A TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION.

I CONSIDER that a conversation by telephone — when you are simply sitting by and not taking any part in that conversation — is one of the solemnest curiosities of this modern life. Yesterday I was writing a deep article on a sublime philosophical subject while such a conversation was going on in the room. I notice that one can always write best when somebody is talking through a telephone close by. Well, the thing began in this way. A member of our household came in and asked me to have our house put into communication with Mr. Bagley's, downtown. I have observed, in many cities, that the sex always shrink from calling up the central office themselves. I don't know why, but they do. So I touched the bell, and this talk ensued: —

Central Office. [Gruffly.] Hello!
I. Is it the Central Office?
C. O. Of course it is. What do you want?
I. Will you switch me on to the Bagleys, please?
C. O. All right. Just keep your ear to the telephone.

Then I heard, k-look, k-look, k'look — klook-klook-klook-klook-look! Then a horrible "gritting" of teeth, and finally a piping female voice: Y-e-s? [Rising inflection.] Did you wish to speak to me?"

Without answering, I handed the telephone to the applicant, and sat down. Then followed that queerest of all the queer things in this world, — a conversation with only one end to it. You hear questions asked; you don't hear the answer. You hear invitations given; you hear no thanks in return. You have listening pauses of dead silence, followed by apparently irrelevant and unjustifiable exclamations of glad surprise, or sorrow, or dismay. You can't make head or tail of the talk, because you never hear anything that the person at the other end of the wire says. Well, I heard the following remarkable series of observations, all from the one tongue, and all shouted,—for you can't ever persuade the sex to speak gently into a telephone:

Yes? Why, how did that happen?
Pause.
What did you say?
Pause.
Oh, no, I don't think it was.
Pause.
No! Oh, no, I did n't mean that. I meant, put it in while it is still boiling, — or just before it comes to a boil.
Pause.
What?
Pause.
I turned it over with a back stitch on the selvage edge.
Pause.
Yes, I like that way, too; but I think it's better to baste it on with Valenciennes or bombazine, or something of that sort. It gives it such an air,—and attracts so much notice.

Pause.

It's forty-ninth Deuteronomy, sixty-fourth to ninety-seventh inclusive. I think we ought all to read it often.

Pause.
Perhaps so; I generally use a hair-pin.
Pause.
What did you say? [Aside] Children, do be quiet!
Pause.
Oh! B flat! Dear me, I thought you said it was the cat!
Pause.
Since when?
Pause.
Why, I never heard of it.
Pause.
You astound me! It seems utterly impossible!
Pause.
Who did?
Pause.
Good-ness gracious!
Pause.
Well, what is this world coming to?
Was it right in church?
Pause.
And was her mother there?
Pause.
Why, Mrs. Bagley, I should have died of humiliation! What did they do?
Long pause.
I can't be perfectly sure, because I have n't the notes by me; but I think it goes something like this: te-rolly-loll-loll, loll lolly-loll-loll, O tolly-loll-loll-lee-ly-li-i-do! And then repeat, you know.

Pause.
Yes, I think it is very sweet,—and very solemn and impressive, if you get the andantino and the pianissimo right.
Pause.
Oh, gum-drops, gum-drops! But I never allow them to eat striped candy. And of course they can't, till they get their teeth, any way.
Elihu Vedder’s Pictures.

Elihu Vedder’s Pictures.

There is as much difference between painting for painting’s sake and the use of brush and colors to express some idea as there is between constructing verses for the perfection of the rhythm and writing poetry in order to convey in the noblest manner some sentiment worth the utterance. It is from the marked absence of any expression of ideas in most modern works of art that our picture exhibitions are such barren and desolate wastes of colored canvases. With all the monotony of subject found in a collection of old masters, with the endless succession of holy families and saints and martyrs, there is enough earnestness of purpose and sincerity of expression to give to these worn-out stories a kind of human interest which rarely flags, even though the eye be wearied by the repetition of compositions on the same theme. In the present stage of art there is a reaction against the idealism of the past, and the demand is for execution; for a degree of technical skill which few of the old masters attained, and which for the last two centuries has never been equaled. The natural result of this reaction is a poverty of ideas in painting; not that there are fewer subjects at the command of the artist than in the days when the Bible was his sole inspiration, but because he is preoccupied with the use of his material, and finds that after he has gained satisfactory skill both the demands of the public and his own ac-

Oh, not in the least, — go right on. He’s here writing, — it does n’t bother him.

Pause.

Very well, I’ll come if I can. [Aside.] Dear me, how it does tire a person’s arm to hold this thing up so long! I wish she’d —

Pause.

Oh, no, not at all; I like to talk, — but I’m afraid I’m keeping you from your affairs.

Pause.

Visitors? Pause.

No, we never use butter on them.

Pause.

Yes, that is a very good way; but all the cook-books say they are very un-healthy when they are out of season. And he does n’t like them, any way, — especially canned.

Pause.

Oh, I think that is too high for them; we have never paid over fifty cents a bunch.

Pause.

Must you go? Well, good-by.

Pause.

Yes, I think so. Good-by.

Pause.

Four o’clock, then — I’ll be ready.

Good-by.

Pause.

Thank you ever so much. Good-by.

Pause.

Oh, not at all! — just as fresh — Which? Oh, I’m glad to hear you say that. Good-by.

[Hangs up the telephone and says, “Oh, it does tire a person’s arm so!”] A man delivers a single brutal “Good-by,” and that is the end of it. Not so with the gentle sex. — I say it in their praise; they cannot abide abrupt-ness.

Mark Twain.