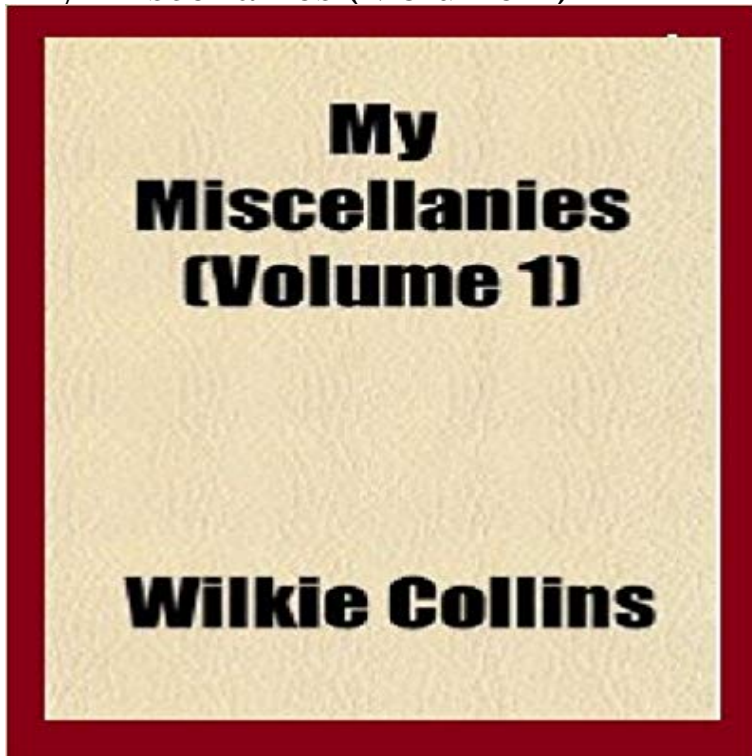


My Miscellanies (Volume 1)



MY MISCELLANIES. SKETCHES OF CHARACTER. I. TALK-STOPPERS. We hear a great deal of lamentation now-a-days, proceeding mostly from elderly people, on the decline of the Art of Conversation among us. Old ladies and gentlemen with vivid recollections of the charms of society fifty years ago, are constantly asking each other why the great talkers of their youthful days have found no successors in this inferior present time. Where they inquire mournfully where are the illustrious men and women gifted with a capacity for perpetual outpouring from the tongue, who used to keep enraptured audiences deluged in a flow of eloquent monologue for hours together? Where are the solo talkers, in this degenerate age of nothing but choral conversation? The solo talkers have vanished. Nothing but the tradition of them remains, imperfectly preserved in books for the benefit of an ungrateful posterity, which reviles their surviving contemporaries, and would perhaps even have reviled the illustrious creatures themselves as Bores. If they could rise from the dead, and wag their unresting tongues among us now, would they win their reputations anew, just as easily as ever? Would they even get listeners? Would they be actually allowed to talk? I venture to say, decidedly not. They would surely be interrupted and contradicted; they would have their nearest neighbours at the dinner-table talking across them; they would find impatient people opposite, dropping things noisily, and ostentatiously picking them up; they would hear confidential whispering, and perpetual fidgeting in distant corners, before they had got through their first half-dozen of eloquent opening sentences. Nothing appears to me so wonderful as that none of these interruptions (if we are to believe report) should ever have occurred in the good old times of the great talkers. I read long biographies of that large class of

illustrious individuals whose fame is confined to the select circle of their own acquaintance, and I find that they were to a man, whatever other differences may have existed between them, all delightful talkers. I am informed that they held forth enrapturingly for hours together, at all times and seasons, and that I, the gentle, constant, and patient reader, am one of the most unfortunate and pitiable of

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