Conversation as an educator.

Much pleasant and profitable reading is to be found in Mr. Robert Waters's "Culture by Conversation" (Dodd). Its twenty chapters, with supplemental "table-talk notes" and other miscellanies, give the subject a thorough treatment, both theory and practice (rules and illustrations) having generous space accorded them. The author is evidently in love with his subject, and his enthusiasm is contagious. One can even forgive an occasional affront offered to books, and such extreme statements as that "the study of books for a specific purpose never yet formed the mind of any man," so pleasantly and convincingly

does Mr. Waters present the inestimable advantages of cultured conversation. Yet, true though it is that conference maketh a ready man, it surely is to be remembered that reading maketh a full man; and no better proof of this last could be desired than the book now before us. Let not its accomplished author kick down the ladder, or this one of the ladders, by which he has climbed to the refreshing uplands of inspiring and well informed discourse. The trend of some of his remarks reminds one of Mr. Bernard Shaw's humorous regret that his own education had been interrupted by a few years of schooling. A few details might call for criticism if space permitted. The inclusion of Brookfield among the "Cambridge Apostles" is probably erroneous: Brookfield consorted with them, but there were twelve without him, as Mr. Waters's own list shows. The apt quotation from Langhorne's "Life of Plutarch" contains a few inaccuracies, according to our edition of the work. But these are trifling blemishes on a good and useful and entertaining book.

A handbook of the microscope.

Actuated by a wish to provide a practical handbook dealing with the construction, theory, and use of the microscope, Dr. Spitta, President of the ancient and honorable Queckett Microscopical Club of London, has written a work entitled "Microscopy" (Dutton). It is, however, more than a mere handbook, for its nearly five hundred pages and fifteen plates make up a bulky and somewhat expensive volume. While its pages are professedly not technical, they contain a very clear and scientific account of the optical parts of the instrument and of the scientific principles involved in bringing about its present marvellous perfection. Modern types of instruments are figured and discussed very fully, barring one — the product of a firm in this country whose unsurpassed objectives are distinctively an American achievement. It is hardly possible that a work dealing with the perfection of microscope objective could be written in America and no mention made of the discoveries in this field of practical optics made by the Americans Spencer and Tolles. The author has written his book throughout from the standpoint of the user of the microscope. It is rich in practical hints which will enable the amateur to secure the maximum efficiency in his use of the instrument, and at the same time offers a lucid explanation, couched in as simple terms as this highly scientific and technical subject will permit, of the principles involved in the construction and use of the microscope.

Short studies in life and literature.

Ten brief sketches and essays, all but one of them reprints, make up Mr. Charles Sears Baldwin's "Essays out of Hours" (Longmans). Five of these pleasant papers appeared originally in "The Contributors' Club" of "The Atlantic," and, with one that was first published in "Putnam's," are the best things in the book, or at least the most entertaining. Clothed in crisp, choice, sententious language, they are real gems in their way. The essay on travel, and that entitled "Not as One that Beateth the Air," yield genuine delight to the reader. Almost equally good is a short piece in praise of "Master Vergil." But who, alas, now reads the "Æneid," after having once laboriously done it to death in the schoolroom? More pretentious chapters of Mr. Baldwin's book treat of Sterne's influence on French literature, of John Bunyan, and of the genesis of the short story — all scholarly and good. But one is a little surprised to find the writer's scholarship permitting such blemishes as "unique" in the superlative degree of comparison, and "ruck" for the now more polite "majority" or "multitude." Of course "ruck" has a venerable antiquity behind it, and perhaps we ought to overcome our squeamishness and applaud rather than condemn an author's heroic attempt to reinstate the word in good usage.

The allurements of a literary life.

That voluminous editor and commentator of the middle nineteenth century, the Rev. Robert Aris Willmott, is now best remembered, if remembered at all, for his "Pleasures, Objects, and Advantages of Literature," which was published in 1851, went into a fifth edition in 1860, and had already two years before enjoyed the distinction of a fifth German edition. Under the abbreviated title, "Pleasures of Literature," it is now republished by the Putnams, with a short biographical and critical introduction from the pen of Mr. Cranstoun Metcalfe. Willmott's style suggests that of the best seventeenth-century prose-writers. It is ornate, and at the same time sententious, learned, and occasionally over-weighted with scholarly allusion and quotation, but always fluent, vivid, gracefully fashioned. To Jeremy Taylor, whom he faithfully studied and whose biography he wrote, he appears to owe as much as to any one author, though many sentences savor unmistakably of Sir Thomas Browne. Wilmott is strong in the classics of Greece, Rome, and his own country, and is a writer good for us all to read in this day and generation, — a task which is made easy and pleasant by this republication of his little masterpiece.