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DEBATING.

EVILS VERSUS BENEFITS.

The practice of debating is recognized in nearly every college literary society; in fact, as in our own, a discussion upon some stated "question" constitutes the important part of every evening's exercise, upon which by far the most stress is laid.

But that the benefits resulting to the participant are *always* a sufficient recompense for the time employed, is by no means certain. On the contrary there is reason to believe that debating, as frequently conducted, may become extremely perilous, and the source of many evils; unless the abuses are avoided, and the uses and objects—the true spirit of such discussions are studied and thoroughly understood by everyone engaging in them as a means of culture. We desire in this article to indicate a few of the dangers of greatest magnitude, and the manner in which we think they can be avoided, and the debating society be made a source of many rich benefits.

EVILS TO BE AVOIDED.

1. Danger of acquiring a habit of careless and desultory speaking and thinking.

While the art of purely extemporaneous speaking is a desirable and rich possession, and perhaps implies the necessity of some practice, without previously arranged ideas in any set phraseology, yet we are seconded by good authority in saying, that the greatest degree of excellence in this art can only be obtained by careful and systematic preparation and arrangement of thought on every subject we are called upon to discuss. Thus we acquire a fund of well-arranged ideas and well-formed opinions on many subjects readymade for future use; at the same time the power to improvise an address on the spur of the moment is strengthened.

But how is it in our societies? Do not the majority of the speakers seem to think that their chief duty is to fill as much time as possible with a heterogeneous vocabulary, without arrangement, logic, or sense?

Who among us, that has taken an active part in the discussions of a debating society for a term, has not often expressed

ideas which he knew to be weak, almost silly when carefully considered, assertions and opinions that he would have been ashamed to advance anywhere else, and in many other ways hazarded his reputation, contrary to his common sense, for the sake of making a speech? Can such a course, long pursued, fail to weaken the judgement, blunt the edge of the intellectual discrimination, and vitiate the taste? Would it not certainly be hazardous?

No one has a right, for the sake of a cheap reputation for speaking, to impose upon his listeners a mess of frothy vapor; for, if he is capable of preparing anything better though briefer, it is an insult to proffer that of inferior quality.

Among those typical of the class with whom this evil is common, are these: The man who can spin a half-hour speech from a half-minute idea—on the same principle that the clown could sing a song of one hundred and one verses, but each verse was similar to the preceding and just like the following; the well-known soph who has just picked up one or two large words from his text-book, of "learned length and thundering sound," which he is aching to enunciate as often as possible in a speech of ten minutes; the senior of unlimited confidence in his ability to speak without preparation—and consequently, of course, an unconscionable bore; the fellow with voice of dolorous twang and sickly monotone, who can argue unceasingly though ignominiously defeated at every attack. Like Goldsmith's village schoolmaster—

"For e'en though vanquished, he could argue still;"

and lastly the petty plagiarist who has just stolen some tidbit of argument which he is anxious to "pass" upon the innocent public, as original, before someone else gets the start of him.

2. Danger of forming false opinions, and of becoming dogmatical.

There is great danger that, in the strife for victory in college contests, the student may form false opinions and be urged to take radical stands upon various issues of vital importance, which will work a great injury to him if persisted in during life; and, if ever abandoned, is apt to impel him to the opposite extreme, equally dangerous, from the reaction. As, for instance, if he is an extreme liberalist in politics and religion, against his convictions, while in college, he may become an extreme partisan or sectarian in after life. This appears to be the reason: the opinions of students are in process of formation; hence when some important subject is presented for discussion, a certain amount of thought, of greater or less degree, is directed to one side or the other of the question, with the hope of conquest. In the event of success, elated by victory, he is apt to persuade himself that the side of the question he has advocated is the correct one, and, likely, will stubbornly adhere thereto against all reason. Who that has often debated, has not sometimes almost persuaded himself to believe a sophistry which in the outset he felt to be false? Is not the advocacy of a false doctrine for argument's sake equally dangerous to the hearer and the reasoner?

3. Danger of disregarding truth in discussions.

Closely connected with the last objection is the frequent disregard of known truth in debate. The debater is often induced to take positions which he sincerely believes to be false, in order to show his

skill. There seems to be a charm, an excitement, a peculiar gratification in being able to wield your adversary's weapon better than he can himself. Such a practice is admitted to be extremely dangerous.

It is stated that Chillingworth, the greatest theologian and controversialist of his day, by frequently exercising his powers to overthrow all adversaries in the arena of words, from all sides of every question, at last came to doubt the validity of all human reasoning. He had conquered himself, and could believe nothing from any demonstration.

These are a few of the perils of debating. We will now consider

THE BENEFITS AFFORDED.

1. It is valuable as a means of testing and developing the powers of thought, reason, and speech, and of determining the channels in which thought most naturally flows, and the style of argument and oratory in which each one is most successful.

Just as the artist learns, after long practice, how to apply the colors with his brush in such a way as to create the most beautiful picture, from their happy blending; in what department of his art he is the most powerful; what artistic touches he can give most skillfully;—So the debater learns by trial in what style of word-painting he can create the most effective pictures of thought; what kind of illustration he uses most successfully; the way to direct his flights of oratory, his flashes of wit, his touches of humor, his shafts of sarcasm, his irony, in order to tell most forcibly on the minds of his listeners; how to address himself on all occasions to suit the circumstances—the time, the place, and the audience; and, like a youthful gladiator, in the arena of controversy, he learns to adjust his armor of defence and to wield the sword of argument with skill. He gauges his own powers and resources, and discovers also, to some extent, how they should be cultivated, and how far he may aspire. Thus when the real battle begins, the mimic fray being ended, he can enter with some assurance of success. He will soon get his intellectual sinews under perfect control. He will temper his blade a little more carefully so that, although his blows may not fall as fiercely, as wildly and fast, as in his youthful contests, yet his weapon will flash no less brightly, and his strokes will be stronger and keener.

2. Debating develops originality, and teaches its value.

The speaker soon discovers that the person who draws from his originality, is the one who is listened to with patience and pleasure. Invention in argument is acknowledged to be the great secret of success.

Though the speaker be Mr. Blank whose very appearance induces a smile; whose awkward gestures, ungainly form, stammering tongue, and unwieldy arms, swinging fearfully about, like the windmills that excited the valor of the knight of La Mancha, present a ludicrous spectacle; though invariably, as he reaches some soaring climax of oratory, at times even sublime, he flounders, collapses and falls ingloriously from his giddy height back to the earth; yet, if he proffer some treasure fresh from his own mine of thought, even though mingled with much dross, it will be accepted and the speaker's effort honored.

3. As we have already intimated, the practice of discussing topics of living interest, if care be taken in preparation

gives a fund of well-digested opinions on many important subjects.

Such careful preparation, if truth, candor, and honesty, be regarded, will obviate most of the dangerous evils we have mentioned, and at the same time confer the most valuable part of a true education—well formed opinions.

We are therefore warmly in favor of debating societies, if properly conducted, believing that the evils which would seem naturally to attend them may be avoided, and they be made the sources of much practical knowledge, and fountains of inspiration to attain excellence in oratory.

WHAT WE HAVE IN THE UNIVERSITY.

A correspondent of the *Omaha Herald*, under the signature of "Iowa" recently makes a bitter and malicious attack on the State University. The article, besides containing a mess of weak and inconsistent attempts at arguments, barefaced falsehoods, and silly complaints, conveys a cowardly and venomous thrust at the Chancellor. The writer says that the University is only such in name; that the laboratory, the apparatus, appliances, and furniture for use in the various departments, are mere shams, and in no way adequate for the needs of the school; in short, that everything is "cheap." Finally he says that the Chancellor is the cause of all deficiencies and failures.

We do not reply to these charges because they ought to deserve notice. Like many similar attacks at the life and welfare of the University that have been made through the columns of that scavenger among the press of Nebraska—*The Omaha Herald*—which greedily seizes and gulps down every piece of carion that comes within its reach, no matter how putrid, this slander will not be noticed by intelligent people, who have taken the pains to visit the University, to see for themselves.

But it is a fact that the people of the state generally, even of Lincoln, know nothing about the University and what it contains; hence are liable to be deceived by such articles as the one in question.

Said one of our most prominent citizens and a popular State officer, the other day in our presence, after paying a visit to the laboratory, library, and museum,—"why, the University is quite an extensive affair, isn't it? I had no idea that so great progress had been made—that so much had been accumulated in so short a time."

THE LIBRARY AND MUSEUM.

The *Herald* says:—"The library and museum are wonderful exhibitions of that disposition which some men exhibit in always buying their clothing at a cheap Jew store—the clothes hide their nakedness, and are 'cheap.' He has certainly contrived a very labored and awkward sentence to express a falsehood that might have been stated in three words.

The library now contains about *three hundred volumes*. Instead of being "cheap," it is a matter of frequent wonder and remark by every visitor inspecting the library, that so much wisdom has been exercised in the selections made. Though the number of volumes is quite limited, the shelves contain the choicest selections of standard works of the best authors, neatly and elegantly bound, representing almost every department of literature and science. The student is never at a loss for books of reference, or the best instructive literature for his leisure hours, either