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CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH.

To write in a foreign language correctly is one thing, to speak it well is another. In English, more than in most European languages, there is a considerable gulf between the written, literary and the spoken, colloquial, word; it could almost be said that there are two, if not different, certainly distinct, languages. The student who has learnt his English from text-books and who has been denied the opportunity of a prolonged visit to England may be bewildered and embarrassed when on meeting English people for the first time he discovers that the language he hears spoken is not the one he has learned so laboriously.

The proper knowledge of a language implies passing the fourfold test of speaking, understanding, reading and writing. The last two can be got from books, but few guide-books exist to help the student learn colloquial, spoken, English.

An English Professor, W. J. Ball, M.A. (Oxon), an expert in the matter with experience in teaching continental students, has set himself the task of solving the problem. With this object in view he has written a book: "CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH", an analysis of contemporary spoken English for foreign students, with exercises, published by Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., 6 & 7, Clifford Street, W.1 at the price of 7/6 nett.

The subject is a vast one. The potential vocabulary of a highly educated Englishman is estimated at 80,000 words, Sir Winston Churchill is credited with 25,000 to 30,000 but the majority of people use no more than some 4,000 to 5,000 in their daily conversation. The Queen's English, as spoken by people of average intelligence and education is clear, fluid, flexible and rich in metaphors and analogies. It is direct and forceful, its backbone is the verb and its main characteristic the monosyllable. Much of it is difficult of literal translation and the meaning of many words can only be got from a context. One of the most useful forms of English syntax is the

"gerund", or verbal noun: "Walking, fishing, coming etc.". The habit of understatement, a national trait, comes out in conversation, but so does also unintentional exaggeration as when people say "I was literally frozen" or "I'm most frightfully sorry".

All this, and a great deal more, is woven into this fascinating handbook. The last hundred pages (the book has 284 pages) consist of exercises and test papers some of which might serve as an entertaining party-game. One of them shows the many uses to which the little word "Well" can be put, each having a different meaning according to context and intonation.

Slang, clichés, idioms, the entire wealth of the spoken language are dealt with. Not only the student, but also the acclimatized member of a foreign colony in England will find the reading of this remarkable work interesting and rewarding.

J.J.F.S.

Nouvelle Société Helvétique (LONDON GROUP)

on Tuesday, February 16th, 1954, at 7 p.m.
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