SECTION VI.

PERSUASION.

Argument, if understood to mean merely the process of convincing, seldom occurs by itself; it is usually combined with PERSUASION, which includes all those processes that make the persons addressed willing to be convinced or ready to carry conviction into action. Unlike argument, persuasion is addressed not so much to the intellect as to the feelings.

Persuasion a useful adjunct to argument.

To substitute an appeal to the feelings for argument is, of course, never justifiable. "It is dishonest to try to convert excited feeling into evidence of facts which would justify it. To say, 'There must be a God because I love him,' is just like saying, 'That man must be a rogue because I hate him,' which many people do say, but not wisely."[1] Equally dishonest is the *argumentum ad hominem*;[2] for this is neither more nor less than an attempt to make an appeal to prejudice or passion seem like proof. In no case is persuasion an equivalent for argument.

The following passages from the report of the arguments before the Supreme Court of the United States in the recent income-tax cases (1895) are persuasive rather than convincing: —

"In conclusion, Mr. Carter said the law had been enacted by the representatives of the people, acting in their legitimate and uncontrollable sphere as the taxing power of the government, elected by a great popular majority, and that the expression of an

[1] Sir James Fitzjames Stephen: Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, chap. vii.

[2] See page 347.

opinion by that means could always be accepted and considered as final. A triumphant majority, he said, firm in the possession of a view which they believed to be just and right, would find a way to the accomplishment of their purpose, if need be, over the ruins of constitutions and of courts. It was the wise thing not to provoke such a contest.

"Mr. Carter spoke two hours and a half and was followed by Mr. Choate. Mr. Choate, in opening, said: —

"'It never would have occurred to me to present [as] either an opening or a closing argument to this great and learned court, that if, in their wisdom, they found it necessary to protect a suitor who sought here to invoke the protection of the constitution which was created for us all, possibly the popular wrath might sweep the court away. It is the first time I ever heard that argument presented to this court or any other, and I trust it will be the last.

"'I thought until to-day that there was a constitution of the United States, and that the business of the executive arm was to uphold that constitution. I thought that this court was created for the purpose of maintaining the constitution as against unlawful conduct on the part of Congress. It is news to me that Congress is the sole judge of the measure of the powers confided to it by the constitution, and it is also news to me that that great fundamental principle that underlies the constitution, namely, the equality of all men before the law, has ceased to exist.'"[1]

Though not an equivalent for argument, persuasion is a useful adjunct to it. Cold logic alone may convince the persons addressed, but it will not take firm hold of them unless they already feel a vital interest in the subject. It is the "instilment of conviction"[2] (to quote Matthew Arnold's definition of persuasion) that makes conviction hold. Conviction alone, moreover, does not influence the will. To win assent to a general proposition is one thing; to secure adhesion to a doctrine that has a personal application and requires exertion is another and a far more

[1] As reported in the Boston Daily Advertiser, March 13, 1895.

[2] Matthew Arnold: Essays in Criticism; The Literary Influence of Academies.

difficult thing. Most difficult of all is the task of persuading a man against his original convictions. Such a triumph was achieved by Whitefield over Benjamin Franklin: —

"The sight of their miserable situation [that of the children in Georgia] inspir'd," says Franklin, "the benevolent heart of Mr. Whitefield with the idea of building an Orphan House there, in which they might be supported and educated. Returning northward, he preach'd up this charity and made large collections, for his eloquence had a wonderful power over the hearts and purses of his hearers of which I myself was an instance.

"I did not disapprove of the design but as Georgia was then destitute of materials and workmen and it was proposed to send them from Philadelphia at a great expense, I thought it would have been better to have built the house here and brought the children to it. This I advis'd; but he was resolute in his first project, rejected my counsel and I therefore refus'd to contribute. I happened soon after to attend one of his sermons in the course of which I perceived he intended to finish with a collection, and I silently resolved he should get nothing from me. I had in my pocket a handful of copper money, three or four silver dollars, and five pistoles in gold. As he proceeded I began to soften and concluded to give the coppers. Another stroke of his oratory made me asham'd of that and determin'd me to give the silver; and he finish'd so admirably that I empti'd my pocket wholly into the collector's dish, gold and all."[1]

Persuasion in exordiums and perorations.

Sometimes the work of persuasion is done by means of an exordium which insures a favorable reception for what is to come, or of a peroration which carries home the conclusion. It is in exordiums and perorations that a young writer often fails: he does not know how to get at his subject or how to get away from it. He should beware of putting in a word of introduction that is not necessary to prepare the way for his argument, and of adding a word at the end that is not necessary to

[1] Benjamin Franklin: Works, vol. i.; Autobiography. Edited by John Bigelow.

enforce his conclusion. "Is he never going to begin?" "Will he never have done?" are questions equally fatal.

The passage with which Webster opened the White murder case is a model exordium: —

"I am little accustomed, gentlemen, to the part which I am now attempting to perform. Hardly more than once or twice has it happened to me to be concerned on the side of the government in any criminal prosecution whatever; and never, until the present occasion, in any case affecting life.

"But I very much regret that it should have been thought necessary to suggest to you that I am brought here to 'hurry you against the law and beyond the evidence.' I hope I have too much regard for justice, and too much respect for my own character, to attempt either; and were I to make such attempt, I am sure that in this court nothing can be carried against the law, and that gentlemen, intelligent and just as you are, are not, by any power, to be hurried beyond the evidence. Though I could well have wished to shun this occasion, I have not felt at liberty to withhold my professional assistance, when it is supposed that I may be in some degree useful in investigating and discovering the truth respecting this most extraordinary murder. It has seemed to be a duty incumbent on me, as on every other citizen, to do my best and my utmost to bring to light the perpetrators of this crime. Against the prisoner at the bar, as an individual, I cannot have the slightest prejudice. I would not do him the smallest injury or injustice. But I do not affect to be indifferent to the discovery and the punishment of this deep guilt. I cheerfully share in the opprobrium, how great soever it may be, which is cast on those who feel and manifest an anxious concern that all who had a part in planning, or a hand in executing, this deed of midnight assassination, may be brought to answer for their enormous crime at the bar of public justice."[1]

The well-known passage with which Burke ended his speech in the impeachment of Warren Hastings — a passage which, it is said, was written sixteen times — is a

[1] Daniel Webster: Legal Arguments; The Murder of Captain Joseph White, April 6, 1830.

model peroration. So is the conclusion of the "Reflections on the Revolution in France": —

"I wish my countrymen rather to recommend to our neighbours the example of the British constitution, than to take models from them for the improvement of our own. In the former they have got an invaluable treasure. They are not, I think, without some causes of apprehension and complaint; but these they do not owe to their constitution, but to their own conduct. I think our happy situation owing to our constitution; but owing to the whole of it, and not to any part singly; owing in a great measure to what we have left standing in our several reviews and reformations, as well as to what we have altered or superadded. Our people will find employment enough for a truly patriotic, free, and independent spirit, in guarding what they possess from violation. I would not exclude alteration neither; but even when I changed, it should be to preserve. I should be led to my remedy by a great grievance. In what I did, I should follow the example of our ancestors. I would make the reparation as nearly as possible in the style of the building. A politic caution, a guarded circumspection, a moral rather than a complexional timidity, were among the ruling principles of our forefathers in their most decided conduct. Not being illuminated with the light of which the gentlemen of France tell us they have got so abundant a share, they acted under a strong impression of the ignorance and fallibility of mankind. He that had made them thus fallible rewarded them for having in their conduct attended to their nature. Let us imitate their caution, if we wish to deserve their fortune, or to retain their bequests. Let us add, if we please — but let us preserve what they have left; and, standing on the firm ground of the British constitution, let us be satisfied to admire rather than attempt to follow in their desperate flights the aëronauts of France.

"I have told you candidly my sentiments. I think they are not likely to alter yours. I do not know that they ought. You are young; you cannot guide, but must follow the fortune of your country. But hereafter they may be of some use to you, in some future form which your commonwealth may take. In the present it can hardly remain; but before its final settlement it may be obliged to pass, as one of our poets says, 'through great varieties of untried being,' and in all its transmigrations to be purified by fire and blood.

"I have little to recommend my opinions but long observation and much impartiality. They come from one who has been no tool of power, no flatterer of greatness; and who in his last acts does not wish to belie the tenor of his life. They come from one, almost the whole of whose public exertion has been a struggle for the liberty of others; from one in whose breast no anger durable or vehement has ever been kindled, but by what he considered as tyranny; and who snatches from his share in the endeavours which are used by good men to discredit opulent oppression, the hours he has employed on your affairs; and who in so doing persuades himself he has not departed from his usual office. They come from one who desires honours, distinctions, and emoluments, but little; and who expects them not at all; who has no contempt for fame, and no fear of obloquy; who shuns contention, though he will hazard an opinion: from one who wishes to preserve consistency; but who would preserve consistency by varying his means to secure the unity of his end; and, when the equipoise of the vessel in which he sails may be endangered by overloading it upon one side, is desirous of carrying the small weight of his reasons to that which may preserve its equipoise." [1]

A whole speech may be so framed as to combine persuasion with argument so closely that it is hard to separate them. Familiar examples of this method are Patrick Henry's speech before the Convention of Delegates, March 28, 1775, and Henry Ward Beecher's speech at Liverpool, October 16, 1863.[2] Another example is one of Sydney Smith's speeches in support of Lord Grey's reform bill: —

"Mr. Bailiff, I have spoken so often on this subject, that I am sure both you and the gentlemen here present will be obliged to me for saying but little, and that favour I am as willing to confer,

[1] Burke: Reflections on the Revolution in France.

[2] This speech is given in George P. Baker's "Specimens of Argumentation."

as you can be to receive it. I feel most deeply the event which has taken place,[1] because, by putting the two Houses of Parliament in collision with each other, it will impede the public business, and diminish the public prosperity. I feel it as a churchman, because I cannot but blush to see so many dignitaries of the church arrayed against the wishes and happiness of the people. I feel it more than all, because I believe it will sow the seeds of deadly hatred between the aristocracy and the great mass of the people. The loss of the bill I do not feel, and for the best of all possible reasons — because I have not the slightest idea that it is lost. I have no more doubt, before the expiration of the winter, that this bill will pass, than I have that the annual tax bills will pass, and greater certainty than this no man can have, for Franklin tells us, there are but two things certain in this world — death and taxes. As for the possibility of the House of Lords preventing ere long a reform of Parliament, I hold it to be the most absurd notion that ever entered into human imagination. I do not mean to be disrespectful, but the attempt of the Lords to stop the progress of reform, reminds me very forcibly of the great storm of Sidmouth, and of the conduct of the excellent Mrs. Partington on that occasion. In the winter of 1824, there set in a great flood upon that town — the tide rose to an incredible height — the waves rushed in upon the houses, and everything was threatened with destruction. In the midst of this sublime and terrible storm, Dame Partington, who lived upon the beach, was seen at the door of her house with mop and pattens, trundling her mop, squeezing out the sea-water, and vigorously pushing away the Atlantic Ocean. The Atlantic was roused. Mrs. Partington's spirit was up; but I need not tell you that the contest was unequal. The Atlantic Ocean beat Mrs. Partington. She was excellent at a slop, or a puddle, but she should not have meddled with a tempest. Gentlemen, be at your ease — be quiet and steady. You will beat Mrs. Partington.

"They tell you, gentlemen, in the debates by which we have been lately occupied, that the bill is not justified by experience. I do not think this true, but if it were true, nations are sometimes compelled to act without experience for their guide, and to trust to their own sagacity for the anticipation of consequences.

[1] The rejection of the bill by the House of Lords.

The instances where this country has been compelled thus to act have been so eminently successful, that I see no cause for fear, even if we were acting in the manner imputed to us by our enemies. What precedents and what experience were there at the Reformation, when the country, with one unanimous effort, pushed out the Pope, and his grasping and ambitious clergy? — What experience, when at the Revolution we drove away our ancient race of kings, and chose another family more congenial to our free principles? — And yet to those two events, contrary to experience, and unguided by precedents, we owe all our domestic happiness, and civil and religious freedom — and having got rid of corrupt priests and despotic kings, by our sense and our courage, are we now to be intimidated by the awful danger of extinguishing Boroughmongers, and shaking from our necks the ignominious yoke which their baseness has imposed upon it?[1] Go on, they say, as you have done for these hundred years last past. I answer, it is impossible — five hundred people now write and read, where one hundred wrote and read fifty years ago. The iniquities and enormities of the borough system are now known to the meanest of the people. You have a different sort of men to deal with — you must change because the beings whom you govern are changed. After all, and to be short, I must say that it has always appeared to me to be the most absolute nonsense that we cannot be a great, or a rich and happy nation, without suffering ourselves to be bought and sold every five years like a pack of negro slaves. I hope I am not a very rash man, but I would launch boldly into this experiment without any fear of consequences, and I believe there is not a man here present who would not cheerfully embark with me. As to the enemies of the bill, who pretend to be reformers, I know them, I believe, better than you do, and I earnestly caution you against them. You will have no more of reform than they are compelled to grant — you will have no reform at all, if they can avoid it — you will be hurried into a war to turn your attention from reform. They do not understand you — they will not believe in the improvement you have made — they think the English of the present day are as the English of the times of Queen Anne or George the First. They know no more of the present state of their own country, than of the state of the Esquimaux Indians.

[1] See pages 54, 55.

Gentlemen, I view the ignorance of the present state of the country with the most serious concern, and I believe they will one day or another waken into conviction with horror and dismay. I will omit no means of rousing them to a sense of their danger; — for this object I cheerfully sign the petition proposed by Dr. Kinglake, which I consider to be the wisest [1] and most moderate of the two." [2]

Principles of persuasion.

On the methods of persuasion very little that is of practical value can be said. All that one may usefully do is to suggest a few general principles, in the application of which good sense, right feeling, and knowledge of human nature will be of more avail than any formal rules could be, however skilfully framed or deftly carried into practice.

Since persuasion, as has already been said, is addressed to the feelings, its methods must be those which lead to success in reaching the feelings. Now, to make men feel strongly, it is of little use to tell them that they ought to feel strongly; for neither reason nor duty can govern the issues of the heart. What we may do is to express our own feeling and trust to the contagion of sympathy; or we may take our readers or hearers to the sources of feeling and thus bring them, as far as is possible, under the influences by which we have ourselves been moved. "Deductions," says Newman, "have no power of persuasion. The heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination, by means of direct impressions, by the testimony of facts and events, by history, by description. Persons influence us, voices melt us, looks subdue us, deeds inflame us." [3]

[1] "*Wisest* and *most moderate* of the *two*"?

[2] Sydney Smith: Speech at Taunton (1831).

[3] Cardinal Newman: Discussions and Arguments. Quoted by Lewis E. Gates in "Selections from the Prose Writings of John Henry Cardinal Newman."

Principle of concreteness.

In persuasion a few concrete examples are of more avail than pages of generalities; for it is individual instances that reach the feelings. A philanthropist who wishes to raise money for a public charity will gain little by setting forth in general terms the worthiness of the object; it is by presenting specific needs and by showing that every additional dollar will do something toward their relief, that he achieves his purpose. Had Mrs. Stowe written a treatise on the evils of slavery, she would have won little attention; it was by putting some of those evils into concrete form that she aroused indignation against them.[1]

Principle of reserved force.

In persuasive discourse wordiness is fatal to success. Sometimes repetition [2] is effective; but as a rule few words are better than many. Reserved force,[3] which tells for much in all kinds of composition, cannot be overestimated as an instrument of persuasion. Webster's words, "It is, sir, as I have said, a small college, and yet there are those who love it," [4] together with his manifest effort to repress his emotion, did more for Dartmouth College than could have been effected by hours of direct appeal.

Principle of climax.

If it is impossible to reach the desired result without making the process of persuasion somewhat long, care should be taken not to begin by striking too high a key. If the pitch is sustained till the end, the result is monotony; if it is not sustained, the result is an anti-climax, and in persuasion the principle of climax [5] should never be violated. A passage that would be ridiculous as an exordium may be very effective as a peroration. Such is the paragraph with which Lord

[1] See the passage from George Eliot, page 131.

[2] See pages 150–153.

[3] See pages 171–174.

[4] See page 172.

[5] See pages 192–195.

Brougham ends his speech in defence of Queen Caroline, a passage which he is said to have written twenty times:

"Such, my lords, is the Case now before you! Such is the evidence in support of this measure — evidence inadequate to prove a debt — impotent to deprive of a civil right — ridiculous to convict of the lowest offence — scandalous if brought forward to support a charge of the highest nature which the law knows — monstrous to ruin the honour, to blast the name of an English Queen! What shall I say, then, if this is the proof by which an act of judicial legislation, a parliamentary sentence, an *ex post facto* law, is sought to be passed against this defenceless woman? My lords, I pray you to pause. I do earnestly beseech you to take heed! You are standing upon the brink of a precipice — then beware! It will go forth your judgment, if sentence shall go against the Queen. But it will be the only judgment you ever pronounced, which, instead of reaching its object, will return and bound back upon those who give it. Save the country, my lords, from the horrors of this catastrophe — save yourselves from this peril — rescue that country, of which you are the ornaments, but in which you can flourish no longer, when severed from the people, than the blossom when cut off from the roots and the stem of the tree. Save that country, that you may continue to adorn it — save the Crown, which is in jeopardy — the Aristocracy, which is shaken — save the Altar, which must stagger with the blow that rends its kindred Throne! You have said, my lords, you have willed — the Church and the King have willed — that the Queen shall be deprived of its solemn service. She has instead of that solemnity, the heartfelt prayers of the people. She wants no prayers of mine. But I do here pour forth my humble supplications at the Throne of Mercy, that that Mercy may be poured down upon the people, in a larger measure than the merits of their rulers may deserve, and that your hearts may be turned to justice!"[1]

Principle of variety.

To success in persuasion variety in matter and in manner is essential; for monotony deadens interest and chills feeling. A variety of sentiments

[1] Lord Brougham: Speeches on Social and Political Subjects; Case of Queen Caroline.

should be appealed to; a variety of methods should be employed. Short explanation, vivid description, happy illustration, indirect suggestion, all may be instruments of persuasion, if they are so used as to advance the main purpose. Not that variety should ever be secured at the expense of unity or of individuality; one and the same subject should be kept constantly in mind, one and the same person should be constantly present behind the words.

In all cases, success in persuasion largely depends upon the adaptation of what is said to the character and the circumstances of the persons addressed. In this matter, the speaker has an advantage over the writer in that he knows what manner of men he is addressing and can choose his method accordingly. One audience is, as everybody knows, more difficult to move than another. The educated, as a class, are much more difficult to move than the ignorant. To this rule there are, of course, many exceptions; but too often education cultivates the head at the expense of the heart. A speaker should, then, always bear in mind that more subtle means must be used in moving an intellectual than an unintellectual audience. He should also bear in mind that his audience, whatever its character, is liable to changes of mood which he must be quick to see and quick to follow.

Principle of adaptation.

In persuasion a bookish or a declamatory style tells for less than the simple expression of the truth. If readers are thinking about a writer's style, or hearers about an orator's eloquence, they are less likely to be influenced by him than if they are so fully absorbed in what he is saying as to pay no attention to the manner in which it is said. No advocate could have a higher

Simplicity.

compliment paid to his persuasive powers than was paid to Scarlett (Lord Abinger) by the English juryman who said that, though Brougham might be the cleverer advocate, Scarlett was "such a lucky one, for he was always on the right side;" or to Rufus Choate by the Yankee juryman who, after telling anecdotes that showed Choate's insidious power over a jury, said, "I must tell you that I did not think much of his flights of fancy; but I considered him a very *lucky* lawyer, for there was not one of those five cases that came before us where he was n't on the right side."[1] If a writer or an orator is thinking of his own style, he may please his readers or his hearers with well-turned periods or sounding phrases, but he will not move them; for he will inevitably betray the fact that manner is more to him than matter. If his mind is full of his purpose, he will express himself simply. "I believe it to be true," says Emerson, "that when any orator at the bar or in the Senate rises in his thought, he descends in his language, — that is, when he rises to any height of thought or of passion he comes down to a language level with the ear of all his audience. It is the merit of John Brown and of Abraham Lincoln — one at Charlestown, one at Gettysburg — in the two best specimens of eloquence we have had in this country."[2]

Sincerity.

In argument the most important requirement is the dry light of intelligence; but in persuasion "the essential thing is heat, and heat comes of sincerity."[2] Without sincerity, a man who has all other graces and gifts will be but "sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal;" with it, a man who lacks everything else will prevail, for the spiritual fire that is in him will go from him to others, whatever the obstacles. People in general hold their opinions so loosely that a man who believes anything with his whole heart is sure to make converts.

[1] Quoted in Whipple's "Recollections of Eminent Men;" Some Recollections of Rufus Choate.

[2] Emerson: Letters and Social Aims; Eloquence.

Examples of argument.

As argumentative composition, nothing in English literature is more deserving of study than the works of Burke, especially the speech on American Taxation and that on Conciliation with America. No American speeches are more deserving of study than those of Daniel Webster. Especially noteworthy are his three speeches against nullification (1830 and 1833), with which may profitably be studied the arguments for nullification by Hayne (1830) and Calhoun (1833). Other examples of argumentative composition are: Richard Cobden's speech in the House of Commons, April 24, 1863, on the seizure of "The Alexandra" on the ground that it was being equipped contrary to the provisions of the Foreign Enlistment Act;[1] John Bright's speech in the House of Commons, May 3, 1864, on a motion for the abolition of capital punishment;[2] Macaulay's speeches in the House of Commons, Feb. 5, 1841, and April 6, 1842, on the bill to amend the law of copyright, and his speech, May 22, 1846, on a bill for limiting the labor of young persons in factories to ten hours a day; the chapter on "Fundamental Principles respecting Capital," in Mill's "Principles of Political Economy;" Sir James

[1] Richard Cobden: Speeches on Questions of Public Policy, vol. ii. American War I. Edited by John Bright and James E. Thorold Rogers.

[2] John Bright: Speech on Questions of Public Policy, vol. ii. Punishment of Death. Edited by James E. Thorold Rogers.

Fitzjames Stephen's article on the suppression of boycotting, published in "The Nineteenth Century," December, 1886; Matthew Arnold's "Last Words" at the end of his papers "On Translating Homer," in "Essays in Criticism;" Huxley's "Three Lectures on Evolution" (delivered in New York, 1876); the Spencer-Weismann articles, published in "The Contemporary Review" between February, 1893, and October, 1894.[1]

[1] Other examples are given in "Specimens of Argumentation," compiled by George P. Baker. Still others are mentioned at the close of President Eliot's article entitled "Wherein Popular Education has Failed," published in "The Forum," December, 1892.

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Principal topics, **black**; words and subordinate topics, Roman; titles of periodicals, "Roman" quoted; other proper names in SMALL CAPITALS; foreign expressions, *italic*.