INTERCOLLEGIATE DEBATING.

For many persons, nothing has a greater attraction than the various forms of intercollegiate contests. In the fall term, foot-ball is in vogue; during the winter, there are track athletics; and the college year is closed with base-ball and rowing. Among the conflicts, the great debates between rival colleges occupy a unique position; for they are virtually the only contests in which are exhibited to the public not physical power and endurance, but intellectual skill and grasp.

As debating fits well into the original purpose of college life, it is not surprising that it has so long occupied a place there. Between 1840 and 1860 it held a position of preëminence; receiving a greater share of attention than any other feature of undergraduate activity. Indeed nearly every student took some part in it.

Investigation shows that not a few of our great men acquired in this way their incentive to effort, and their earliest training for later achievements. Among the records of the debating societies of Williams College are found many accounts of the debates between the late President Garfield and Ex-Senator Ingalls. The occasions, when these two were pitted against each other,—occasions when even standing-room was at a premium,—are well remembered. It is interesting to note how plainly the characteristics of these distinguished men were already visible in this college work. A spectator at one of their battles describes Garfield as a "slow debater," but cool, reliable, showing excellent judgment, and descending with unerring accuracy and force on his opponent's weak points; while Ingalls was quick, brilliant, sarcastic, and lightning-like in thought and expression.

In the early sixties, debating began gradually to decline in interest. This may have been due to a general depression in educational work; for nearly every institution suffered a diminution in numbers and, consequently, a reduction of activity in all departments. About fifteen years ago, when matters collegiate were reviving, the great athletic contests came into being; absorbing the attention of the students. Debating, however, continued dormant.

It is only within the last few years that the great intercollegiate

debating leagues have been formed; giving to this work the stimulus of public notice. But, once revived, probably nothing in the world of education has made more rapid progress. At present there are no less than a score of collegiate debating leagues in all parts of the country. Yale, Harvard, and Princeton have annual contests; the University of Pennsylvania debates with Cornell; Williams, with Dartmouth; and Columbia, looking to the West, has found an opponent in the University of Chicago. The most novel arrangement, however, is that of Northwestern University and the Universities of Michigan, Chicago, and Minnesota. These, about a year ago, formed the Central Debating League,—the most comprehensive union of the kind yet produced. The four universities dispute in groups of two each; and, later, the winners of these two contests meet for a final battle. Additional leagues are continually being formed. Not many months ago Dartmouth started a new one with Brown; indeed, nearly every centre of learning takes part, at least once a year, in some affair of this sort.

This activity permeates the atmosphere of each college; and positions on the team of debaters for a great intercollegiate struggle are obtained only after a most rigorous and exhaustive competition. There can be no doubt as to the desirability of this competitive work. It produces good debaters; and a good debater must be an apt compiler of authorities and statistics, an expert thinker, and able to select the vital points on which the fate of an argument depends. Withal he must be a speaker of sufficient ability to put his whole spirit into the point he wishes to make, and thus arouse the interest and sympathy of his audience.

Usually the intercollegiate debating teams consist of three men, with an alternate or substitute. In most cases, one of these has the supervision of the preparation for the debate; though, necessarily, each must have a large degree of freedom in his individual work.

There are various methods of preparing and selecting these men. At Cornell they are chosen, ordinarily, from the seven debating societies, where they have the best opportunity for drill. Largely through excellent preparation, Cornell has defeated the University of Pennsylvania for two successive years. Princeton has two societies, the "Clio" and the "Whig," between which there exists a strong rivalry. At Harvard are the "Union" and the "Forum." Columbia, Williams, and the University of North Carolina also have each two rival societies for such training. Harvard and Columbia allow the greatest freedom of competition for places on the team. A public meeting is held, when a cer-

tain subject is announced for argument. Candidates may speak on either side; and from these, a committee of the faculty selects the successful debaters. As there are sometimes a large number of contestants, the meeting is not a brief one. At Yale there are preliminary trials in each of the several departments of the University. The successful men afterward compete before a committee of professors for final choice. The chief factor in training men at New Haven is the Yale Union, the debating organization of the academic departments. There is a separate union among the freshmen, which debates with the Harvard freshmen. The University of Michigan has, in its Literature Department, four societies which, by a series of trials, decide upon their best three men, who compete with representatives of the Law Department for places on the team. At Dartmouth each of the fraternities, as well as the "Neutrals," or non-fraternity men, presents its best speakers, from whom the choice is made. Several colleges, notably Harvard and Cornell, have made systematic training in debate a part of the regular curriculum. This work is always apparent in the final debate, and often results in victory where the opposing college has no such system.

After the debaters are selected, the first task in preparing for an intercollegiate contest is the choice of a question for discussion. This is done in accordance with the debating constitution which the opposing colleges have adopted. Often one party has the privilege of submitting several topics, of which its opponents select one; choosing the side on which it prefers to stand. These positions are reversed the following year. With Yale, Harvard, and Princeton, the home college selects the question; while the visiting debaters are entitled to choice of side. In other cases this point is decided by lot. The Central Debating League above-mentioned departs from the usual practice; the selection of both judges and question being made by a council composed of alumni of the institutions interested. These methods leave each college with well-defined positions approximately equal in desirability. In the case of a seemingly unfair question, such an equality is often produced by loading one side with conditions, or by giving it additional points to prove. For example: With the subject, "*Resolved*, That municipalities should own and operate plants for supplying gas," the difficulty of the negative side is enhanced by adding the proviso, "if such action would not increase official corruption"; and the burden of the affirmative is made heavier by including in the question not only plants for supplying gas, but also those for furnishing water, electricity, and surface transportation.

The questions chosen to-day are very different from those discussed in the local debates of forty years ago. At that time such subjects as the following were in vogue; viz., "*Resolved*, That ambition is a stronger incentive to action than fear." "*Resolved*, That the existence and attributes of the Supreme Being can be proved without the aid of divine revelation." These topics would hardly evoke the interest that was felt when Harvard and Yale recently discussed the annexation of Hawaii; Dartmouth and Williams, the city ownership of public franchises; Cornell and the University of Pennsylvania, the compulsory arbitration of labor disputes; and the University of Michigan and Northwestern University, the Government construction of the Nicaragua Canal. In short, at present a successful debate must involve a live issue.

The question having been chosen, the real work of preparation begins. Every book and authority pertinent to the subject must be thoroughly canvassed, every telling point secured, every probable argument of the other side investigated and answers prepared. In fact, each detail must be completely absorbed and understood in all its bearings. If the question be one involving a law or custom in any locality, numerous letters must be written and, sometimes, visits made to discover proof of its success or failure. A certain Wisconsin college, which was to argue the Prohibition Question, sent representatives to Maine for the purpose of observing the operation of the prohibitory law of that State. It is hardly necessary to say, however, that such long pilgrimages are not of common occurrence.

Frequently this preparatory labor is supplemented by practice in the home college, whereby the team is trained and strengthened by trial debates on the question; being opposed by the best debaters available. In some cases the three speakers and the alternate discuss the subject in public: two are on either side. They are thus given a better knowledge of the arguments they must meet. At Yale, a further improvement is proposed, by choosing not only the three regular debaters, but also three others who will act as a permanent "scrub" team, the members of which will have the hope of replacing the "Varsity" men by doing good work in these practice disputes.

Thus it will be seen that the preparation for an intercollegiate debate involves a large amount of work. In consideration of this the colleges have different methods of recognizing their representatives, on the same principle that they reward their foot-ball and base-ball champions by allowing them to wear the initial of the college on cap or sweater. For instance, Yale disputants are given handsome gold watch-

charms, bearing on one side the head of Demosthenes, and, on the other, the name of the owner, and the debate in which he is to take part. This college also offers several prizes to the best debaters; and, by agreement with Yale, Harvard, and Princeton, the winning team receives a trophy banner, which is hung in some conspicuous spot for future admiration. Similarly the Williams debaters are rewarded with pins or watch-charms; while Harvard and a number of the other colleges show their appreciation by the gift of "shingles," or certificates, to the effect that the owner has represented his *Alma Mater* in debate. These somewhat resemble college diplomas in appearance, though more ornate, and are sometimes elaborately engraved and beautified. The University of Michigan has a more practical mode of recompense. Her debaters receive $75, $50, and $30 respectively. Money rewards are given in many other colleges.

Team-work is almost as important in debate as in foot-ball or rowing; and, as the aggregate amount of time allowed to each side is seldom over fifty minutes, a team, to win, must use every second to advantage. To secure this result, it is usually best for a team to maintain the special line of thought agreed upon beforehand, and shun the alluring challenges and interpolations of the other side. This was illustrated not long ago in a debate between two of our greatest universities having equal chances of victory. At the outset, one party challenged its opponent to answer several skilfully put questions. The bait was accepted; and several precious moments were used in the responses. As a result, the questioned side had to omit, or cut short, its own carefully prepared and important arguments. At the close of the debate, the questioners calmly showed that neither interrogations nor answers had any actual bearing on the subject; and, having employed their own time to advantage, they won the debate.

At times, also, the exclusive possession of some important information, withheld until the final moment and then emphasized to the greatest extent, will outweigh former arguments and secure the judges' decision. Cornell won from the University of Pennsylvania last March by throwing on the latter the burden of proof with so adroit and fierce an onslaught that they had to accept it, and place themselves on the defensive,—a position almost invariably leading to defeat. On the other hand, rebuttal work must not be neglected; only it should be reserved for its proper place, and should not interfere with the main arguments. To her excellence in such use of the rebuttal are attributed the successive victories of Yale over Harvard for the past three years;

and her defeats by Princeton were caused by the still greater superiority of the "Tigers" in this same particular.

Formerly aid from the faculty was a great factor. One distinguished instructor even claimed that the team of his college was triumphant because of superior learning among the professors. This would be hardly possible at present; for faculty assistance, except to a very limited extent, is considered a violation of ethics, as being to debating what professionalism is to athletics.

In spite of all possible labor and skill, the element of luck sometimes decides debating contests as well as other struggles. A sudden confusion or forgetfulness, or an attack of illness, has not seldom brought about an undeserved defeat.

The debates between two colleges are held alternately at each, in some hall on the campus or other public building. A speaker is allowed from ten to fifteen minutes; and each address on the affirmative precedes one on the negative. When all have spoken, the leader of the affirmative makes a rebuttal speech of about five minutes; summing up the entire argument and pointing out the weak points of the opposition. The leader on the negative then follows a similar course. With the larger universities all the speakers are allowed short rebuttals. Next comes the decision of the judges,—usually three in number,—who are prominent alumni of both colleges, or noted lawyers and statesmen.

As the debaters are becoming more expert, the public interest in their forensic battles is increasing. Those between important colleges are decided by men of the highest rank and ability, and are heard by thousands. Indeed, it is often difficult to secure a hall of sufficient size to accommodate the audience. Among the older alumni there is perhaps a stronger desire that their *Alma Mater* should be triumphant in an important debate than in an athletic contest. Also, from the undergraduates, in both Eastern and Western colleges, debating must continue to receive increasing attention; since, though involving much confining labor, it leads directly to the professions which many of them will pursue in after-life. To prospective members of the bar, especially, such work is of the greatest advantage; for "every law-case is a debate."

During the last few months some notable and instructive debates have taken place. In April occurred the annual contest between Yale and Princeton, at which Ex-President Cleveland presided. On that occasion, Yale defeated the New Jersey university for the first time in several years. Princeton's ill luck continued; for again, in May, she surrendered to Harvard, who supported the affirmative of the question, "*Re-*

solved, That the present restrictions on immigration into the United States are insufficient." The victory of the crimson seemed due to judicious combinations of prepared arguments and extemporaneous rebuttal. Probably a verdict was never more quickly agreed upon, as the judges required less than two minutes for consultation. Somewhat similar in this respect was the Williams-Dartmouth debate a few days later. The decision in that case was practically reached before the men had ceased speaking; although the formality of a consultation was observed. The victory came to Williams, which maintained the negative of a proposition to reform the laws of Massachusetts relating to taxation. This result was secured by careful selection of the important arguments and by clearness of presentation. Another interesting debate was held at Ann Arbor between the Universities of Michigan and Chicago. The former affirmed, "That the action of the Senate in rejecting the proposed treaty of arbitration between the United States and England, was wise." The decision was in favor of the University of Michigan on the ground of effective team-work and excellent delivery. The Chicago debaters lost in relatively unimportant objections the time necessary to advance constructive arguments to meet those of their opponents. The first debate of the new league between Dartmouth and Brown was won by the former because of superior work in rebuttal. All of these contests were characterized by a noticeably greater display of perceptive power, logic, and oratory than those of previous years.

In general, the present system of intercollegiate discussion can hardly fail to commend itself to all interested in educational progress; for, in this way, the powerful incentive of college spirit and rivalry, of individual competition and success, supplies what is so often lacking in the student's labor, and is so necessary to his advancement—the feeling of personal intimacy and personal enthusiasm.

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