Daily Exercises

Speaker: Crassus

On the Orator [I. xxxiv. 154-159]

For my part, in the daily exercises of youth, I used chiefly to set myself that task which I knew Gaius Carbo, my old enemy, was wont to practise: this was to set myself some poetry, the most impressive to be found, or to read as much of some speech as I could keep in my memory, and then to declaim upon the actual subject-matter of my reading, choosing as far as possible different words. But later I noticed this defect in my method, that those words which best befitted each subject, and were the most elegant and in fact the best, had been already seized upon by Ennius, if it was on his poetry that I was practising, or by Gracchus, if I chanced to have set myself a speech of his. Thus I saw that to employ the same expressions profited me nothing, while to employ others was a positive hindrance, in that I was forming the habit of using the less appropriate. Afterwards I resolved, and this practice I followed when somewhat older, to translate freely Greek speeches of the most eminent orators. The result of reading these was that, in rendering into Latin what I had read in Greek, I not only found myself using the best words — and yet quite familiar ones — but also coining by analogy certain words such as would be new to our people, provided only they were appropriate.

To proceed, the control and training of voice, breathing, gestures and the tongue itself, call for exertion rather than art; and in these matters we must carefully consider whom we are to take as patterns, whom we should wish to be like. We have to study actors as well as orators so that bad practice may not lead us into some inelegant or ugly habit.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

1. *From the Read Aloud resources you have selected, find a good example of wording, which presents the subject matter in an appropriate, elegant, or simply impressive way.*
2. *What is your understanding of the idea that "must our Oratory be conducted out of this sheltered training-ground at home, right into action, into the dust and uproar, into the camp and the fighting-line of public debate"? What could pose the greatest challenge to you when delivering a speech in the open air?*
3. *Is it necessary for an orator to "argue every question on both sides, and bring out on every topic whatever points can be deemed plausible"?*

The memory too must be trained by carefully learning by heart as many pieces as possible both from our Latin writers and the foreigner. Moreover in this work I do not altogether dislike the use as well, if you are accustomed to it, of that system of associating commonplaces with symbols, which is taught in the profession.

Then at last must our Oratory be conducted out of this sheltered training-ground at home, right into action, into the dust and uproar, into the camp and the fighting-line of public debate. She must face putting everything to the proof and test the strength of her talent, and her secluded preparation must be brought forth into the daylight of reality.

We must also read the poets, acquaint ourselves with histories, study and peruse the masters and authors in every excellent art, and by way of practice praise, expound, emend, criticize and confute them; we must argue every question on both sides, and bring out on every topic whatever points can be deemed plausible. Besides this we must become learned in the common law and familiar with the statutes, and must contemplate all the olden time, and investigate the ways of the senate, political philosophy, the rights of allies, the treaties and conventions, and the policy of empire. And lastly we have to cull, from all the forms of pleasantry, a certain charm of humour, with which to give a sprinkle of salt, as it were, to all of our discourse.

The Pen of Eloquence

Speaker: Crassus

On the Orator [I. xxxiii. 149-153]

I certainly approve of what you yourselves are in the habit of doing, when you propound some case, closely resembling such as are brought into Court, and argue it in a fashion adapted as nearly as possible to real life. Most students however, in so doing, merely exercise their voices, and that in the wrong way, and their physical strength, and whip up their rate of utterance, and revel in a flood of verbiage. This mistake is due to their having heard it said that it is by speaking that men as a rule become speakers. But that other adage is as true that by speaking badly men very easily succeed in becoming bad speakers. This is why, in those exercises of your own, though there is a value in plenty of extempore speaking, it is still more serviceable to take time for consideration, and to speak better prepared and more carefully. But the chief thing is what, to tell the truth, we do least, for it needs great pains which most of us shirk: to write as much as possible.

The pen is the best and most eminent author and teacher of eloquence, and rightly so. For if an extempore and casual speech is easily beaten by one prepared and thought-out, this latter in turn will assuredly be surpassed by what has been written with care and diligence. The truth is that all the commonplaces, whether furnished by art or by individual talent and wisdom, at any rate such as appertain to the subject of our writing, appear and rush forward as we are searching out and surveying the matter with all our natural acuteness; and all the thoughts and expressions, which are the most brilliant in their several kinds, must needs flow up in succession to the point of our pen then; too the actual marshalling and arrangement of words is

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

1. *What makes impromptu speeches difficult?*
2. *Do you agree that "the pen is the best and most eminent author and teacher of eloquence"?*
3. *What does Crassus' metaphor of the boat tell us about the pen of eloquence?*

made perfect in the course of writing, in a rhythm and measure proper to oratory as distinct from poetry.

These are the things which in good orators produce applause and admiration; and no man will attain these except by long and large practice in writing, however ardently he may have trained himself in those off-hand declamations. He too who approaches oratory by way of long practice in writing, brings this advantage to his task, that even if he is extemporizing, whatever he may say bears a likeness to the written word. And moreover if ever, during a speech, he has introduced a written note, the rest of his discourse, when he turns away from the writing, will proceed in unchanging style. Just as when a boat is moving at high speed, if the crew rest upon their oars, the craft herself still keeps her way and her run, though the driving force of the oars has ceased, so in an unbroken discourse, when written notes are exhausted, the rest of the speech still maintains a like progress, under the impulse given by the similarity and energy of the written word.

Memory

SPEAKER: ANTONIUS

On the Orator [II. lxxxvi. 351-354]

I am grateful to the famous Simonides of Ceos, who is said to have first invented the science of mnemonics. There is a story that Simonides was dining at the house of a wealthy nobleman named Scopas in Thessaly when a message was brought to him that two young men were standing at the door who earnestly requested him to come out; so he rose from his seat and went out; but in the interval of his absence the roof of the hall where Scopas was giving the banquet fell in, crushing Scopas himself and his relations underneath the ruins and killing them; and when their friends wanted to bury them but were unable to know them apart, Simonides was enabled by his recollection of the place in which each of them had been reclining at table to identify them for separate interment; and that this circumstance suggested to him the discovery of the truth that the best aid to clearness of memory consists in orderly arrangement. He inferred that persons desiring to train this faculty must select localities and form mental images of the facts they wish to remember and store those images in the localities, with the result that the arrangement of the localities will preserve the order of the facts, and the images of the facts will designate the facts themselves, and we shall employ the localities and images respectively as a wax writing tablet and the letters written on it.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

1. *Has memory ever been a problem for you when speaking in the public or on other occasions? If so, do you still remember what actually happened then?*
2. *What suggestions does Antonius offer here for training and improving memory? Do they also carry implications for how to deliver a memorable speech?*

On the Orator [II. lxxxvii. 357-358]

It has been sagaciously discerned by Simonides or else discovered by some other person that the most complete pictures are formed in our minds of the things that have been conveyed to them and imprinted on them by the senses, but that the keenest of all our senses is the sense of sight, and that consequently perceptions received by the ears or by reflexion can be most easily retained in the mind if they are also

conveyed to our minds by the mediation of the eyes, with the result that things not seen and not lying in the field of visual discernment are earmarked by a sort of outline and image and shape so that we keep hold of as it were by an act of sight things that we can scarcely embrace by an act of thought.

But these forms and bodies, like all the things that come under our view, require an abode, inasmuch as a material object without a locality is inconceivable. Consequently one must employ a large number of localities which must be clear and defined and at moderate intervals apart, and images that are effective and sharply outlined and distinctive, with the capacity of encountering and speedily penetrating the mind.

The ability to use these will be supplied by practice, which engenders habit, and by marking off similar words with an inversion and alteration of their cases or a transference from species to genus, and by representing a whole concept by the image of a single word, on the system and method of a consummate painter distinguishing the positions of objects by modifying their shapes. It follows that this practice cannot be used to draw out the memory if no memory has been given to us by nature, but it can undoubtedly summon it to come forth if it is in hiding.