CONVERSATION.

The first sermon of a series of eight, delivered by Rev. A. A. Pfanstiehl, in Highland Park Presbyterian Church.

"And they talked together of all these things which had happened." (*Luke 24:14*)

The conversation of these two men on their way to Emmans became to them the most blessed revelation the world ever had, even that of the resurrected Saviour.

It is proposed this morning to consider the subject of "Conversation."

Much of life's comfort and welfare depends upon it. Rash language, impulsive speech, unguarded words—what a curse these have been and are in the world! On the other hand, pure conversation, lofty speech, worthy words—how inspiring, how blessed, how encouraging, how healing! "A new light falls upon our course from the inspiring conversation of a friend." Darkness, shadow, falls athwart our pathway when unworthy conversation is indulged in with companions.

1. Consider what our conversation should be.

It should be pure. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." There is, therefore, deep meaning, as well as strict justice, in these scripture statements. "By thy words thou shalt be justified; and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." (Matt. 12:27.) "For every idle word thou shalt be brought into judgment." Our words are but the outward expression, or the index of what we are. They are the hands of the clockwork within. Tell me what conversation a man delights in and I will tell you what his prevailing thoughts and desires are and what his heart is, *i. e.* what the man is. "As a man thinketh so is he," and largely as a man converseth so he thinketh. Think purely and you will be pure, and talk purely. And shouldn't we? "Immodest words admit of no defence."

Many a soul has been irretrievably ruined because his companions dragged him into the slums of impure conversation. Especially dangerous is this in the presence of children. It has been well said that purity of speech is as much to purity of action as kind and gentle speech is to peace and good will.

"O, many a shaft at random sent,
Finds mark the archer little meant;
And many a word at random spoken,
May sooth or wound a heart that's broken."

2. Our conversation should be considerate.

"Words are like leaves; and where they most abound,
Much fruit of sense is rarely found."

Let me ask this question particularly of those young people who laudibly aspire sometime to be of influence in a community, and who hope to fill places of trust and leadership: "Whose language is heeded in a community? Whose words are received with confidence and are taken as the language that forms the judgment of people? The loud declaimers, the wordy persons, who delight to run about and hastily form and freely express an opinion on any and every question of family, municipal, national or international interest? or from th se who sit on store boxes and whittle and talk and talk and whittle? who in the excitable times of Philip II. of Spain was looked upon and chosen as the standard-bearer of the party who desired to free ther elves from the despotism of a autocrat, as well as from the superstition of a fanatic, and forever secure to the world religious toleration and true civil liberty? The noisy talker on street corne and in convivial clubs? No: t was the Prince of Orange, e who, because he was always considerate in what he said was called William, the Silent.

Stillest streams oft water fairest meadows, and the bird that flutters least is longest on the wing."

This naturally leads me to speak a word on the subject of gossip. Gossip! What a disgusting word! It breathes of the nether world. Gossip! Well named. It sips the life out of all that is worthy and true and great. Wherever a gossip goes "at every word a reputation dies!" Dr. Talmage was scarcely extravagant when he said: "The most loathsome, miserable, God-forsaken wretch on earth is a gossip. I can tell her in the street though I have never seen her before. She walks fast and has her bonnet strings loose, for she had not had time to tie them since she heard that last scandal. She looks both ways as she passes, hoping to see new evidences of disparity in the windows. I think that when Satan has a job so infinitely mean that in all the pit he cannot find a devil mean enough to do it, and all bribes and threats have failed to get one willing to undertake the infidel crusade, he says to one of his sergeants: "Go up to earth, get that gossiping woman and she will be glad to do it!"

But it is not always a woman who gossips. Alas! alas! many a financial ruin of firms that otherwise would have rolled through safely have resulted from the hellish whisperings of officious business men—whispers reeking with destructive, blighting insinuations, as deadly as the simoons that sweep over the desert. The Lord deliver us from gossiping conversation.

3. Conversation should be elevating.

Oh, that people would study to say things worth saying, and say them in a proper, elevating way. Nor does this mean that there should not be vivacity, sprightliness in our talk, a lymereal tone; no, but it means a form of extravagance in speech that is as meaningless as it is weak and disgusting,—a profuse use of adverbs. Perhaps the temptation to this is stronger in young ladies than among any other class; at all events it is noticed more among them. What a weakness it indicates in any woman to assume a swaggering independent "I don't care" air, freely using such phrases as "My goodness,"—"Goodness gracious" and everything is "Awfully nice," and "Awfully stupid" and "Awfully awful." A sensible business man cured his children of such senseless habits of speech in his way: One evening he came home with a budget of news. An acquaintance had failed in business. He spoke of the incident as "deliciously sad." He had ridden up town with a noted wit, whom he described as "horribly entertaining," and to cap the climax he spoke of the butter which had been served before him at a country hotel as "divinely rancid." The young people started, and the oldest daughter said: "Why, papa, I should think you were out of your head." "Not in the least, my dear," he said pleasantly. "I'm merely trying to follow the fashion. I have worked out 'divinely rancid' with a good deal of labor. It seems to me rather more effective than awfully sweet. I mean to keep up with the rest of you hereafter, and now, he continued, let me help you to a piece of this exquisitely tough beef." Slang was banished from that house by common consent.

In this age of good books and floods of religious papers, and great reviews, and excellent magazines and circulating libraries so that the poorest can become informed on all subjects, there is no excuse for dirth of worthy ideas in our conversation. What is more, there would not be if good literature were bought and read, rather than the low, trashy stuff with which the markets are flooded. I have in my study a table that gives the proportionate amount of news space devoted by fourteen leading, representative daily newspapers of New York, Boston, Cincinnati, Chicago, St. Louis and New Orleans various kinds of reading. "In making up the table, the compiler, the space in the six dailies was measured up for days, the Boston, Cincinnati, St. Louis and New Orleans dailies for four days each, the Chicago dailies for two days. The Sunday edition, except three cases, were included in examination. Now what is the result? This: These papers give twice the space to crime, sports, matches, and "sports" than they give to temperance, art, education, religion and science all combined. Who is to blame for this? The editors? Neither. It is because there is a demand for such reading—sells more readily than any other reading, yea, and it "sells" a precious, innocent, impressionable young soul to crime and death.

Take another table of reading equally as interesting and instructive: A classified list of books published in this country during a given year in recent years, showing the fact that during the year 422 books of fiction were published, while only 437 books relating to law and only 351 books of theology and religion, 283 books of education and language, 253 in history and miscellanies, 225 books of poetry and the drama, 201 in biography and memoirs, 187 in description and travel—so that out of the 2,000 books published in our country in all departments of reading there were more in fiction and largely dime sensational and evanescent fiction—What does this indicate? True, fiction often is an impressing truth; but it is only a condiment and is used as such. And no mind and heart and character can be built up strong and healthy by feeding on condiments, anymore than can the body thus grow strong. To build up an intelligent, virtual people, who alone are capable of being a free and democratic people, there must be sound, helpful, uplifting reading done by them. Scotland gave the halo of greatness of character to the people of Scotland, three centuries ago that has never died out? It was because they read strong books, especially the Bible, the children all being "taught to read, if taught nothing more, that they might at any rate be able to read the Bible—the Word of God. Almost all the peasantry in Europe and Scottish peasantry, as a body, could do this, and often by fireside and wayside, reasoned high of providence, foreknowledge, will and fate, fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute." People whose conversation took such turns could not but grow up to be great in character.

But again, our conversation should be God-glorifying. Nor is this meant pious cant; weak religious sentiment; funereal topics; talked in undertaker's tones; but what is meant, cheerful, hearty, courage that lifts the soul heavenward and awakens a desire to be and live better to the glory of God in the doing of good. 'Tis a sad thing that when such conversation is entered into it is often mistaken for pious twaddle, so uncommon is it. And yet nothing is more becoming than that, not in pious monotones, not in sentimentalism, but as worthy beings created by the most high in His image and for an eternity of blessedness in an exalted and glorified being in heaven, they should amid their pleasures, at least be serious in their conversation. The strange developments in contemporary history, the intense strain in which mankind finds itself, the critical nature of this age, the great necessity for worthy and true and strongly developed characters, if the future is to be all that it can and promises to be, imperatively demand that most careful attention be paid to develop in the young serious and noble conceptions and thoughts, so that they will nobly and worthily and heroically be a help to our churches and to all that makes for temperance, for purity, for holiness in character and living, and thus save the world to God. What saved the Jewish people of old from the general ruin of nations that rose and fell all around them, while they were not consumed, but grew in numbers and especially in strength of national character,—a strength that has not waned to this day. Here is the secret: (Read Deut. 6:3-9.) Faithful compliance with this made them the custodians of the knowledge of the true God and made them the people who perpetuated the religion of Jehovah, and brought forth the Savior of the world, while other nations, some richer in money, many greater in numbers, and nearly all more extensive in area by far than they, were consumed, and lie wrecks of warning along the shores of Time. Any people who in their homes, in their society, in their business, in their government, if you please, will honor God, will be honored of Him. And this leads us to speak of the blessedness of good conversation. By it dark passions have been lit up with light of life and love and purity, and good will that saved from ruin and the doing of much harm. Impulses for good lying latent in the heart, have by it, been started into life, to the glory of God and the blessings of mankind. Inspirations have by it been given, and aspirations awakened that have led to the execution of noble deeds, which would never have been done but for it.

"Oft times a word or kindly deed,
Bestowed upon some soul in need,
Some soul where love is never guest,
Transforms the heart by hate oppress'd
Till flowers the noisome weeds succeed."

It is said that frogs will cease croaking when a light is brought near them; so a holy conversation hangs, as it were, a padlock on profane lips." It may be said with truth of any earnest, pious, God-fearing person who is careful and considerate and pure and earnest and God-glorifying in all his walk and conversation, what Goldsmith said of the village preacher:

"Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway,
And fools who came to scoff remained to pray."

There is no power on earth, save the power of the Holy Spirit, that is able more effectually to close the mouths of scoffers, of infidels, of blasphemers, than the earnest, honest, courageous, godly conversation of a true Christian. The words of hypocrits have no weight, pious talk without a truly godly heart out of which it flows, amounts to little; but the words of a true man of God have power to soften men's hearts and draw them to truth and God. A benign, holy influence accompanies such where'er he goes; his pathway through life is marked with sweet memories left behind to encourage and bless many burdened hearts, aye, the influence of his words and life live on and on long after his place on earth shall know him no more.

"He liveth long who liveth well,
All else is life but fling away,
He liveth longest who can tell
Of true things truly done each day;
Then fill each hour with what will last,
Bay up the moments as they go;
The life above when this is past
Is the ripe fruit of life below.

Good Logic.

This from our esteemed contemporary, the Chicago Chronicle, is sound logic. Is the Chronicle a Prohibition sheet as well as for sound money and a reformed Democracy? It looks like it sure.

"There is just now a mighty hullabaloo in this town about saloons. Which is humbug and hypocrisy. The city derives a great portion of its income from saloon licenses. If the people of Chicago disapprove of saloons let them refuse to license those institutions and go down into their pockets and make up the dificiency in revenue that will follow. But so long as the municipality accepts money from saloons it is rank pharisaism to exclaim against them. Let us be honest in these matters."

The monthly musical vesper services at the Presbyterian church are a great success. Last Sabbath the church was full to overflowing with people, and a most inspiring and beautiful musical service was rendered. Mrs. Charles Everett, the chorister of the church, ably assisted by the choir, deserves the thanks of the community for the rare treats in music they give us. They find an invaluable help in Mrs. Nettie Jones and son, George.

Mrs. William Eddy and litttle son, of Des Moines, Iowa, and Mr. H. K. Bender, of Minneapolis, Minn. are visiting at the home of their sister, Mrs. S. Levin.

The subject of the sermon at the Presbyterian church next Sabbath morning will be "Woman's Part in the Formation of a Nation's Character."

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