

**OUR  
CONVERSATIONAL  
CIRCLE**

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Our conversational circle by Agnes H. Morton & Hamilton W. Mabie

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**AGNES H. MORTON & HAMILTON W. MABIE**

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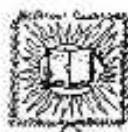


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BY  
AGNES H. MORTON

WITH INTRODUCTION BY  
HAMILTON W. MABIE



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1898

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DEDICATED

TO THE MEMORY OF

JOHN P. GROSS, A. M., PH. D.,

most merciless of critics and most patient of mentors, sternest preceptor and gentlest exemplar, most generous foe and most candid friend.

For the effective inspiration derived from his tactful demonstration of conversational ethics, for the potent social influence of his refined personality, and for the harvest in this particular field of thought which has largely sprung from seed-grain of his sowing, I reverently pay him this humble tribute "after many days."



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## A WORD OF INTRODUCTION

THE world which cares for such matters has been told so often that conversation is one of the lost arts that it has come to be taken for granted that this highest form of social expression must find its place, with chain armor and Watteau's shepherdesses, among the things of the past. Essayists have hinted in many unmistakable ways that the generation which now dines and talks has parted with one of those finer resources which gave the society of a more fortunate time a charm which still imparts to certain memoirs and letters a delicate perfume.

Out of all this melancholy discussion one hopeful conclusion has emerged — the conclusion that conversation is an art. If it were a gift of nature, or a subtle distillation of moods and conditions, like the

singing faculty among the English poets of the days of Queen Elizabeth, we might well despair of recovering a resource which once invested the intercourse of men and women with such interest and charm. A mood which has vanished cannot be recalled; but an art which has fallen into disuse may be practised again, if there are those who are willing to submit to the discipline of its training. Dogberry was of opinion that reading and writing come by nature; talking of the best kind certainly comes by taking thought. The writing that comes by nature is so constantly and insistently with us, that we are almost persuaded at times to agree with Dogberry. In our better moments, however, we regain sanity, and understand that writing comes by practice; because every kind of skill is the result of some kind of education.

Good talking never comes by nature; it demands too much, not only of the intelligence, but of those finer perceptions which are made sensitive and keen only by habitual breathing in of the social atmosphere and habitual insight into the

temperament and thought of others. A strong personality has, as a rule, the gift of talk; but one must have a fine personality to converse well. Talking may be distinctly antisocial in its temper. Sydney Smith laid his finger on this quality in one of the most instructive talkers of his time when he called Macaulay an engine of social oppression. A master of conversation, on the other hand, always draws men together by bringing into consciousness the things which they hold in common, and by evoking from each his individual quality. Nothing unites a man so closely with his fellows as the feeling that he is giving them the best there is in him.

The art of conversation involves intelligence and that grace of heart which is sometimes called tact. Commonplace people do not converse, though they often talk. It is significant that the masters of familiar speech of whom lovers of English literature have heard most were all men of superior intellect and superior culture—Shakspeare, Jonson, Addison, Johnson, Lamb, Carlyle, Burns. The women who created the tradition of wise, witty, and