a good talk. Good writers are perhaps now more common than good talkers.

## FIRST PAPER

Page 61. *Sir, we had a good talk.* This remark was made by the Doctor in 1768, the morning after a memorable meeting at the Crown and Anchor tavern, where he had been engaged in conversation with seven or eight notable literary men. "When I called upon Dr. Johnson next morning," says Boswell, "I found him highly satisfied with his colloquial prowess the preceding evening. 'Well,' said he, 'we had good talk.' BOSWELL: 'Yes, sir, you tossed and gored several persons.'"

*As we must account.* This remark of Franklin's occurs in *Poor Richard's Almanac* for 1738.

Page 62. *Flies . . . in the amber.* Bartlett gives Mar-  
tial.

"The bee enclosed and through the amber shown,  
Seems buried in the juice which was his own."

Bacon, Donne, Herrick, Pope and many other authors speak of flies in amber.

Page 62. *Fancy free.* See *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act II, Sc. 2.

“And the imperial votaress passed on,  
In maiden meditation, fancy-free.”

This has been called the most graceful among all the countless compliments received by Queen Elizabeth. The word “fancy” in the Shaksperian quotation means simply “love.”

Page 62. *A spade a spade*. The phrase really comes from Aristophanes, and is quoted by Plutarch, as Philip’s description of the rudeness of the Macedonians. *Kudos*. Greek word for “pride”, used as slang by school-boys in England.

Page 64. *Trailing clouds of glory*. See our note on page 60.

Page 64. *The Flying Dutchman*. Wagner’s *Der Fliegende Holländer* (1843), one of his earliest, shortest, and most beautiful operas. Many German performances are given in the afternoon, and many German theatres have pretty gardens attached, where, during the long intervals (*grosse Pause*) between the acts, one may refresh himself with food, drink, tobacco, and the open air. Germany and German art, however, did not have anything like the influence on Stevenson exerted by the French country, language, and literature.

Page 65. *Theophrastus*. A Greek philosopher who died 287 B. C. His most influential work was his *Characters*, which, subsequently translated into many modern languages, produced a whole school of literature known as the “Character Books,” of which the best are perhaps Sir Thomas Overbury’s *Characters* (1614), John Earle’s *Microcosmographie* (1628), and the *Caractères* (1688) of the great French writer, La Bruyère.

Page 66. *Consuelo, Clarissa Harlowe, Vautrin, Steenie Steenson*. *Consuelo* is the title of one of the most notable novels by the famous French authoress, George Sand. (1804-1876), whose real name was Aurore Dupin. *Consuelo* appeared in 1842. . . . *Clarissa* (1747-8) was the masterpiece of the novelist Samuel Richardson (1689-

1761). This great novel, in seven fat volumes, was a warm favorite with Stevenson, as it has been with most English writers from Dr. Johnson to Macaulay. Writing to a friend in December 1877, Stevenson said, "Please, if you have not, and I don't suppose you have, already read it, institute a search in all Melbourne for one of the rarest and certainly one of the best of books—*Clarissa Harlowe*. For any man who takes an interest in the problems of the two sexes, that book is a perfect mine of documents. And it is written, sir, with the pen of an angel." (*Letters*, I, 141.) Editions of *Clarissa* are not so scarce now as they were thirty years ago; several have appeared within the last few years. . . . *Vautrin* is one of the most remarkable characters in several novels of Balzac; see especially *Père Goriot* (1834) . . . *Steenie Steenson* in Scott's novel *Redgauntlet* (1824).

Page 66. *No human being, etc.* Stevenson loved action in novels, and was impatient, as many readers are, when long-drawn descriptions of scenery were introduced. Furthermore, the love for wild scenery has become as fashionable as the love for music; the result being a very general hypocrisy in assumed ecstatic raptures.

Page 67. *You can keep no men long, nor Scotchmen at all.* Every Scotchman is a born theologian. Franklin says in his *Autobiography*, "I had caught this by reading my father's books of dispute on Religion. Persons of good sense, I have since observed seldom fall into it, except lawyers, university men, and generally men of all sorts who have been bred at Edinburgh." (Chap. I.)

Page 67. *A court of love.* A mediæval institution of chivalry, where questions of knight-errantry, constancy in love, etc., were discussed and for the time being, decided.

Page 68. *Spring-Heel'd Jack.* This is Stevenson's cousin "Bob," Robert Alan Mowbray Stevenson (1847-1900), an artist and later Professor of Fine Arts at University College, Liverpool. He was one of the best conversationalists in England. Stevenson said of him,



“My cousin Bob, . . . is the man likest and most unlike to me that I have ever met. . . . What was specially his, and genuine, was his faculty for turning over a subject in conversation. There was an insane lucidity in his conclusions; a singular, humorous eloquence in his language, and a power of method, bringing the whole of life into the focus of the subject under hand; none of which I have ever heard equalled or even approached by any other talker.” (Balfour’s *Life of Stevenson*, I, 103. For further remarks on the cousin, see note to page 104 of the *Life*.)

Page 69. *From Shakespeare to Kant, from Kant to Major Dyngwell*. Immanuel Kant, the foremost philosopher of the eighteenth century, born at Königsberg in 1724, died 1804. His greatest work, the *Critique of Pure Reason* (*Kritick der reinen Vernunft*, 1781), produced about the same revolutionary effect on metaphysics as that produced by Copernicus in astronomy, or by Darwin in natural science. . . . *Major Dyngwell I know not*.

Page 69. *Burly*. Burly is Stevenson’s friend, the poet William Ernest Henley, who died in 1903. His sonnet on our author may be found in the introduction to this book. Leslie Stephen introduced the two men on 13 Feb. 1875, when Henley was in the hospital, and a very close and intimate friendship began. Henley’s personality was exceedingly robust, in contrast with his health, and in his writings and talk he delighted in shocking people. His philosophy of life is seen clearly in his most characteristic poem:

“Out of the night that covers me,  
 Black as the Pit from pole to pole,  
 I thank whatever Gods may be  
 For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
 I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
 Under the bludgeonings of chance  
 My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
 Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
 And yet the menace of the years  
 Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
 How charged with punishments the scroll,  
 I am the master of my fate:  
 I am the Captain of my soul."

After the publication of Balfour's *Life of Stevenson* (1901), Mr. Henley contributed to the *Pall Mall Magazine* in December of that year an article called *R. L. S.*, which made a tremendous sensation. It was regarded by many of Stevenson's friends as a wanton assault on his private character. Whether justified or not, it certainly damaged Henley more than the dead author. For further accounts of the relations between the two men, see index to Balfour's *Life*, under the title *Henley*.

Page 70. *Pistol has been out-Pistol'd*. The burlesque character in Shakspeare's *King Henry IV* and *V*.

Page 71. *Cockshot*. As the note says, this was Professor Fleeming Jenkin, who died 12 June 1885. He exercised a great influence over the younger man. Stevenson paid the debt of gratitude he owed him by writing the *Memoir of Fleeming Jenkin*, published first in America by Charles Scribner's Sons, in 1887.

Page 71. *Synthetic gusto; something of a Herbert Spencer*. The English philosopher, Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), whose many volumes in various fields of science and metaphysics were called by their author the *Synthetic Philosophy*. His most popular book is *First Principles* (1862), which has exercised an enormous influence in the direction of agnosticism. His *Autobiography*, two big volumes, was published in 1904, and fell rather flat.

Page 72. *Like a thorough "glutton."* This is still the

slang of the prize-ring. When a man is able to stand a great deal of punching without losing consciousness or courage, he is called a "glutton for punishment."

Page 72. *Athelred*. Sir Walter Simpson, who was Stevenson's companion on the *Inland Voyage*. For a good account of him, see Balfour's *Life of Stevenson*, I, 106.

Page 73. "*Dry light*." "The more perfect soul," says Heraclitus, "is a dry light, which flies out of the body as lightning breaks from a cloud." Plutarch, *Life of Romulus*.

Page 73. *Opalstein*. This was the writer and art critic, John Addington Symonds (1840-1893). Like Stevenson, he was afflicted with lung trouble, and spent much of his time at Davos, Switzerland, where a good part of his literary work was done. "The great feature of the place for Stevenson was the presence of John Addington Symonds, who, having come there three years before on his way to Egypt, had taken up his abode in Davos, and was now building himself a house. To him the newcomer bore a letter of introduction from Mr. Gosse. On November 5th (1880) Louis wrote to his mother: 'We got to Davos last evening; and I feel sure we shall like it greatly. I saw Symonds this morning, and already like him; it is such sport to have a literary man around. . . . Symonds is like a Tait to me; eternal interest in the same topics, eternal cross-causewaying of special knowledge. That makes hours to fly.' And a little later he wrote: 'Beyond its splendid climate, Davos has but one advantage—the neighbourhood of J. A. Symonds. I dare say you know his work, but the man is far more interesting.'" (Balfour's *Life of Stevenson*, I, 214.) When Symonds first read the essay *Talk and Talkers*, he pretended to be angry, and said, "Louis Stevenson, what do you mean by describing me as a moonlight serenader?" (*Life*, I, 233.)

Page 73. *Proxime accessit*. "He comes very near to it."

Page 73. *Sirens . . . Sphinx . . . Byronic . . . Horatian*

... *Don Giovanni* ... *Beethoven*. The Sirens were the famous women of Greek mythology, who lured mariners to destruction by the overpowering sweetness of their songs. How Ulysses outwitted them is well-known to all readers of the *Odyssey*. One of Tennyson's earlier poems, *The Sea-Fairies*, deals with the same theme, and indeed it has appeared constantly in the literature of the world. . . . The *Sphinx*, a familiar subject in Egyptian art, had a lion's body, the head of some other animal (sometimes man) and wings. It was a symbolical figure. The most famous example is of course the gigantic Sphinx near the Pyramids in Egypt, which has proved to be an inexhaustible theme for speculation and for poetry. . . . The theatrically tragic mood of *Byron* is contrasted with the easy-going, somewhat cynical epicureanism of *Horace*. . . . *Don Giovanni* (1787) the greatest opera of the great composer *Mozart* (1756-1791), tells the same story told by *Molière* and so many others. See note on page 58. The French composer, *Gounod*, said that *Mozart's Don Giovanni* was the greatest musical composition that the world has ever seen . . . *Beethoven* (1770-1827) occupies in general estimation about the same place in the history of music that *Shakespeare* fills in the history of literature.

Page 74. *Purcel*. This stands for Mr. Edmund Gosse (born 1849), a poet and critic of some note, who writes pleasantly on many topics. Many of *Stevenson's* letters were addressed to him. The two friends first met in London in 1877, and the impression made by the novelist on the critic may be seen in Mr. Gosse's book of essays, *Critical Kitcats* (1896).

Page 75. *I know another person*. This is undoubtedly *Stevenson's* friend *Charles Baxter*. See the quotation from a letter to him in our introductory note to this essay on page 89. Compare what *Stevenson* elsewhere said of him: "I cannot characterise a personality so unusual in the little space that I can here afford. I have never known one of so mingled a strain. . . . He is the only

man I ever heard of who could give and take in conversation with the wit and polish of style that we find in Congreve's comedies." (Balfour's *Life of Stevenson*, I, 105.)

Page 75. *Restoration comedy . . . Congreve.* Restoration comedy is a general name applied to the plays acted in England between 1660, the year of the restoration of Charles II to the throne, and 1700, the year of the death of Dryden. This comedy is as remarkable for the brilliant wit of its dialogue as for its gross licentiousness. Perhaps the wittiest dramatist of the whole group was William Congreve (1670-1729).

Page 75. *Falstaff . . . Mercutio . . . Sir Toby . . . Cordelia . . . Protean.* Sir John Falstaff, who appears in Shakspeare's *King Henry IV*, and again in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, is generally regarded as the greatest comic character in literature . . . *Mercutio*, the friend of Romeo; one of the most marvellous of all Shakspeare's gentlemen. He is the Hotspur of comedy, and his taking off by Tybalt "eclipsed the gaiety of nations." . . . *Sir Toby Belch* is the genial character in *Twelfth Night*, fond of singing and drinking, but no fool withal. A conversation between Falstaff, Mercutio, and Sir Toby would have taxed even the resources of a Shakspeare, and would have been intolerably excellent. . . . *Cordelia*, the daughter of King Lear, whose sincerity and tenderness combined make her one of the greatest women in the history of poetry. . . . *Protean*, something that constantly assumes different forms. In mythology, Proteus was the son of Oceanus and Tethys, whose special power was his faculty for lightning changes.

"Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea."

—Wordsworth.

Page 76. *Note.* The article referred to appeared in the *Spectator* for 1 April 1882, and bore the title, *The*

*Restfulness of Talk.* The opening words of this article were as follows:—"The fine paper on 'Talk,' by 'R. L. S.,' in the *Cornhill* for April, a paper which a century since would, by itself, have made a literary reputation, does not cover the whole field."

Page 77. *Valhalla.* In Scandinavian mythology, this was the heaven for the brave who fell in battle. Here they had an eternity of fighting and drinking.

Page 79. *Meticulous.* Timid. From the Latin, *meticulosus*.

Page 80. *Kindly.* Here used in the old sense of "natural." Compare the Litany, "the kindly fruits of the earth."

Page 80. "*The real long-lived things.*" For Whitman, see our note on page 57.

Page 81. *Robert Hunter, Sheriff of Dumbarton.* Hunter recognised the genius in Stevenson long before the latter became known to the world, and gave him much friendly encouragement. Dumbarton is a town about 16 miles north-west of Glasgow, in Scotland. It contains a castle famous in history and in literature.

Page 81. *A novel by Miss Mather.* The name should be "Mathers." Helen Mathers (Mrs. Henry Reeves), born in 1853, has written a long series of novels, of which *My Lady Greensleeves*, *The Sin of Hagar* and *Venus Victrix* are perhaps as well-known as they deserve to be.

Page 81. *Chelsea.* Formerly a suburb, now a part of London, to the S. W. It is famous for its literary associations. Swift, Thomas Carlyle, Leigh Hunt, George Eliot, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and many other distinguished writers lived in Chelsea at various times. It contains a great hospital, to which Stevenson seems to refer here.

Page 81. *Webster, Jeremy Taylor, Burke.* John Webster was one of the Elizabethan dramatists, who, in felicity of diction, approached more nearly to Shakspeare than most of his contemporaries. His greatest play was *The Duchess of Malfi* (acted in 1616). Jeremy Taylor

(1613-1667), often called the "Shakspere of Divines," was one of the greatest pulpit orators in English history. His most famous work, still a classic, is *Holy Living and Holy Dying* (1650-1). Edmund Burke (1729-1797) the parliamentary orator and author of the *Sublime and Beautiful* (1756), whose speeches on America are only too familiar to American schoolboys.

Page 82. *Junius*. No one knows yet who "Junius" was. In the *Public Advertiser* from 21 Jan. 1769 to 21 Jan. 1772, appeared letters signed by this name, which made a sensation. The identity of the author was a favorite matter for dispute during many years.

Page 82. *David Hume*. The great Scotch skeptic and philosopher (1711-1776).

Page 828. *Shakespeare's fairy pieces with great scenic display*. So far from this being a novelty to-day, it has become rather nauseating, and there are evidences of a reaction in favour of *hearing* Shakspere on the stage rather than *seeing* him.

Page 83. *Calvinism*. If this word does not need a note yet, it certainly will before long. The founder of the theological system Calvinism was John Calvin, born in France in 1509. The chief doctrines are Predestination, the Atonement (by which the blood of Christ appeased the wrath of God toward those persons only who had been previously chosen for salvation—on all others the sacrifice was ineffectual), Original Sin, and the Perseverance of the Saints (once saved, one could not fall from grace). These doctrines remained intact in the creed of Presbyterian churches in America until a year or two ago.

Page 83. *Two bob*. A pun, for "bob" is slang for "shilling."

Page 83. *Never read Othello to an end*. In *A Gossip on a Novel of Dumas's*, Stevenson confessed that there were four plays of Shakspere he had never been able to read through, though for a different reason: they were *Richard III*, *Henry VI*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *All's Well*

*that Ends Well.* It is still an open question as to whether or not Shakspeare wrote *Titus*.

Page 84. *A liberal and pious education.* It was Sir Richard Steele who made the phrase, in *The Tatler*, No. 49: "to love her (Lady Elizabeth Hastings) was a liberal education."

Page 85. *Trait d'union.* The French expression simply means "hyphen": literally, "mark of connection."

Page 85. *Malvolio.* The conceited but not wholly contemptible character in *Twelfth Night*.

Page 85. *The Egoist.* *The Egoist* (1879) is one of the best-known novels of Mr. George Meredith, born 1828. It had been published only a very short time before Stevenson wrote this essay, so he is commenting on one of the "newest" books. Stevenson's enthusiasm for Meredith knew no bounds, and he regarded the *Egoist* and *Richard Feverel* (1859), as among the masterpieces of English literature. *Daniel Deronda*, the last and by no means the best novel of George Eliot (1820-1880), had appeared in 1876.