GEORGE MURRAY

GEORGE MURRAY, Canadian educator and man of letters, was born at London, March 23, 1830, the only son of the late James Murray, in his lifetime foreign editor of the London "Times." He received his early education at Walthamstow, Essex, afterwards matriculating at King's College, London, where he took the chaplain's two prizes for English verse—original and translated—the principal's prize for Latin verse, together with the senior classical scholarship. Proceeding to Oxford, he obtained among other honors the Lusby scholarship and the Lucy exhibition. Before taking his degree he published "The Oxford ars Poetica; or, How to Write a Newdigate." In 1859, after spending some years on the continent, he came to Canada and was appointed senior classical master of the Montreal High School, a position which he held until 1892. He is an extensive contributor to the Canadian press, and in 1891 published a volume entitled "Verses and Versions," dedicated to Sir Edwin Arnold. Among his journalistic enterprises were "Diogenes," a serio-comic weekly, and the "Free Lance," both published in Montreal. In 1882, he established "Notes and Queries" in the Montreal "Star," and of this department he has since been the editor. He wrote also for the English "Notes and Queries," and for "Once a Week." As a classical scholar, the Ottawa "Journal" places him among the foremost on the American continent. On the formation of the Royal Society of Canada, in 1882, he was appointed by its founder, the Marquis of Lorne, one of the twenty original Fellows of the section of English literature and history. He was secretary for some years of the old Montreal Literary Club, and on the death of the Hon. Thomas D'Arcy McGee, one of the Fellows of that society, was chosen, with two others, to edit the literary remains of the lamented Irish poet and Canadian statesman.

PUBLIC SPEAKING

PARTS OF AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE ATHENÆUM CLUB OF MONTREAL IN 1880

THE question whether oratorical ability be on the whole a public benefit or a mischief, was frequently debated among the ancients; but in the present day it would be a waste of time to dilate upon the advantages of being a skilful speaker. The tongue, which is the sword of

the orator, equals or surpasses in effect, at least for the time being, the pen of the ablest writer. If the true function of eloquence is to enlighten the understanding, to please the imagination, to stir the passions, or to influence the will; the accomplished orator who can attain these ends, and even the less effective speaker, in a minor degree, are possessed of a mighty power, either for good or evil. "The wise in heart," says Solomon, "shall be called prudent, but the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning."

Lord Chesterfield, a very superficial Solomon, but still a man of great worldly wisdom, constantly repeated to his son, that no man in his time could make a fortune or a figure in England without speaking, and speaking well in public. "It does not surprise us," writes Emerson, "to learn from Plutarch what large sums were paid at Athens to the teachers of rhetoric, and if the pupils got what they paid for, the lessons were cheap."

Even a single triumphant speech has occasionally conferred a quasi-immortality. In the year 1755, when Lord Chatham was attacking the Newcastle administration, a member who voted with the ministry found their cause one evening in extreme danger. He accordingly rose, we are told, though he had never before addressed the House, and poured forth a speech, full of cogent argument and fervid emotion, with all the ease and confidence of a practised speaker. But the success of his maiden speech sealed his lips for the future. He was ever after getting ready, but never was ready for a second effort which should surpass his first; and the orator survives in the annals of fame under the sobriquet of "Single-Speech Hamilton."

Again, the loss to the world of speeches which were unrecorded at the time of their delivery has been vainly regretted

by the most illustrious orators; and it is related by Lord Brougham of the younger Pitt that when the conversation turned on lost works, and some said they would prefer to recover the lost books of Livy, some those of Tacitus, and some a Latin tragedy, he at once decided for a speech of Bolingbroke. This was a noble tribute to the oratorical genius of the idol of Swift and of Pope, coming from one who in his own time, though accused by Mr. Windham of speaking in a "state-paper style," produced almost magical effects upon a refined and critical audience.

Let me here, before I forget to introduce it, quote the simple but eloquent panegyric penned by one of England's greatest poets on England's greatest philosopher:

"There happened," writes Ben Jonson, "in my time one noble speaker who was full of gravity in his speaking. No man ever spoke more neatly, more expressively, more weightily, or suffered less emptiness, less idleness in what he uttered. No member of his speech but consisted of its own graces. His hearers could not cough or look aside from him without loss. He commanded where he spoke, and had his judges angry or pleased at his devotion. The fear of every man that heard him was that he should make an end."

"No finer description," says Dugald Stewart, "of the perfection of this art is to be found in any author, ancient or modern."

The prince of Roman orators used the following language in his speech for Muræna: "*Magnus dicendi labor, magna res, magna dignitas, summa autem gratia,*" that is to say: "Great is the labor that qualifies speaking, great the art itself, great its dignity, and most great too, the influence connected with it." Apart from its professional value and advantages to the clergyman, the senator, and the lawyer, the

art of public speaking is the surest means of gratifying that laudable ambition which prompts most men to take some part in the social and political life of their generation. Wherever self-government is recognized there must be gatherings of different kinds for the transactions of public business, and in these the ablest speaker will win the attention and arouse the sympathies of all who listen to his sentiments. Pericles, as we learn from Thucydides, once remarked that, "a man who forms a judgment on any point, and cannot explain his views clearly to the people, might as well have never thought on the subject." This assertion is perhaps too absolute, but, at any rate, it points out with emphasis that the value of a mental action is obviously depreciated when we cannot use the result of it orally for the benefit of others. Mankind seem to agree almost unanimously that no accomplishment gains consideration for its possessor so speedily as public speaking; and there is none for which there is so persistent a demand.

Let me again quote some words of Cicero, from one of his best rhetorical treatises:

"I cannot conceive anything more excellent than to be able, by language, to captivate the affections, to charm the understanding, and to impel or restrain the will of whole assemblies, at pleasure. Among every free people, especially in peaceful, settled governments, this single art has always eminently flourished, and always exercised the greatest sway. For what can be more surprising than that, amidst an infinite multitude, one man should appear who shall be almost the only one capable of doing what nature has put in every man's power? Or, can anything impart such exquisite pleasure to the ear and to the intellect as a speech in which the wisdom and dignity of the sentiments are heightened by the utmost force and beauty of expression? Is there anything so commanding, so grand, as that the eloquence of one man should direct the inclinations of the people, the consciences

of judges and the majesty of senates? Nay, further, can aught be esteemed so great, so generous, so public-spirited, as to assist the suppliant, to rear the prostrate, to communicate happiness, to avert danger, and to maintain the rights of a fellow citizen? Can anything be so necessary as to keep those arms always in readiness, with which you may defend yourself, attack the profligate, and redress your own or your country's wrongs?"

Notwithstanding the truth of these eloquent observations, notwithstanding the acknowledged fact that public speaking as a rule is the passport to profit, to high station, and even to fame, it is certain that as an art, it is comparatively neglected; and the character of the oratory which we usually hear is far inferior to what we might expect from the ordinary culture and intellectual vigor of the present age.

What, then, is the cause of this strange state of things? I would suggest the two following reasons as accounting in a Measure for the phenomenon: First, the majority of people seem hastily to have adopted the notion that the faculty of public speaking is simply and wholly a gift or instinct, peculiar to few, and unattainable by the many. They believe that, like Dogberry's reading and writing, oratory comes by nature — that the orator, in fact, as has been said of the poet, *nascitur non fit;* while the reverse of the case is nearer the truth — *orator fit, non nascitur.* I am far from denying that some men by nature are better fitted than others to become orators. Still less do I affirm that all men are capable of making themselves good speakers. But I firmly believe that all who are not tonguetied, or positively deficient in intellect can learn by diligent practice to express their thoughts publicly in intelligible and intelligent language, and in a manner which is not painful either to themselves or to their audience. "The speaker must learn his

crafts as thoroughly as a painter, a sculptor, or a musician; although, like them also, he must have from nature some special aptitude for his vocation." Lord Chesterfield was, I think, guilty of exaggeration when he maintained that a good speaker is as much a mechanic as a good shoemaker, and that the two trades are equally to be learned by the same amount of application.

The second reason why public speaking as an art is neglected is, that even those who hold the same opinions that I have expressed are still unwilling to undergo the necessary labor to become good speakers. They did not, they say, begin the task early in life, as Henry Ward Beecher recommends in his "Lectures on Preaching," and a new study now appears tedious and irksome to them, or they have really not time for the requisite training, and have no pressing need for the accomplishment as no immediate emolument can be derived from it.

It would be wasting breath to argue against these frivolous objections. The best way to expose their futility, and at the same time to show how the art of public speaking may be acquired, is carefully to ascertain by what means the greater number of those who have succeeded as orators or debaters have attained their success. Those who endeavor to follow their example and adopt their methods may probably fail to gain their supreme mastery over the instrument of language; but, in the end, they will have profited largely by their self-discipline, and it is honorable to win by hard work even a low rank amid a crowd of competitors.

Some years ago, on the occasion of distributing the prizes at University College, London, the Earl of Derby delivered a speech, which no one, old or young, can read without profit or admiration. Part of it I shall quote as strictly applicable

to the present subject. As the orator of old insisted on action, so Lord Derby insisted on industry, premising that his exhortations on this head must necessarily appear common-place. But a common-place well explained is no common-place in the ordinary sense of the term, and Lord Derby did not declare industry to be the grand secret of success in life without showing its necessity and its products. Capital, in whatever shape it may be accumulated, whether pecuniary or intellectual, is hoarded labor. The man who is ready now has constantly worked hard to be ready, and his present state of modest confidence is the result of unwearied drill. In the words of Lord Derby, "We have heard at the bar, or in Parliament, men whose instantaneous command of words, whose readiness of thought as well as of expression, seemed the effect of instinct rather than of training; but what is the secret of that readiness? Why, this — that the mind has previously been so exercised on similar subjects that not merely the necessary words, but the necessary arguments and combinations of thought, have become by practice as instinctive as those motions of the body by which we walk or speak, or do any habitual and familiar act.

"One man will pore and perplex himself over a difficult point, be it in law or science, or what you will; another will come in and see at a glance where the difficulty lies, and what is the solution. Does that necessarily prove that the latter has more genius? No, but it proves that his faculties have been sharpened by familiarity with such topics; and the ease with which he now does his work, so far from proving that he has always worked with ease, is a measure, so to speak, of the labor by which he has prepared himself for doing it."

These are wise and true words, well worthy of our attention. To the same effect is the testimony of Sydney Smith, who shows by indubitable proofs that the greatest poets, historians, and orators have labored as hard in their specialties as the makers of dictionaries and the compilers of indexes. No man, says Henry Ward Beecher, can preach well except out of an abundance of well-wrought material. Some sermons seem to start up suddenly, body and soul, but in fact they are the product of years of experience. Natural genius is but the soil, which let alone, runs to weeds. If it is to bear fruit and harvests worth reaping, no matter how good the soil is, it must be ploughed and tilled with incessant care.

"The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight;
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night."

Lord Brougham, whose competency to instruct us on the subject of public speaking no one will be bold enough to deny, used the following language in 1820, and was apparently so satisfied with its truthfulness that he reproduced it forty years afterward in the address which he delivered at his installation as chancellor of the University of Edinburgh:

"I dwell upon the subject of what is called extempore speaking in order to illustrate the necessity of full preparation and of written composition of those who would attain real excellence in the rhetorical art. In truth, a certain proficiency in public speaking may be acquired by any one who chooses often to try it, and can harden himself against the pain of frequent failures. If he is a person of no capacity his speeches will of course be bad; but even though he be man of genius, they will not be eloquent.

"A sensible remark or a fine image may occur; but the loose and slovenly diction, the want of art, in combining and disposing his ideas, the inability to bring out many of his

thoughts, and the incompetency to present any of them in the most efficient form, would reduce the speaker to the level of an ordinary talker. His diction is sure to be clumsy and incorrect — unlimited in quantity, but of no real value.

"Such a speaker is never in want of a word, and hardly ever has one that is worth hearing. '*Sine hac quidem conscientia,*' says Quintilian, speaking of the habit of written composition, '*illa ipsa extempore dicendi facultas inanem modo loquacitatem dabit, et verba in labris nascentia.*'[1] It is a common error to call this natural eloquence. It is the reverse: It is neither natural nor eloquent."

If public men in every grade would but take to heart this advice of Lord Brougham, the quantity would be reduced and the quality enhanced of what commonly passes by the name of eloquence. It is not that the age of oratory like that of chivalry has passed away, but that the necessity for study and the discipline it exacts is not sufficiently recognized.

"The untaught speaker [continues Lord Brougham] who utters according to the dictates of his feelings, may now and then achieve a success. But in these instances he would not be less successful if he had studied the art, while that study would enable him to succeed equally in all that he delivers. Herein, indeed, consists the value of the study: It enables a man to do at all times what nature teaches only on rare occasions."

We cannot value too highly these opinions of Lord Brougham. The eloquence of the untrained and uncultivated is elicited only by special occasions. It is not at command. The speaker does not master his powers, but is mastered by them. When wanted, they are not always at hand, and when drawn forth by emergencies, they often transport him beyond his mark. As Archbishop Whately once said, "he has but

[1] Without this consciousness that very power of extempore speaking will give merely an empty loquacity and words stringing forth from the lips.

the same 'command of language' that the rider has of a horse that has run away with him." But the eloquence of the trained and cultivated speaker is a power, though often dormant, yet always ready for use; when summoned it appears, though there be no favoring circumstances. It can speak even to reluctant ears, and compel an audience.

The story of Demosthenes, whose orations, according to Hume, present to us the models which approach the nearest to perfection, is well known to every schoolboy. How he was nick-named "ὁ Βαταλός" or "the stammerer;" how he cured his stuttering by speaking with pebbles in his mouth; how he strengthened his weak lungs by repeating verses of the poets as he ran up hill; how he declaimed on the seashore in stormy weather to accustom himself to the tumult of the Athenian popular assemblies; how his first oratorical effort was received with ridicule — these and other statements may, perhaps, not be literally true, but at any rate they attest the tradition of antiquity that he labored hard and successfully to overcome his natural deficiencies for public speaking. In spite of the severe discipline which he underwent to master the art of rhetoric, and notwithstanding the faculty of speech which he must have acquired by persistent practice, it is related of him that, like Pericles, whom he so greatly admired, he had an unconquerable aversion to extemporaneous addresses. He was unwilling to "trust his success to Fortune," that is, to the uncertain inspiration of the moment.

By a detailed examination of the repetitions that occur in some of his finest orations, Lord Brougham has enabled us to appreciate the progressive workmanship of many striking passages. We are thus, as it were, let into the secret of their composition, almost as if the rough draught had been preserved. As Moore has pointed out in his "Life of Sheridan"

that many of his *soi-disant* spontaneous witticisms — the hoarded repartees and matured jests with which Pitt taunted him — had passed through numerous editions on paper before they charmed the social circle or electrified the House of Commons; so Lord Brougham shows that some of the most admired sentences of Demosthenes, when he wished to adapt them to new occasions, were invested with fresh beauty by happy variations in expression which had been suggested subsequently to their original delivery.

Passing over the incredible labors of Cicero, which he has fully described in his various works on oratory, let us select some "modern instances," all tending to prove the value and necessity of incessant toil. When Woodfall, a tolerably good judge of public speaking, had heard Sheridan's maiden speech in Parliament, he said to him discouragingly: "I am sorry to say that I do not think this is your line; you had much better have stuck to your former pursuits."

"It is in me, however," said Sheridan, after a short pause, "and, by God, it shall come out."

This has been called a case of the intuitive consciousness of latent power; but, if Brougham is correct in his estimate, Sheridan's genius for oratory fell far short of his assiduity in cultivating it. Some defects, we are told, he never could eradicate. A thick and indistinct mode of delivery, and an inability to speak without the most careful preparation characterized him to the end; but by excessive labor he verified his own prediction, and as an orator eventually attained to excellence rarely equalled, and, if we are to judge by the verdict of his contemporaries, never, with all his faults, surpassed.

When Burke brought forward in the House of Commons the various accusations against Warren Hastings, the charge

relating to the spoliation of the Begums was allotted to Sheridan. His speech was made on February 7, 1787, and occupied nearly six hours in delivery. When the orator sat down, the whole house as if fascinated with his eloquence burst into an involuntary tumult of applause. It was the first time, we are told, that any speech in Parliament had ever been received with cheers.

Burke declared it to be the most extraordinary effort he had ever witnessed; while Fox said, "all that he had ever heard, all that he had ever read, when compared with it, dwindled into nothing, and vanished like vapor before the sun."

Even Pitt, who had frequently satirized the dramatic turns and epigrammatic points of Sheridan, acknowledged "that it surpassed all the eloquence of ancient and modern times, and possessed everything that genius or art could furnish to agitate and control the human mind."

Twenty years afterward Windham asserted that "the speech deserved all its fame, and was, in spite of some faults of taste, such as were seldom wanting in the literary and parliamentary performances of Sheridan, the greatest that had been delivered within the memory of man."

It should not be forgotten that the debate was adjourned when the speech was concluded, in order that the House might have time to recover their calmness and collect their reason. As Lord Lytton describes the scene in his poem of "St. Stephen's:"

> "He who had known the failure, felt the sneer,
> Smit burning brows in muttering, 'It is here'—
> He now, one hour the acknowledged lord of all,
> Hears Pitt adjourn the agitated hall,
> That brain may cool, and heart forget to swell,
> And dawn relax the enchanter's midnight spell."

This effective oration, though written out in full, and committed accurately to memory, was never published. The author preferred trusting his fame to the tradition of its effects rather than to the production itself. In so doing he probably acted wisely. He never, says Moore, made a speech of any moment of which a sketch was not found among his papers, with the showy parts written two or three times over. His memoranda show the exact place where the involuntary exclamation, "Good God, Mr. Speaker," was to be introduced, and exhibited elaborate "burst of passion," into which it was his intention to be "hurried." Lord Brougham has thus recorded the means by which after a most unpromising beginning Sheridan finally attained his prodigious success: —

"What he wanted in acquired learning and natural quickness he made up by indefatigable industry. Within given limits toward a present object no labor could daunt him. No man could work for a season with more steady and unwearied application. By constant practice in small matters, or before private committees, by diligent attendance upon all debates, by habitual intercourse with all classes of dealers in political wares, he trained himself to a facility of speaking absolutely essential to all but first-rate genius, and all but necessary even to that. By these steps he rose to the rank of a first-rate speaker, and as great a debater as want of readiness and need for preparation would permit."

The case of Benjamin Disraeli bears some resemblance to that of Brinsley Sheridan. In 1837 he was elected member for Maidstone. On December the seventh of that year his maiden speech in the House was deservedly cut short by a burst of inextinguishable laughter, and he ended it with the memorable words: "I am not at all surprised at the reception which I have experienced. I have begun several times

many things, and I have often succeeded at last. I will sit down now, but the time will come when you will hear me."

His prophecy, like Sheridan's, has also been verified, and by dint of the same indefatigable toil.

Chatham and Burke in like manner, Pitt and Fox, Grattan, Erskine, Curran and Shiel, Lord Brougham, Macaulay, and the finest orators of the present day, form no exception to the fixed law that genius, to succeed even in public speaking, cannot afford to dispense with labor, all it can do is to shorten the time of labor. Lord Chatham, at the age of eighteen, when he went to the University of Oxford, forthwith entered upon a severe course of rhetorical training. We are informed by his biographers that he adopted the practice of translating largely from the most famous orators and historians of antiquity. His model was Demosthenes, and by frequently writing translations of his finest orations, he insensibly acquired the habit of always using the right word in the right place. This practice of accurate translation he adopted from Cicero, who has recommended it in his treatise "De Oratore," and whose preface to his versions of both Demosthenes' and Æschines' "De Corona" is extant, though the translations themselves have perished. As another means of acquiring a *copia verborum*,[1] and a choice diction, he diligently studied the sermons of Barrow; and, with the same view went twice through Nathan Bailey's folio dictionary, examining the exact meaning and use of every word until he thoroughly appreciated the strength, beauty, and significance of the English language, and could enlist any part of it at will in the service of his oratory. He trained himself at the same time for the graces of public speaking by unwearied exercises in elocution. An imposing figure

[1] A sufficient vocabulary.