OF GARRULITY, OR TALKATIVENESS.

1. It is a troublesome and difficult task that philosophy undertakes in going about to cure the disease, or rather itch, of intemperate prating. For that words, which are the sole remedy against it, require attention; but they who are given to prate will hear nobody, as being a sort of people that love to be always talking themselves. So that the principal vice of loquacious persons is this, that their ears are stopped to every thing else but their own impertinencies; which I take to be a wilful deafness in men, controlling and contradicting Nature, that has given us two ears, though but one tongue. Therefore it was that Euripides spoke very right to a certain stupid hearer of his:

> Impossible it is to fill that brain,
> That in a moment lets out all again;
> 'Tis but the words of wisdom to unfold
> Unto a fool, whose skull will nothing hold.*

More justly and truly might I say to an idle prate-too-fast, or rather concerning such a fellow:

> In vain I seek to fill thy sieve-like brain,
> That in a moment lets out all again;
> Infusing wisdom into such a skull
> As leaks so fast, it never will be full.

Much more may he be said to spill his instructions over (rather than pour them into) a man, who is always talking to those that do not hear, and never hears when others

* Euripides, Frag. 891.

talk. For so soon as a wise man has uttered any thing, be it never so short, garrulity swallows it forthwith like the sea, and throws it up again threefold, with the violence of a swelling tide. Such was the portico at Olympia, called Heptaphonos, by the reverberation of one single voice causing no less than seven distinct echoes. And in like manner, if the least word light into the ears of an impertinent babbler, presently all the room rings with it, and he makes such a din,

> That soon the jangling noise untunes the strings
> Of minds sedately fixt on better things.

Insomuch that we may say, that the conduits and conveyances of their hearing reach not to the souls, but only to their tongues. Therefore it is that other people retain what is spoken to them; whereas, whatever is said to talkative people runs through them as through a cullender; and then they run about from place to place, like empty vessels void of sense or wit, but making a hideous noise.

2. However, in hopes that there is yet some room left to try an experiment for the cure of this distemper, let us begin with this golden sentence to the impertinent prater:

> Be silent, boy, and thou wilt find i' th' end,
> What benefits on silent lips attend.*

Among these benefits two of the first and chiefest are to hear and to be heard. To neither of which can these talkative companions ever attain; so unhappy they are still to meet with disappointments, though they desire a thing never so much. For as for those other distempers of the soul, such as avarice, ambition, and exorbitant love of pleasure, they have this happiness, to enjoy what they so eagerly covet. But this is that which most afflicts these idle prattlers, that being desirous of nothing more than of company that will hear them prate, they can never meet with it, in regard that all men avoid their society; and

* From the Aleadae of Sophocles, Frag. 79.

whether sitting in a knot together or walking, so soon as they behold a prattler advancing towards them, they presently give warning to each other and adjourn to another place. And as, when there happens a deep silence in any assembly, so that all the company seems to be mute, we say that Mercury is got among them; so when a fool, full of noise and talk, enters into any room where friends and acquaintance are met to discourse or else to feast and be merry, all people are hushed of a sudden, as afraid of giving him any occasion to set his tongue upon the career. But if he once begin to open his mouth, up they rise and away they trip, like seamen foreseeing a sudden storm and rolling of the waves, when they hear "the north wind begin to whistle from some adjoining promontory," and hastening into harbor. Whence it comes to pass, that he never can meet with any that are willing either to eat or drink or lodge with him in the same room, either upon the road or upon a voyage, unless constrained thereto by necessity. For so importunate he is in all places, that sometimes he will pull you by the coat, sometimes by the beard, and sometimes be hunching your sides, to make you speak. How highly then are to be prized a swift pair of legs, according to the saying of Archilochus! Nay, by Jove, it was the opinion of wise Aristotle himself. For he being perplexed with an egregious prater, and tired out with his absurd stories and idle repetitions of, "And is not this a wonderful thing, Aristotle?" — No wonder at all, said he, is this; but if a man should stand still to hear you prate thus, who had legs to run away, that were a wonder indeed. To another of the same stamp that, after a long tale of a roasted horse, excused himself by saying that he was afraid he had tired him with his prolixity; No, upon my word, quoth the philosopher, for I never minded what you said. On the other side, should it so fall out that there was no avoiding the vexation of one of these chattering fops, Na-

ture has afforded us this happiness, that it is in the power of the soul to lend the outward ears of the body, to endure the brunt of the noise, while she retires to the remoter apartments of the mind, and there employs herself in better and more useful thoughts. By which means those sonorous babblers are at the same time disappointed, as well of auditors, as of people that believe what they say. All men look upon their vain babbling with the same opinion that they have of the seed of people insatiably addicted to the use of women; for as the one is barren and useless for generation, so is the other void of the end of discourse, altogether frivolous and impertinent.

3. And yet there is no member of human bodies that Nature has so strongly enclosed within a double fortification, as the tongue, entrenched within with a barricado of sharp teeth, to the end that, if it refuses to obey and keep silent when reason "presses the glittering reins" within, we should fix our teeth in it till the blood comes, rather than suffer the inordinate and unseasonable din. For, according to the saying of Euripides,

> Our miseries do not spring
> From houses wanting locks or bolts,
> But from unbridled tongues,
> Ill used by prating fools and dolts.

And truly, I must tell you, that they who think that houses without doors, and purses without strings, are of no use to their masters, yet at the same time set neither fence nor door before their lips, but suffer a continual torrent of vain and idle discourse to flow through them, like the perpetual flux of water through the mouth of the Pontic sea, seem to me to have the least esteem for human speech of all men in the world. Whence it comes to pass that they never gain belief, which is the end of all discourse. For the main scope and intention of all men that speak is to

* See Eurip. Bacchae, 385.

gain a belief of what they utter with those that hear them; whereas talkative noise-makers are never believed, let them speak never so much truth. For as wheat, when crowded into a musty vessel, is found to exceed in measure, but to be unwholesome for use; so the discourse of a loquacious person swells and enlarges itself with lies and falsehood, but in the mean time it loses all force of persuasion.

4. Then again, there is no man of modesty and civility but would be careful of preserving himself from drunkenness. For anger, as some are of opinion, is the next neighbor to madness, while drunkenness doth dwell in the very same house with it; or rather, drunkenness is madness itself, inferior to it in continuance of time, yet far exceeding it as it is voluntary, since it is a madness of our own choice. Now there is nothing for which drunkenness is so much abominated and decried, as for that it is the cause of inordinate and unlimited babbling and prating.

> Heated with wine, the man at other times
> Both wise and grave sings loose and wanton rhymes;
> He minds not loud indecent laughter then,
> Nor mimic dancing, scorned by sober men.*

And yet both singing, laughing, and dancing are all but trifles to that which follows, the consequences of which are oft-times fatal:

> He blurts those secrets forth, which once revealed,
> Too late he wishes they had been concealed.

This is that which oftentimes proves dangerous, if not terrible, to the discoverer. And who knows but that the poet might here design to resolve a question much disputed among philosophers, — that is to say, what the difference is between being tipsy and stark drunk, — by attributing to the former only mirth and jollity of humor,

* See Odyss. XIV. 464.

but branding the latter with the foul reproach of noxious babbling? For, according to the proverb,

> What the sober heart conceals,
> That the drunken heart reveals.

Wherefore it is reported of Bias, that sitting very silent at a compotation, drinking only when it came to his turn, and being laughed at by one whose tongue ran at random, who for his silence called him mope and fool, he made this reply: Find me out that fool, said he, that e'er could hold his tongue in his cups.

A citizen of Athens, having invited the king of Persia's ambassadors to a magnificent feast, at their request gave the same invitation to the most eminent philosophers in the city, to bear them company. Now, when all the rest were propounding of themes, and raising arguments pro and con, and others were maintaining of paradoxes to show their wit and learning, only Zeno sat still, so reserved and mute that the ambassadors took notice of it; and thereupon, after they thought they had opened his heart with two or three lusty brimmers, Pray tell us, Zeno, said they, what report we shall make concerning thee to our master? To whom Zeno: Nothing more, said he, but that there was an old man at Athens that could hold his tongue in the midst of his cups. Such profound and divine mysterious virtues are silence and sobriety; whereas drunkenness is loquacious, void of reason and understanding, and therefore full of jangling and impertinent tautologies. Wherefore the philosophers, when they come to define drunkenness, call it "vain talk over wine." So that drinking is not condemned, provided a man keep himself within the bounds of silence; only vain and silly discourse makes wine-bibbing to be drunkenness. He then that is drunk talks idly over his wine; but the babbler does it everywhere, — in the market-place, at the theatre, in the public walks, as well by night as by day. If he be a physician,

certainly he is more troublesome than the disease; if your companion in a voyage, more insupportable than the qualms occasioned by the tumbling of the sea. If he praise thee, his panegyric is more offensive than the reproaches of another. It is a greater pleasure to converse with vicious men, so they be discreet in their language, than with twaddlers, though never so honest. Therefore Nestor in Sophocles, desirous to appease exasperated Ajax, mildly thus rebuked him:

> I blame thee not, for though thy words are ill,
> Thy deeds bespeak thee brave and valiant still.*

But there is not the same excuse to be made for a vain babbling fellow; for the ill government of his tongue corrupts and vitiates all the merits of his actions.

5. Lysias had given to a certain accused criminal an oration of his own writing. He, having read it several times over, came to Lysias very much dejected, and told him that, upon his first perusal of it, it seemed to him to be a most admirable piece; but after he had read it three or four times over, he could see nothing in it but what was very dull and insipid. To whom Lysias, smiling: What, said he, is not once enough to speak it before the judges? And yet do but consider the persuasive eloquence and grace that is in Lysias's writing, and then I may be bold to affirm,

> That no man living e'er was favored more
> By sacred Muse that violet garlands wore.

Certain it is that, of all the commendations that were ever given to Homer, this is the truest, that he alone avoided being irksome to his readers, as one that was always new and still flourishing, as it were in the prime of poetic beauty. And yet in speaking thus of himself,

> I hate vain repetitions, fondly made,
> Of what has been already plainly said,†

* From Sophocles Frag. 770. † Odyss. XII. 452.

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