

### Oratory

G. MacGuigan, ex '29

Every young man, such is the ambition of youth, either openly or secretly desires to become a leader in public life. Yet we are suffering from a great lack of leaders. The explanation, I think, of this dearth of leaders, the reason why so many potential leaders fall by the wayside, and so few reach the goal, is that they neglect the Art of Speaking. They fail to meditate upon and realize fully a fact for which proofs are not wanting. Demosthenes defending Athens against Philip, Cicero controlling the destinies of the Roman Republic, St. John, Chrysostom, Mirabeau, Napoleon, Lincoln, Gladstone, Laurier, Mussolini, Hitler, Alfred E. Smith and Fr. Coughlin, are but a few of the most outstanding names bearing out the fact that the most skilful speaker inevitably becomes the leader. There are few leaders, because few men have thought it necessary to master the Art of Speaking.

In different words, Cicero expresses the same fact in his "De Oratore" book I: "Nothing appears to me more excellent than the power of holding enchained the minds of an assembly by the charm of speech, of fascinating their hearts, impelling their wills whithersoever you desire, and diverting them from whatsoever you please. This one accomplishment has ever exerted the chief attraction and influence among every free people, especially in times of tranquility and repose. For what is so admirable as that among an infinite number of men, there should rise up one who alone, or almost alone, can do what Nature intended to be done by all? Or what is so pleasing to hear as an oration adorned with wise maxims and noble expressions? Or what is so powerful and so grand, as that speech of one man should control the movements of the people, the consciences of the judges, and the dignity of the Senate? What, besides, is so noble, so honorable, and so glorious as to succour the suppliant, to cheer the afflicted, to free from evil, to save from danger, to retain men in the bonds of Society? . . . . . Not to name any other advantages, for they are almost innumerable, I shall briefly say, I feel convinced that on the influence and the wisdom of a perfect orator depends not only his own dignity, but also to a very great extent, the safety of multitudes, and the welfare of the whole Republic."



No man then, who would be a force in his city, province or country, can afford to neglect the Art of Speaking. It is, I may say, the condition *sine qua non* of leadership—it is the essential element in all other qualities such as personality, honesty, sincerity etc. True, the man with money is usually a force in any community, but not so great a force as the skilful speaker. The words by which we express the power of the monied man implicitly acknowledge the greater power of the orator—"Money TALKS."

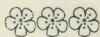
Some men are much better speakers than others. But the usual explanation, "It's IN him," does not satisfy. Invariably it will be found that the men who "have it IN them," have spent many hours reading or hearing lectures, sermons and speeches. This tallies with St. Augustine's instructions to his Seminarians. Constant and diligent study of the Sacred Scriptures, and of approved Ecclesiastical authors, accompanied by practice in writing, dictating and speaking, were, he believed, an easier and more certain path to genuine sacred eloquence than any system of rhetorical precepts. The reasons he assigns are, that a man of sensibility and intellect soon warmed into eloquence under the influence of eloquence heard or read; that a man of inferior capacity could at most acquire, and with difficulty, an imperfect knowledge of rhetorical precepts; his best chance, too, was imitation; his best study the model. He had known many men who had become eloquent without a knowledge of rhetoric; he had not known one who had become so without hearing or reading eloquent men. His experience is confirmed by the great French pulpit orators, who owe their enduring fame to the fact that their best plans, noblest conceptions, and most vivid imagery are (confessedly) borrowed from the Church Fathers.

However, it must not be inferred that the study of rhetoric is useless. Far from it. The study of rhetorical precepts has its advantages; it helps the student to work more systematically, to express himself with greater force and clarity, and to avoid errors of grammar, style and manner. Its chief disadvantage is that many after long study find that they have but learned to "name their tools." Hence St. Augustine, himself a master of rhetoric and eloquence, prescribed constant and diligent study of authors and models, plus practice, as the easiest and surest method.



In choosing subjects for study, it is well to remember that although something may be learned from all, most profit will be derived from the study of the best. Do not, by any means neglect Demosthenes, especially his Crown Speech; nor Cicero's Manilian Law, Pro Ligario, and Pro Milone. Even in translation these speeches are masterpieces. Study Burke (Dr. Johnson thought that Cicero was very much like Burke), but do not forget that he emptied the benches. The long list of French, English and American orators leaves great scope for individual taste. No Canadian, however, should pass over the speeches of Sir Wilfred Laurier. There is eloquence, the eloquence of the orator who possessed "the eye of a god, the voice of a silver bell, and the very fire of his eye, the very music of his voice swept the hearts of men even before they had been dazzled by the torrents of his eloquence" Laurier on the death of Gladstone is our great example of the orator become leader.

Let us have more Lauriers !



"Truth is generally the best vindication against slander."—*Lincoln*.

"Years of love have been forgot  
In the hatred of a minute."

—*Poe*

"When faith is lost, when honor dies  
The man is dead !"

—*Whittier*.

