

MY MAIDEN SPEECH

I was walking downstairs one morning and feeling rather grouchy as a consequence of having been aroused so early, when I perceived from a notice on the signboard, that I had to take part in a debate, which was to take place in ten days' time. I had never debated before, and you may well suppose that my grouchiness was by no means relieved. Certainly, I was not filled with pleasure at the thought of speaking before the whole society, but on the contrary, I had a very great fear of the ordeal. However, there was no avoiding it, and I decided then and there that I would be well prepared. I had ten days. I would begin it Wednesday night. Wednesday night came and went and I did not even think of it.

A week passed. On another morning I awoke to the fact that the debate was three days away. I was filled with consternation. Something had to be done. I looked at the subject for the first time: "Resolved that an increase in tariff necessarily results in an increase in the price of commodities." I had to oppose this proposition. It did not seem a very difficult subject, for lately I had read a great deal in the newspapers concerning tariffs, and I considered that I knew something about them. Another day slipped away and on the evening of the following day, I sat down to write out my argument. I commenced with that ancient time-worn introduction of all beginners, a definition, and a very good definition it was. It was just at this point that I began to see that the subject might be a little difficult. It did not specify home-goods or imported goods, nor did it specify the goods of Canada, United States or any other country; neither did it mention any particular tariff. I could not see any argument for my side at all, so I went in search of material. In my efforts, I learned a great deal about tariff, how much it would help the country, and how much it would lower the prices—in three or four years; but all that did not help me in my present situation. I looked into everything that I thought might be of value to me. In fact, I did everything except consult those who might have helped me. At last, I gave it up as a bad job, deciding that further search was useless. For the second time I began to write out my speech. It was my aim to say as much as possible, not to injure my side of the argu-

ment, and to keep the members as much amused as possible. To that end, I hunted up a few jokes, and then I memorized my speech just before the debate began.

During the proceedings, I felt perfectly at ease, and I enjoyed the speeches of the others very much. However, as my time drew nearer, I began to lose more and more of my confidence. At last, it arrived; and my condition can be pictured only by those who have suffered in like manner. I struggled to my feet. "Rev. Chairman and Mr. Moderator." I could not remember the beginning; I had only a jumble of words. Those jokes which were to have eked out my weak argument, fled. My memory fled. In fact everything fled except my poor self, who was quite desirous of fleeing, but quite incapable of it. A moment before, I had been one of the crowd. Now, I felt like an outcast. My thoughts were of nothing but of my unfortunate plight: "Why do they stare so much? Are those two laughing at me or with me? I must say something. Where are those jokes anyway? What is the matter with my knees?" I lost count of the time, and can recall very little of what I said.

That speech, which should have lasted five minutes, at least, and which would have been convincing enough to most of those whose minds would be chiefly engrossed with the humor of my speech, became a mere conglomeration of sounds, which I stuttered forth in two minutes. I dragged myself to my chair and became immersed in my own bitter thoughts. "Debates may be all right; yes, and they may teach us that art of public speaking; but what I'd love to know is, who wants to speak in public anyway? Henceforth I'm a listener."

—J. McC., '32

