


EFFECTIVE SPEAKING I

I. Oratory Still the Supreme Art



The demand for good public speaking is as great as it ever was. Some years ago there was a prevailing belief that the spoken word had lost its power as a real force in shaping men's opinions and influencing their actions. It was commonly thought that the newspaper and the magazine were about to take the place of the preacher, the lecturer, and the stump-speaker. But such has not been the case. Though the country is sown thick with newspapers and magazines, and almost snowed under with well-written and instructive books of every kind, the public responds as much as ever to the magic of living speech on the lips of living men. If anyone doubts this statement let him count over in his mind the number of public addresses that have been delivered in his community during the past year from pulpit and stage, from the stump and from the platform. And then let him add up the scores and hundreds of addresses --frequently brief and informal, but often vital and impassioned--that have been uttered on the spur of the moment in committees, conferences, school and college faculties, social gatherings, city councils, law courts, conventions and civic celebrations. Such a test can hardly fail to show that the public still has needs which the printed page does not supply. Society still cherishes its gifted speakers; and every national crisis gives added proof of their value.

Oratory is still the supreme art. It is alive. Men see its results at once. Upon it hang the issues of life and death. We cannot estimate the influence that great speakers have had upon our characters and our actions. Hundreds of thousands of men and women have had their lives changed as a result of the utterances of such preachers as Wesley, and Spurgeon, and Frederick Robertson, and Phillips Brooks, and Dwight L. Moody. We erect marble statues to our Garrisons, and Wendell Phillips, and Frances Willards, and Henry Gradys to show our gratitude to them for the lasting influence of their words upon the lives of men and the course of civilization.

More than once the future of a nation for centuries to come has been decided by an oration or a debate. When the stupid and tyrannical attempt was made by King George III (the really great minds of England were friendly to America) to enforce his will illegally upon the American Colonists by means of writs of assistance and the Stamp Act, American liberty was preserved chiefly because of the eloquence of Samuel Adams, James Otis, and Patrick Henry. Of James Otis, John Adams said: "Otis was a flame of fire--Otis's oration against writs of assistance breathed into this nation the breath of life." Every student knows by heart the fiery words of defiance that Patrick Henry hurled in the face of the tyrant king during a debate in the Virginia House of Burgesses at the time of the Stamp Act struggle. For ten years in many speeches he continued to inflame the hearts and stiffen the wills of the American people against royal insult and injustice. His crucial and most famous speech came finally in the Provincial Convention of March, 1775. How could words be more eloquent and effective! "There is no retreat but in submission and slavery. Our chains are almost forged. Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston. The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring the clash of resounding arms. Our brethren are already in the field. Why stand we here idle? What is it that the gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!"

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II. True and False Rhetoric

Pure taste today requires that the speaker be natural, simple, and sincere. He will be effective only as he practises these qualities; and effectiveness is the supreme end to be achieved. There is a true rhetoric and a false rhetoric, and unfortunately it is the glitter and pomp of the false rhetoric that most easily captures the minds of the immature and the uneducated. The untrained speaker is too likely to fix his attention upon surface qualities--the glowing word, the fine phrase, the dramatic pose and gesture, the sonorous voice, the polished period, and the high-wrought climax. He is much inclined to be imitative; and he is almost sure to imitate outward habits of the speaker he admires rather than ways of thought and noble traits that lie deep in the character of the speaker--sincerity of feeling, clarity of expression, soundness of logic, closeness to fact, loyalty to truth, skill in the arrangement of material and in the marshaling of argument. There is no vice of oratory so hard for a beginner to rid himself of as this habit of attending more to form than to substance.

There is a common fashion in debate and oratory that cannot be too strongly condemned. It takes big words to describe it, for it is full of sound and fury. It is artificial and ambitious; bombastic and grandiloquent. When we meet it on the stump, or a Fourth of July celebration we call it the "spread-eagle" style. It has been widely adopted by crude young lawyers, ambitious politicians, and obscure Fourth of July orators throughout the United States.

What then, in brief, does a cultivated modern audience demand of the public speaker? It insists, first, that the speaker himself be genuine; second, that he know something worth while and know it well; third, that his own feelings and convictions be fully enlisted in the theme that he presents; and, fourth, that he talk straight to the point in simple, natural, forceful language. People today listen to a man for what he himself is. Personality is the greatest force on earth--more attractive than the magnet, more glowing and penetrating than radium, more deeply charged with subtle and mysterious energy than electricity. There are still people who are willing to improve their minds; who like to think; who are inquiring after truth; and who are quick to respond when someone who is an authority upon a subject is willing to tell them at first hand what he knows about it. Other things being equal they would rather hear a man speak on an issue of public interest than read what he writes about it. All men and women are not hard, cold, and sceptical. All people at times feel truly and deeply, and often they hunger for something really worth while upon which they may nourish their hearts and minds. But they are quick to see through what is empty and catchy. They must feel sure that the speaker's own brand is upon what he says. It will not do for him merely to borrow the thought of other people, commit it to memory, and then deliver it in a stiff and showy manner. Even when the young speaker presents matter that has become truly his own in thought and conviction, as well as in language, he must not recite it parrot-like. There must be "blood-earnestness" at the moment of delivery. And the voice must be natural, the language easily understood, the incidents and illustrations taken from the world in which the listeners themselves live.

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Exercises

1. Can you think of any occasion in your community when a single speaker turned the tide for good or evil?
2. When Livingstone was a boy of twelve he heard a speech that made him dedicate his life to missionary work in Africa. What speech has most influenced you?

CHAPTER I

HOW TO GET MATERIAL FOR THE SPEECH

There are many things in this world that are so, and that are worth knowing and telling. The bottom thing in a speech is subject matter. We can make no headway until we have ideas and facts. There is no use going to mill if we have no grist to grind.

All life is just one endless process of picking up facts and storing up wisdom. The most useful and interesting orators are those who have seen most and thought most and experienced most. You are to get matter for speeches and debate everywhere. You are young now; your senses are so alert; your minds are so eager and so filled with curiosity; your memories so plastic ("wax to receive and marble to retain") that it will be a very simple matter for you to pick up and pack away vast stores of information.

I. Original Thought

It is natural for everyone to want to be an original thinker. We should like to utter only such thoughts as are brand new. And this is a good thing; for, surely, each human soul must have some new inlet of truth from the vast silence and mystery that encircles us. And we owe it to ourselves and to our fellow men to utter the best truth that has been given to us.

But after all, the great truths of life that make for the weal or woe of humanity have been pretty well known for ages. So it is only rarely that the most gifted person finds a brand new truth about nature or human nature. This ought not, of course, to discourage the desire for intense and independent thought, since no matter how old a truth may be, it has meaning for you, and comes to life in your soul only when you have thought it out for yourself; and in a sense it is new knowledge; for now for the first time in history it has a new lodging place; a fresh angle of reflection; and no one can foresee what may be born out of this contact of an old truth with a fresh mind. At least you reinit it; it takes the color of your personality; and you clothe it in your own word and phrase. So men are on safe ground when they toil and sweat to bring fresh ideas into the world.

II. Experience

Perhaps, in the long run, no subject matter will prove so useful as that which is drawn from experience. Here is a source of knowledge that is both fresh and true. The word experience comes from a Latin word that means to try, or test, or pass through. What you have tried and

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tested for yourself you can rely upon. It is practical, that is, you have practised it yourself by going through it. Such facts as are gotten in this way almost always have weight and force. And when you refer to things in a speech that you have yourself seen, heard, tested, or had a hand in, you feel so certain of what you say that it convinces those who hear because of its solid reality.

Indeed, it is only what we have passed through that fully lives for us. Life is the truest and biggest teacher of all. So the man who wants to be a force in the world should not be afraid to live, and to live richly. He must do and dare. He must not shrink from pain and hardship and danger. Of course there is no merit in simply being reckless; and he will draw back in horror from any act or deed that his moral sense tells him is wrong. But he will welcome hard knocks in a good cause. He will handle life with bare hands. He will scorn soft ways, and will let no one coddle him. He will make courage and prompt action a habit. For fear and bravery are, after all, habits.

III. Observation

Observation is, of course, a form of experience. It is what we have seen with our eyes, rather than what we have felt. It has to do with things outside of ourselves--the acts and ways of other people, the habits of animals, and the doings of Nature. To be a good observer one must have an alert mind and keen, quick eyes. One must care for life, too; must take an interest in everything. It is hard to be patient with a stupid person--one who is too dull to care what is going on about him. A man's success and popularity depends very much upon the number of interests he has. If we have few and petty interests it is our business to wake up and get new and larger ones. Indeed, we can make no better test of the extent of a person's education or culture than by inquiring how many vivid points of contact he has with the world about him. Education is a waking-up process; and the best educated person is the one who is awake to the largest number of good things in life.

The little ugly and commonplace things about us are not to be overlooked. They, too, are a part of life; and since so many people in this world are ugly, and since the warp and woof of life is all made up of the commonplace, we cannot grip life and make our speeches convincing unless we have a firm hold upon the everyday sights and scenes and happenings. Lincoln, you know, said that God must love the common people or he would not have made so many of them.

There are two kinds of observation--one that comes as a habit of storing away for future use, and one that searches out matter for use at once. Students should early enter upon the practice of always being on the lookout for facts, incidents, anecdotes, and illustrations that will prove useful at some later time. We cannot afford to get our subject matter for speeches the way a tramp gets his living--from hand to mouth, day by day. The great orators have been far-sighted and thrifty. They look ahead to the sudden demand that may come next week or next month or next year. Some of the great passages that seem like flashes of inspiration have been thought out and written out. Daniel Webster once told a friend that "the most admired figures and illustrations in his speeches which were supposed to have been thrown off in the excitement of the moment were, like the hoarded repartees and cut-and-dry impromptus of Sheridan, the result of previous study and

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meditation." Hamilton Mabie, in his book, *Essays on Books and Culture*, writes as follows of a famous speaker: "He habitually fed himself with any kind of knowledge which was at hand. If books were at his elbow, he read them; if pictures, engravings, gems were within reach, he studied them; if nature was within walking distance, he watched nature; if men were about him, he learned the secrets of their temperaments, tastes, and skills; if he were on shipboard, he knew the dialect of the vessel in the briefest possible time; if he traveled by stage, he sat with the driver and learned all about the route, the country, the people, and the art of his companion; if he had a spare hour in a village in which there was a manufactory, he went through it with keen eyes and learned the mechanical processes used in it."

It is important to form the habit of seeing things accurately. Most people have hazy notions of what they see. They cannot be trusted to give exact reports. Yet truth and fairness demand exactness; and a public speaker must build up a reputation for keeping close to fact. The temper of the orator is likely to lead him to overcolor events and overstate facts. The mood of the scientist is cool and cautious; that of the orator is likely to be hot and hasty. But the orator, as well as the scientist, must see his fact first clearly in cold, hard outline, no matter how warm and glowing he makes it later with the play of imagination, because of his intense feeling about it.

IV. Conversation

So far we have mentioned only such facts and truths as come directly from our own inner or outer life--pure thought, first-hand contact with life, observation and travel. But we are not limited to what we ourselves have thought and seen and felt. If such were the case, you might be a little short of material, for it is early morning with you. You stand at the foot of the mountain with your kit on your back, and your stout staff in your hand, with the climb, and the views, and the bumps, and the adventures mostly before you. What you have already picked up is not to be despised. You ought to draw upon it, and make use of it in your speeches, since it is your very own. If the matter bears your imprint and design in clear bright colors, if it glows with your own true conviction, it will be interesting; it will be valuable; and people will listen to what you say gladly.

But other people will be glad to share their knowledge with you; and the total amount of information lodged in the minds of your neighbors--no matter where you live--is vast and varied. When you add together all that is known by the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker, and then pile on top of this the knowledge that is stored up in the minds of the doctor, the lawyer, the banker, the minister, the carpenter, the plumber, the mason, the cowboy, the farmer, the miner, the chauffeur, the policeman, the railroad man, the barber, the blacksmith, the cobbler, the soldier, the sailor, and the traveling man, you will not be at a loss for facts and figures and illustrations upon any subject you may have to treat. Here is what Mr. J. Ogden Armour, a hard-headed business man, has to say about this art of asking questions:

"Almost anyone can learn from books. Many have attained the knack of learning from things by observation. Few have acquired all there is to the art of learning from other people.

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"Yet almost everyone you meet has something important to teach you, tell you, or show you, if you know how to ask intelligent questions, and if you are genuinely interested in learning. Some will give you information, some will teach you wisdom, some will show you the right manner of delivering a smile or a handshake. The man who would grow must be a human interrogation point."

Most important and interest^{ing} of all, though, would be the inquiries you would make among the pioneers and old settlers in your town. Here you would get not only facts but glowing enthusiasm and stirring stories of early days, and little, lively, snapshots that would give zest and color to your speech. No doubt you will be timid at first about going to busy people whom you do not know, especially if they are public officers, or men and women in high places. But if you are in earnest, and are tactful, and know what you want, and go after it at once without waste of time, and know how to quit and get up and leave when you are through, you will be surprised to find how kind and helpful the greatest person will be. Then, too, such conversations will afford you excellent practice in several ways. First, they will lead you to think hard and closely yourself on the subject you are going to inquire about. Second, they will force you to draw up a list of questions before you hold your interviews, and so will provide you with the outline for your speech. Third, they will give you practice in putting your thoughts into words. It will be a form of public speaking, and having talked thus at close range with person after person, you will find that you can talk to a number of people together. And, fourth, when you come to draw up, and think out, and deliver your speech you will have confidence that what you have to say is worth while, since it has been drawn directly from life--from the street, and shop, and home--and from the men and women who know most about the things under discussion and have first-hand knowledge of them. No one can go behind your facts and your information. You have been to the sources.

V. Reading

Not only can we add to our best thought the experience and wisdom and knowledge of our parents and friends and our neighbors; but through books we may find an open door into the minds of the greatest men and women of all ages and countries. The best thinking of the world has been preserved and written down in books. So what anyone in the world has known, we may know if we make earnest inquiry. We cannot always find the book we want when we want it.

We can scarcely realize how great a debt we owe to books. Books are our most constant and accessible source of wisdom. Parents and teachers we cannot always have with us; and sooner or later, at last, we find to our surprise that there is a horizon line beyond which the knowledge of the dearest parent, the most honored teacher, does not go. We can ask questions of books at will. We never feel timid or abashed when we display our ignorance to them, or reveal to them the secret or trivial interest that urges us to seek information. They never smile at our ignorance; they never rebuff us; they never refuse to tell us all that they know. How shall we estimate to what degree we have from books coined our diction, formed our manners, fashioned our taste, found subject matter for agreeable conversation, drawn the ideals that have guided us in the choice of our business or profession, and secured the hints that have decided our action at crucial moments of our lives?

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Reading is of two kinds: general reading, for the sake of enriching and broadening the mind and taste; and specific reading for the purpose of getting facts and ideas to use in a speech that is to be made very soon. Little need be said here about reading up for a special speech, since that will be taken up pretty fully in a later chapter. It was general reading that Bacon had in mind when he wrote, "Reading maketh a full man". By this kind of reading we lay up stores of knowledge for future use.

Some people read too much and think too little. Think as you read, and think afterward about what you have read. Boys and girls who read all the time just for the sake of filling up the hours, or getting thrills from the words and deeds of brave heroes and lovely heroines will find that their minds are getting weak and flabby. A passion for reading of this kind is little better than a passion for drinking and gambling. We fly a kite by running against the wind; and so you will rise in your thought and strengthen your soul by matching thought against thought as you read. You will not want simply to be wafted along on the strong breeze of interest and excitement as you read. It will be well once in a while to stop and ask, How about this? Where is this going to take me? After all, is that true? Would any one have acted that way? Or, say to yourself, That statement does not seem to convince me. I want to think a little more about that situation.

In some such ways as these you can keep your mind wide-awake and growing. At the same time you are gathering the rich fruits of thought from all climes. You are exerting your own thought and calling upon your own experience; and in case you do harvest this or that choice idea you are doing so only after it has taken the trade-mark of your own private conviction. Do not fail to apply your memory to what you read. You will want to refer again to certain noble passages, or deep truths, or startling statements of fact. Try to impress memorable books, pages, and passages vividly upon your mind so that you may find your way back to them, and so that you can lay hold of them at need. Mark lines and passages that are especially fitted for quotation; and commit to memory before you lay the book aside, any notable line, couplet, stanza, or passage that thrills you with its force or beauty and seems to you once for all to sum up a truth that all men ought to know.

VI. Travel

If possible, it is well to travel far, and into strange lands if one knows what to see and how to see it. We should read, though, before we travel, and should have some idea beforehand of what we are going to see. Geography becomes very real to the traveler; and history unfolds its pictures before his mind with strange vividness and power as he stands just where some great deeds of the past took place. We grow broad by travel. As we see the manners and customs of other peoples and notice not only how they differ from us but in how many ways they excel us, it leads us to make comparisons, takes away some of our egotism, and broadens our sympathies. Travel quickens and trains our taste. America is young, and is somewhat lacking yet in examples of great painting and sculpture and architecture. We are not destitute of these things; but Europe is a storehouse of art treasures. And there are hundreds of colleges, palaces, castles, and cathedrals that thrill the heart of an American youth with their age, their beauty, their dignity, their associations with the heroic and romantic past.

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Monuments and inscriptions are to be seen everywhere in Europe; and the lessons they teach are often deep and true and inspiring. They point out and interpret for us the great lessons of history on spots made sacred by human sacrifice and at moments when we are most alive to receive and cherish their teaching. Often we find summed up in a brief inscription upon a statue or a tomb the guiding motive of a world hero, or the inner meaning of a struggle that drenched the world in blood.

VII. Growth of the Speech

When one has to make a speech at a certain time it is well to fix upon the exact topic or theme just as early as possible so that it may take root and grow in the mind even when no special thought is being given to it. For, by some strange law, our ideas do expand and throw out fibers here and there without particular effort on our part. If the topic about which we want to gather material is a live one and we are interested in it, and if we keep it warm, and once in a while let our thoughts play about it, bits of fact, and scraps of quotation and apt anecdotes will gather about it just as a magnet draws fragments of steel and iron filings to it. Perhaps another figure of speech will make still clearer what the writer means. The topic that has been fixed firmly in the mind is like a stake that has been driven down in the middle of a stream. Pretty soon one thing after another on the surface of the stream begins to gather about the stake that has been planted. Now a straw lodges, and again a leaf or a twig. Before very long quite a collection of drift will form there. And the larger the mass becomes the more rapidly it will grow because it is exposing more and more surface each hour. It is just so that straws of thought and twigs of quotation, and bright, flashing blossoms of imagery, and now and then a good sound stick of illustration, swept along on the current of thought, are gathered about the idea that has been set up in the mind.

One is often amazed to see how material collects about an active idea held in the mind. As likely as not the first newspaper you pick up will have an editorial or some scrap of comment that bears exactly on your subject. You will talk with some one at the inner table or on the train, and to your surprise the stranger will drop some remark that just fits into your topic. You go to church or to a lecture, and before the hour is over some magic spring is touched, and out there flashes a ray or even a flood of light on your topic. Some day you read a book, and here again a certain character says something or a certain situation arises that seems as if it had been made to order for your speech. This law of mental attraction that is always working in your interest will be of more and more value to you as you grow older. The time will come when you have to make many speeches. Perhaps you will have to keep three or four centers of interest alive at once on very different subjects. The speaker who is in constant demand, and the speaker who must face the same audience day after day and week after week, would fall by the wayside if he had not learned this habit of alertness, of waiting, of meditating beforehand.

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Exercises

1. During one month write down in the best form you are master of, every new, bright, original thought that comes to you from your own reflection or inner life.
2. Tell in ten or twenty sentences to the class the liveliest, most vivid experience you had during your summer vacation.
3. Make a list of eight or ten activities--physical or mental--that have a real grip upon your life.
4. As you read this, stop; shut your eyes; call before you the breakfast table as you left it; now write down on a slip of paper every object on the table you can recall distinctly.
5. Describe the worst or most interesting storm you were ever in.
6. Come to class tomorrow morning prepared to tell what you saw and heard on the way home from school tonight.
7. Tell of the most striking person you have ever met.

CHAPTER II

HOW TO BUILD THE SPEECH

The next move after the search for materials is the putting together of the speech. Indeed, while the quest for ideas is still on foot, and the couriers of thought are posting over land and sea--prying into the deeps and gazing into the starry heights--one sturdy, stay-at-home workman of the mind is busy laying out plans for the building that is soon to rise, and checking up, stowing away and arranging the materials as they come in from this, that, or the other source. The materials that are to enter the building--besides the plan or outline--are paragraphs, sentences, phrases, and single words. This chapter will deal with these building materials.

I. The Plan of the Speech

A preacher who was much praised for his fine sermons, said to his admirers, "It's easy enough to preach a sermon. All you haf to do is to take a tex, an' den mystify, an' sprangle out, an' bring in de rousements." A good speech is made in very much the same way. That is, we first decide upon a theme; then we focus and limit and explain the meaning of this theme; and next we arrange the subject under three or four simple heads; and finally we drive the main truth home with force and fire. Of course, it is better to clarify than to "mystify" at the beginning; and it is somewhat better to expand than to "sprangle out;" and we should be careful not to make the "rousements" mere noise. But this orator had grasped the main idea even though he did not express it in exactly the right words.

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The student should realize at the very start, though that any speech he is likely to make during his school days will be brief.

The body of the speech, if it is very brief, will be made up of four or five paragraphs arranged in logical order, each paragraph dealing with a single topic or point of view. Whatever is necessary to conclude the speech may be brought into the final paragraph in the form of a terse summary, a telling application, a brief, pat anecdote, or a striking quotation. A ten- or fifteen-minute speech may have a short opening paragraph; the body of the speech may be divided into three or four chief heads with two or three paragraphs under each head; and there may be a concluding paragraph.

II. The Paragraph and Its Place in the Plan

A paragraph is a developed topic. It is a small essay in itself, and is the chief building unit we make use of as we round out the completed speech. Great pains should be taken to make each paragraph a clear, strong, orderly whole, since the strength of the finished speech will be little greater than the strength of the separate paragraphs when welded together. A paragraph is not unlike a state in the Union. It has its own laws, and rights, and local ideals and duties, yet it bears a vital relationship to the whole union. The Union would not be strong and great were it not for the sturdy, orderly life of the states that compose it. On the other hand, each state gains a force and quality from its connection with the Federal Government that it could never achieve all alone.

Be sure of a topic sentence around which to mould your paragraph. It is often wise to state this chief thought in the opening sentence. At least be sure that you can state it in a single sentence. You will unfold this germ sentence in various ways. It must grow and enlarge under your hand, so that every phase of it will be brought out. You may repeat it in some bright and striking way. You may state what it is not, and so throw it into relief by contrast. You may add interest to it by a happy quotation. You may make it clearer by using an example that is familiar to everyone. You may make it stand out in bright colors by a well-conceived image or figure of speech; and, again, you may give it zest and point by means of a well-told anecdote. Whatever method you make use of in developing it, make it clear, make it lively and make it unified and complete. A very eloquent speaker had the habit, when unfolding a topic, of first putting the idea in the barest, clearest, strongest words he could think of; then of holding it up before his hearers in a golden figure of speech; and then finally of draping it in the richest and most glowing imagery.

The opening sentence of a paragraph, whether or not it contains a condensed statement of the topic, should be striking, and worded with skill. Many of the greatest speakers reserve the topic sentence until the very close, and then sum up in a short, strong, easily remembered sentence the full meaning of the paragraph. This closing sentence, by the use of an epigram or an apt quotation, might well repeat the substance of what was put into the first sentence. It is a good thing to