

AMENITIES OF SOCIAL LIFE

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Amenities of Social Life by Edward Bennett

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EDWARD BENNETT

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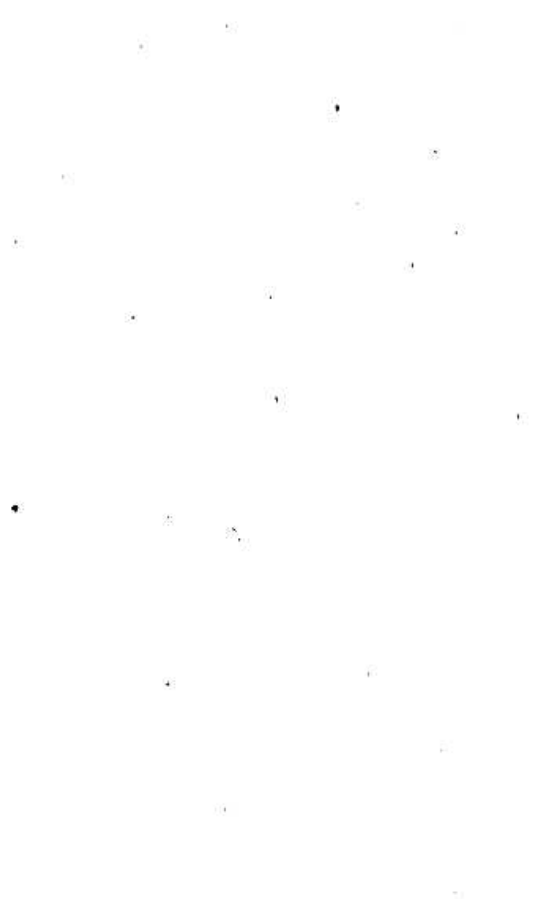
BY
EDWARD BENNETT.

"And whereas in this our time, the minds of men are so diverse, that some think it a great matter of conscience to depart from a piece of the least of their ceremonies, they be so addicted to their old customs: and again on the other side some be so new-fangled that they would innovate all things, and so despise the old, that nothing can like them, but that is new: it was thought expedient, not so much to have respect how to please and satisfy either of these parties, as how to please God, and profit them both."—*Book of Common Prayer*

LONDON:
ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW.
1887.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
THE ART OF CONVERSATION.	I
THE PLAGUE OF BOOKS.	37
LETTERS AND LETTER WRITING	64
THE MISERIES OF A NERVOUS DISPOSITION.	94
SINGLE BLESSEDNESS	118
DOMESTIC QUARRELS	144
THE HERETICS OF SOCIETY	174
A FAMILY PORTRAIT	203





THE ART OF CONVERSATION.

IT is a very old and hackneyed observation that human nature is much the same in every age and country. But old as is the saying, and black as is the crime of the man who opens a paper with a wearisome repetition of it, there is, in all our hearts an evident disinclination to realise the profound truth embodied in the words. As children of the nineteenth century, we very properly and consistently question the truth of the saying, simply because it has hitherto been unquestioned, and as sharers in the unparalleled glories of our age, we naturally refuse to admit anything which may have the effect of placing us more on an equality with the poor unfortunates who travelled at a rate not exceeding eight miles

an hour, and who had never read Mr. Herbert Spencer.

None the less, there are still, scattered about in this unexampled age and country, a few old stagers, with whom the present writer has much in common, who have a lingering affection for the old books, and the old ways, and who have at times a nasty and vicious habit of unearthing from the records of the past certain plain unvarnished facts, which either convict our century of plagiarism, or else go far to substantiate the accuracy of the saying we have quoted. Take for instance this all important matter of conversation. Just as, perhaps, we are drawing up an imaginary line of distinction between ourselves and those who lived previous to the year of grace 1837, a book of the ancient world is put into our hands and we read sentences like these: "He that repeateth a matter separateth very friends," and "Even a fool when he holdeth his peace is counted wise." Immediately we are shaking hands across the ages with men and women, who, whatever their shortcomings in locomotion

might have been, had certainly kindred social sufferings with our own.

Or we open the pages of that most charming of the works of its kind, *The Thoughts of Marcus Aurelius*, and we hear from his own lips what, in the opinion of a man of culture of the second century, were the social plagues of that age. Listen to these exquisite confessions.

"From my governor I learned . . . to want little, and to work with my own hands, and not to meddle with other people's affairs, and not to be ready to listen to slander. From Rusticus I received the impression that my character required improvement, and discipline, and from him I learned not to be led astray to sophistic emulations, nor to writing on speculative matters, nor to delivering little hortatory orations, nor to showing myself off as a man who practises much discipline, or does benevolent acts in order to make a display, and to abstain from rhetoric, and poetry, and fine writing, and not to walk about in the house in my outdoor dress, nor to do other things of the kind, and to write my letters with simplicity like the letters which Rusticus wrote from Sinuessa to my mother, to read carefully, and not to be satisfied with a superficial knowledge of a book, nor hastily to give my assent to those *who talk overmuch.*"

True it is that we possess the electric telegraph, and the spiritual consolations which may be supposed to proceed from a vivid realisation of the great Darwinian doctrine of the Descent of Man, but are we one whit nearer losing the social plagues from which by his education the Roman Emperor was so mercifully delivered? Oh, men and maidens of the Jubilee Year of Queen Victoria, where are your vaunted progress and culture if you have to confess that the language of the nineteenth, and the language of the second century with regard to our social life are practically identical? Can we not in our own circles find the duplicates to the Roman Emperor's awful examples? Is the scandal-monger unknown to us? is the sophistical rhetorician a being of a past age? Again, have we not in our midst the man who writes poetry? while the continued and permitted existence of Arch-deacon Farrar and Mr. Swinburne are alone sufficient to prove that fine writing is in as flourishing a condition as ever.

Or better still, we take up our old friend