

port of his speech stares him in the face next morning. Cynical as the latter part of the advice which I have quoted may sound, it is just when the strange intoxication which is begotten by the breathless stillness of a host of absorbed listeners weakens the reason and opens the floodgates of feeling that the check of the calmly considered written judgment tells, even if its exact words are forgotten.

As to notes, my experience may be of interest to that unfortunate mortal, the average Englishman, who, as you say, finds it the hardest thing in the world to stand up and speak for ten minutes without looking, or at least feeling, either a fool or a coward. Of that form of suffering I do not believe that the average Englishman knows half so much as I do. For twenty years I never got up to speak without my tongue cleaving to the roof of my mouth; and if the performance was a lecture, without an *idee fixe* that I should have finished all I had to say long before the expiration of the obligatory hour; and, at first, I clung to my copious MS. as a shipwrecked mariner to a hencoop. My next stage was to use brief but still elaborate notes—not unfrequently, however, having the big MS. in my pocket to fall back upon in case of an emergency, which, by the way, never arose. Then the notes got briefer and briefer, until I have known occasions on which they came down to a paragraph. But the aid and comfort afforded by that not too legible scrawl upon a small sheet of paper was inexpressible. Twice in my life I have been compelled to swim without floats altogether—to renounce even a sheet of note-paper. On one of these occasions, I had to address an audience to some extent hostile, upon a topic which required very careful handling, and I had taken unusual pains in writing my discourse with the intention of practically reading many parts of it. But the assemblage was a very large one; and when I came face to face with it I saw, at a glance, that if I meant to be heard, looking at notes was out of the question. So I took my courage in my two hands, put my papers down, and left them untouched; while the discourse, in a way quite unaccountable to me, rolled itself off as if I had been a phono-

graph, in order and matter, though not in words, as it was written.

On the other occasion, the circumstances were still more awkward. I had been obliged to dictate my discourse the day before it was delivered to a short-hand writer for the Associated Press in the United States, exacting from him a pledge that he would supply me with a fairly written out copy to be used as notes. My friend the reporter kept his word, and a couple of hours before the time of speaking the manuscript arrived. But, alas! it was written on the thin paper which I believe is technically called “flimsy.” I could not read it at any distance with ease, and the attempt to make use of it in speaking would have been perilous. So I had the comfort of knowing that the local papers might have one version and the others another of my speech. Luckily, no one took the trouble to compare the two, or the discrepancies might have afforded good ground for suspicion that my address and myself were alike mythical.

In spite of this tolerably plain evidence that if I were put to it I could very well do without notes, I have never willingly been without them—at any rate in my pocket. At public dinners and ordinary public meetings they have long ceased to come out; but on more serious occasions I have always had them lying before me, though I very often forgot to look at them. I think they acted as a charm against that physical nervousness, which I have never quite got over, and the origin of which has always been a puzzle to me. With every respect for the public, I cannot say I ever felt afraid of an audience; and my cold hands and dry mouth used to annoy me when my hearers were only students of my class, as much as at other times. The late Lord Cardwell once told me that Sir Robert Peel never got up to speak in the House of Commons without being in what schoolboys call a “funk;” and I fancy from what I have heard of great speakers that this trouble of their weaker brethren is much better known to them than people commonly suppose. There is a rational ground for it. So much depends upon all sorts of physical and moral conditions that beginning to make a speech is like going into action, and no man knows—not the most practised of speakers—how he will come out of it.