

## CHAPTER XII

### DEBATING

**The Ideal of Debating.** A long time ago so admirable a man as William Penn stated the high ideal of all real debating whether practiced in the limited range of school interests or in the extended field of life's activities.

In all debates let truth be thy aim, not victory, or an unjust interest; and endeavor to gain, rather than to expose thy antagonist.

The quotation states exactly the true aim of all debating—the conclusion of the right, the truth rather than the securing of a decision over an opponent. The same rules which animate the true lover of sports, the clear distinction which is instilled into all participants of amateur athletics of the meanings and significance of the two terms *sportsman* and *sport*, can be carried over to apply to school activities in debating. Honest differences of opinion among people upon countless questions will always furnish enough material for regular debating so that no one need ever do violence to his convictions.

**Value of Debate.** One of the greatest educational values of practice in debate is that the ability it develops can be applied instantly in the life beyond the schoolroom, that it operates in every person's daily life. There are differences in the manner in which debating is carried on in the two places, but practice in the earlier will result in skill and self-confidence in the second.

**Debate in Actual Life.** The most marked difference between debates in the two phases of life is the difference of form. In academic circles debate is a well-regulated game between matched sides. In actual life only in certain professions are the rules well defined. In most cases the debating is disguised under different forms, though the essential purposes and methods are the same.

Debate between lawyers in courts—technically termed pleading—is the most formal of all professional debating. Its regulations are found in the stabilized court procedure which every lawyer must master and obey.

Much looser than the formal debate of the court room is the speech-making of the legislative organization from the lowest township board meeting up to the Senate of the United States. Of course the members of such bodies are regulated by certain restrictions, but the speeches are not likely to be curbed in time as are academic performances, nor are the speakers likely to follow a prearranged order, nor are they always equally balanced in number, nor do they agree so carefully upon "team work." Sometimes in a legislative body the first speaker may be on the negative side, which is quite contrary to all the rules of regularly conducted debates. All the speakers may also be on one side of a measure, the opposing side not deigning to reply, resting secure in the knowledge of how many votes they can control when the real test of power comes.

Most informal of all are the general discussions in which business matters are decided. In these the speeches are never so set as in the two preceding kinds. The men are less formal in their relations and addresses to one another. The steps are less marked in their changes. Yet underneath the seeming lack of regulation there is the framework of debate, for there is always present the sense of two sides upon every proposition, whether it be the purchase of new office equipment for a distant agent, an increase of salary for employees, or the increase of capitalization. Certain speakers support some proposition. Others oppose it until they are convinced and won over to the affirmative side or until they are out-voted.

Two men seated in an office may themselves be debaters, audience, and judges of their own argumentative opinions. They may in themselves fill all the requirements of a real debate. They deliver the speeches on the affirmative and negative sides. Each listens to the arguments of his opponent. And finally, the pair together gives a decision upon the merits of the arguments presented.

On all such occasions the speakers need and use just those qualities which classroom training has developed in them—knowledge of material, plan of presentation, skill in expression, conviction and persuasion of manner, graceful acceptance of defeat.

**Debating Demands a Decision.** Debating goes one step farther than merely argumentative speaking. Debating demands a decision upon the case, it requires a judgment, a registered action. Again in this respect it is like a game.

### EXERCISES

1. Make a list of propositions which have been debated or might be debated in a courtroom.
2. Make another list of propositions which have been debated or might be debated in legislative bodies.
3. Make a list of propositions which might be debated in business.
4. As far as is possible, indicate the decisions upon them.
5. Choose some proposition on which there is considerable difference of opinion in the class. Make a list of those who favor and those who oppose. Speak upon the proposition, alternating affirmative and negative.
6. Discuss the speeches delivered in the fifth exercise.

**Persons Involved in a Debate.** Who are the persons involved in a regular debate? They are the presiding officer, the speakers themselves, the audience, and the judges.

**The Presiding Officer.** Every debate has a presiding officer. The Vice-President of the United States is the presiding officer of the Senate. The Speaker is the presiding officer of the House of Representatives. If you will refer to Chapter IV on *Beginning the Speech* you will see several other titles of presiding officers. In school debates the head of the institution may act in that capacity or some person of note may be invited to preside. In regular classroom work the instructor may serve as presiding officer, or some member of the class may be chosen or appointed. The latter method is the best—after the instructor has shown by example just what the duties of such a position are.

The presiding officer should announce the topic of debate in a short introductory speech. He should read the names of the speakers on the affirmative and those on the negative side. He should stipulate the terms of the debate—length of each speech, time for rebuttal, order of rebuttal, method of keeping speakers within time limits, conditions of judgment (material, presentation, etc.), announce the judges, and finally introduce the first speaker; then the subsequent speakers. At the close he might refer to the fact of the debate's being ended, he might rehearse the conditions of judgment, and request the judges to retire to consider their decision. Practice varies as to who shall deliver the decision of the judges to the audience. Sometimes the chairman elected by the judges announces the decision. Sometimes the judges hand the decision to the presiding officer who announces it.

**The Debaters.** Beyond saying that the speakers must do their best, there is nothing to be added here about their duty in the debate except to issue one warning to them in connection with the next personal element to be considered—the audience.

**The Audience.** Debaters must remember that in practically no circumstances outside legislative bodies are the audience and the judges ever the same. Debaters argue to convince the judges—not the entire audience, who are really as disconnected from the decision of the debate as are the straggling spectators and listeners in a courtroom detached from the jury who render the verdict of guilty or not guilty. The debater must therefore speak for the judges, not for his audience. Many a debating team has in the course of its speeches won all the applause only to be bitterly disappointed in the end by hearing the decision awarded to the other side. Recall the warnings given in the previous chapters against the tempting fallacies of appealing to crowd feelings and prejudices.

In classroom debates it is a good distribution of responsibility to make all the members not participating in the speaking act as judges and cast votes in rendering a decision. This makes the judges and the audience one. Moreover it changes the mere listener into a discriminating judge. If the instructor cares to carry this matter of responsibility one step farther, he can ask the members of the class to explain and justify their votes.

The audience, when it is also the judge, has the responsibility of careful attention, analysis, and comparison. It is too much to expect usual general audiences to refuse to be moved by unworthy pleas and misrepresentations, to accord approval only to the best speakers and the soundest arguments. But surely in a class of public speakers any such tricks and schemes should be received with stolid frigidity. Nothing is so damaging to appeals to prejudice, spread-eagleism, and fustian bombast as an impassive reception.

**The Judges.** In any debate the judges are of supreme importance. They decide the merits of the speakers themselves. The judges are of infinitely more importance than the audience. In interscholastic debates men of some prominence are invited to act as judges. In the instructions to them it should be made clear that they are not to decide which side of a proposition they themselves approve. They are to decide which group of speakers does the best work. They should try to be merely the impersonal registers of comparative merit. They should sink their own feelings as every teacher must when he hears a good speech from one of his own students supporting something to which the instructor is opposed. Good judges of debates realize this and frequently award decisions to speakers who support opposite positions to their personal opinions. They must not be like the judges in an interscholastic debate who announced their decision thus, "The judges have decided that China must not be dismembered." That was an interesting fact perhaps, but it had nothing to do with their duty as judges of that debate.

In business, the buyer, the head of the department, the board of directors, constitute the judges who render the decision. In legislative assemblies the audience and judges are practically identical, for after the debate upon a measure is concluded, those who have listened to it render individual verdicts by casting their votes. In such cases we frequently see decisions rendered not upon the merits of the debate, but according to class prejudice, personal opinion, or party lines. This is why so many great argumentative speeches were accounted failures at the time of their delivery. Delivered to secure majority votes they failed to carry conviction to the point of changing immediate action, and so in the small temporary sense they were failures. In legal trials the jury is the real judge, although by our peculiar misapplication of the term a different person entirely is called judge. In court the judge is in reality more often merely the presiding officer. He oversees the observance of all the rules of court practice, keeps lawyers within the regulations,

instructs the jury, receives the decision from them, and then applies the law. Every lawyer speaks—not to convince the judge—but to convince the jury to render a decision in his favor.

**Scholastic Debating. Choosing the Proposition.** In school debating the proposition may be assigned by the instructor or it may be chosen by him from a number submitted by the class. The class itself may choose by vote a proposition for debate. In interscholastic debating the practice now usually followed is for one school to submit the proposition and for the second school to decide which side it prefers to support. In any method the aim should be to give neither side any advantage over the other. The speakers upon the team may be selected before the question of debate is known. It seems better, when possible, to make the subject known first and then secure as speakers upon both sides, students who have actual beliefs upon the topic. Such personal conviction always results in keener rivalry.

**Time Limits.** Since no debate of this kind must last too long, time restrictions must be agreed upon. In every class, conditions will determine these terms. Three or four speakers upon each side make a good team. If each is allowed six minutes the debate should come well within an hour and still allow some time for voting upon the presentations. It should be distinctly understood that a time limit upon a speaker must be observed by him or be enforced by the presiding officer.

The speakers upon one side will arrange among themselves the order in which they will speak but there should be a clear understanding beforehand as to whether rebuttal speeches are to be allowed.

**Rebuttal Speeches.** Rebuttal speeches are additional speeches allowed to some or all the speakers of a debating team after the regular argumentative speeches have been delivered. In an extended formal debate all the speakers may thus appear a second time. In less lengthy discussions only some of them may be permitted to appear a second time. As the last speaker has the advantage of making the final impression upon the judges it is usual to offset this by reversing the order of rebuttal. In the first speeches the negative always delivers the last speech. Sometimes the first affirmative speaker is allowed to follow with the single speech in rebuttal. If the team consist of three speakers and all are allowed to appear in rebuttal the entire order is as follows.

*First Part*

*Rebuttal*

First affirmative

First negative

First negative

First affirmative

Second affirmative

Second negative

Second negative

Second affirmative

Third affirmative

Third negative

Third negative

Third affirmative

If not all the speakers are to speak in rebuttal the team itself decides which of its members shall speak for all.

**Preparation.** The proposition should be decided on and the teams selected long enough in advance to allow for adequate preparation. Every means should be employed to secure sufficient material in effective arrangement. Once constituted, the team should consider itself a unit. Work should be planned in conference and distributed among the speakers. At frequent meetings they should present to the side all they are able to find. They should lay out a comprehensive plan of support of their own side. They should anticipate the arguments likely to be advanced by the other, and should provide for disposing of them if they are important enough to require refuting. It is a good rule for every member of a debating team to know all the material on his side, even though part of it is definitely assigned to another speaker.

This preliminary planning should be upon a definite method. A good outline to use, although some parts may be discarded in the debate itself, is the following simple one.

- I. State the proposition clearly.
  1. Define the terms.
  2. Explain it as a whole.
- II. Give a history of the case.
  1. Show its present bearing or aspect.
- III. State the issues.
- IV. Prove.
- V. Refute.
- VI. Conclude.

**Finding the Issues.** In debating, since time is so valuable, a speaker must not wander afield. He must use all his ability, all his material to prove his contention. It will help him to reject material not relevant if he knows exactly what is at issue between the two sides. It was avoiding the issue to answer the charge that Charles I was a tyrant by replying that he was a good husband. Unless debaters realize exactly what must be proven to make their position secure, there will be really no debate, for the two sides will never meet in a clash of opinion. They will pass each other without meeting, and instead of a debate they will present a series of argumentative speeches. This failure to state issues clearly and to support or refute them convincingly is one of the most common faults of all debating. In ordinary conversation a frequently heard criticism of a discussion or speech or article is "But that was not the point at issue at all." These issues must appear in the preliminary plans, in the finished brief, and in the debate itself.

The only point in issue between us is, how long after an author's death the State shall recognize a copyright in his representatives and assigns; and it can, I think, hardly be disputed by any rational man that this is a point which the legislature is free to determine in the way which may appear to be most conducive to the general good.

THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY: *Copyright*, 1841

Mr. President, the very first question that challenges our attention in the matter of a league of nations is the question of whether a war in Europe is a matter of concern to the United States. The ultra opponents of any league of nations assert that European quarrels and European battles are no concern of ours. If that be true, we may well pause before obligating ourselves to make them our concern. Is it true?

SENATOR P.J. MCCUMBER: *The League of Nations*, 1919

The best method of finding the issues is to put down in two columns the main contentions of both sides. By eliminating those entries which are least important and those which have least bearing upon the present case the issues may be reduced to those which the debate should cover. Any possible attempt to cloud the issues on the part of the opposing side can thus be forestalled. All the speakers on one side should participate in this analysis of the proposition to find and state the issues.

The New York *Tribune*, by parallel columns, brought out these chief points of difference between the Paris plan and Senator Knox's for the League of Nations.

#### THE KNOX PLAN

League formed of all, not a portion, of the nations of the world.

War to be declared an international crime, and any nation engaging in war, except in self-defense when actually attacked, to be punished by the world as an international criminal.

#### THE PARIS PLAN

Under Article VII it is provided that no state shall be admitted unless it is able to give guaranties of its intention to observe its international obligations and conform to the principles prescribed by the League in regard to its naval and military forces and armaments.

Article XVI provides that should any of the high contracting parties break covenants under Article XII (relating to arbitration) it shall be deemed to have committed an act of war against the League, which undertakes to exercise economic pressure; and it is to be the duty of the executive council to recommend what military or naval force the members of the League shall contribute to be

The Monroe Doctrine to be safeguarded; also our immigration policy and our right to expel aliens.

Our right to maintain military and naval establishments and coaling stations, and our right to fortify the Panama Canal and our frontiers to be safeguarded.

An international court to be empowered by the League to call upon the signatory Powers to enforce its decrees against unwilling states by force, economic pressure, or otherwise. The constitution of the League to provide, however, that decrees against an American Power shall be enforced by the nations of this hemisphere, and decrees against a country of the eastern hemisphere by the Powers of that hemisphere.

used to protect the covenants of the League.

None of these matters is mentioned specifically, but President Wilson has said that the League will "extend the Monroe Doctrine to the whole world" and that domestic and internal questions are not a concern of the League.

Article VIII says: "The executive council shall also determine for the consideration and action of the several governments what military equipment and armament is fair and reasonable and in proportion to the scale of forces laid down in the program of disarmament, and these limits when adopted shall not be exceeded without the permission of the executive council."

Article XIV provides for the establishment of a "permanent court of international justice," but its powers are limited to hearing and determining "any matter which the parties recognize as suitable for submission to it for arbitration" under Article XIII.

**Team Work.** With the plan agreed upon by the speakers, the brief made out, and the material distributed, each speaker can go to work in earnest to prepare his single speech. The best method has been outlined in this book. His notes should be accurate, clear, easily manipulated. His quotations should be exact, authoritative. By no means should he memorize his speech. Such

stilted delivery would result in a series of formal declamations. With his mind stocked with exactly what his particular speech is to cover, yet familiar enough with the material of his colleagues to use it should he need it, the debater is ready for the contest.

**Manipulating Material.** The speakers on a side should keep all their material according to some system. If cards are used, arguments to be used in the main debate might be arranged in one place, material for rebuttal in another, quotations and statistics in still another. Then if the other side introduces a point not anticipated it should be easy to find the refuting or explaining material at once to counteract its influence in the next speech, if it should be disposed of at once. If slips of paper are used, different colors might indicate different kinds of material. Books, papers, reports, to be used should always be within available distance. While a speaker for the other side is advancing arguments the speaker who will follow him should be able to change, if necessary, his entire plan of defense or attack to meet the maneuver. He should select from the various divisions upon the table the material he needs, and launch at once into a speech which meets squarely all the contentions advanced by his predecessor. This instantaneous commandeering of material is likely to be most usual in rebuttal, but a good debater must be able to resort to it at a second's notice.

**The First Affirmative Speaker.** The first affirmative speaker must deliver some kind of introduction to the contentions which his side intends to advance. It is his duty to be concise and clear in this. He must not use too much time. If the proposition needs defining and applying he must not fail to do it. He must not give the negative the opportunity to explain and apply to its own purposes the meaning of the proposition. He should state in language which the hearers will remember exactly what the issues are. He can help his own side by outlining exactly what the affirmative intends to prove. He may indicate just what portions will be treated by his colleagues. He should never stop with merely introducing and outlining. Every speaker must advance proof, the first as well as the others. If the preliminary statements by the first affirmative speaker are clearly and convincingly delivered, and if he places a few strong, supporting reasons before the judges, he will have started his side very well upon its course of debating. The last sentences of his speech should drive home the points he has proved.

**The First Negative Speaker.** The first negative speaker either agrees with the definitions and application of the proposition as announced by the first affirmative speaker or he disagrees with them. If the latter, the mere statement of his disagreement is not sufficient. Contradiction is not proof. He must refute the definition and application of the proposition by strong reasoning and ample proof. If his side does not admit the issues as already presented he must explain or prove them away and establish in their place the issues his side sees in the discussion. When the two sides disagree concerning the issues there is a second proposition erected for discussion at once and the argument upon this second matter may crowd out the attempted argument upon the main proposition. To obviate such shifting many schools have the sides exchange briefs or statements of issues before the debate so that some agreement will be reached upon essentials.

In addition to the matters just enumerated the first negative speaker should outline the plan his side will follow, promising exactly what things will be established by his colleagues. If he feels that the first affirmative speaker has advanced proofs strong enough to require instant refutation he should be able to meet those points at once and dispose of them. If they do not require immediate answering, or if they may safely be left for later refutation in the regular rebuttal, he may content himself with simply announcing that they will be answered. He should not allow the audience to believe that his side cannot meet them.

He must not give the impression that he is evading them. If he has to admit their truth, let him frankly say so, showing, if possible, how they do not apply or do not prove all that is claimed for

them, or that though they seem strong in support of the affirmative the negative side has still stronger arguments which by comparison refute at least their effect.

The first negative speaker should not stop with mere refutation. If the first affirmative has advanced proofs, and the first negative disposes of them, the debate is exactly where it was at the beginning. The negative speaker must add convincing arguments of his own. It is a good thing to start with one of the strongest negative arguments in the material.

**The Second Affirmative and Second Negative Speakers.** The second affirmative and the second negative speakers have very much the same kind of speech to make. Taking the immediate cues from the preceding speaker each may at first pay some attention to the remarks of his opponent. Here again there must be quickly decided the question already brought up by the first negative speech—shall arguments be refuted at once or reserved for such treatment in rebuttal? When this decision is made the next duty of each of these second speakers is to advance his side according to the plan laid down by his first colleague. He must make good the advance notice given of his team.

Each position of a debater has its peculiar tasks. The middle speaker must not allow the interest aroused by the first to lag. If anything, his material and manner must indicate a rise over the opening speech.

He must start at the place where the first speaker stopped and carry on the contention to the place at which it has been agreed he will deliver it to the concluding speaker for his side. If this connection among all the speeches of one side is quite plain to the audience an impression of unity and coherence will be made upon them. This will contribute to the effect of cogent reasoning. They will realize that instead of listening to a group of detached utterances they have been following a chain of reasoning every link of which is closely connected with all that precedes and follows.

**The Concluding Affirmative Speaker.** The concluding affirmative speaker must not devote his entire speech to a conclusion by giving an extensive summary or recapitulation. He must present arguments. Realizing that this is the last chance for original argument from his side he may be assigned the very strongest argument of all to deliver, for the effect of what he says must last beyond the concluding speech of the negative. It would likewise be a mistake for him to do nothing more than argue in his concluding speech. Several persons have intervened since his first colleague outlined their side and announced what they would prove. It is his duty to show that the affirmative has actually done what it set out to do. By amplifying and diminishing he may also show how the negative had not carried out its avowed intention of disproving the affirmative's position and proving conclusively its own. The concluding speech for the affirmative is an excellent test of a debater's ability to adapt himself to conditions which may have been entirely unforeseen when the debate began, of his keenness in analyzing the strength of the affirmative and exposing the weakness of the negative, of his power in impressing the arguments of his colleagues as well as his own upon the audience, and of his skill in bringing to a well-rounded, impressive conclusion his side's part in the debate.

**The Concluding Negative Speaker.** The concluding negative speaker must judge whether his immediate predecessor, the concluding affirmative speaker, has been able to gain the verdict of the judges. If he fears that he has, he must strive to argue that conviction away. He too must advance proof finally to strengthen the negative side. He must make his speech answer to his first colleague's announced scheme, or if some change in the line of development has been necessitated, he must make clear why the first was replaced by the one the debaters have followed. If the arguments of the negative have proved what it was declared they would, the last

speaker should emphasize that fact beyond any question in any one's mind. Finally he should save time for a fitting conclusion. This brings the debate proper to a close.

**Restrictions in Rebuttal.** In rebuttal—if it be provided—the main restrictions are two. The speeches are shorter than the earlier ones. No new lines of argument may be introduced. Only lines of proof already brought forward may be considered. Since the speeches are shorter and the material is restricted there is always the disposition to use rebuttal speeches for refutation only. This is a mistake. Refute, but remember always that constructive argument is more likely to win decisions than destructive. Dispose of as many points of the opponents as possible, but reiterate the supporting reasons of your own. Many speakers waste their rebuttals by trying to cover too many points. They therefore have insufficient time to prove anything, so they fall back upon bare contradiction and assertion. Such presentations are mere jumbles of statements. Choose a few important phases of the opposing side's contention. Refute them. Choose the telling aspects of your own case. Emphasize them.

**Manner in Debating.** Be as earnest and convincing in your speeches as you can. Never yield to the temptation to indulge in personalities. Recall that other speakers should never be mentioned by name. They are identified by their order and their side, as "The first speaker on the affirmative" or "The speaker who preceded me," or "My colleague," or "My opponent." Avoid using these with tones and phrases of sarcasm and bitterness. Be fair and courteous in every way. Never indulge in such belittling expressions as "No one understands what he is trying to prove. He reels off a string of figures which mean nothing." Never indulge in cheap wit or attempts at satiric humor.

Prepare so adequately, analyze so keenly, argue so logically, speak so convincingly, that even when your side loses, your opponents will have to admit that you forced them to do better than they had any idea they could.