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# THE VARSITY

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## DEBATING AT VARSITY.

So many new regulations in regard to debates have come into effect during recent years at Varsity that it seems appropriate at the beginning of a new term to set down some account of what has been done in the past, and what improvements are desirable in the future. It is evident from what was accomplished in the debating field last year at University College that a new era has dawned in which the members of the lower years, as well as the seniors, are to become prominent factors. The action of the Class of 1904 in forming and maintaining a debating club was most laudable, and was justly rewarded by their success in the Inter-Year Debates. Were their example followed by every class entering Varsity, the consequent rivalry for places on debating teams, and for other debating honors would have a most beneficial effect.

A very important step towards arousing interest in debates and encouraging class debating societies was taken last year by the Literary Society, when a trophy was offered for competition among the four years. The interest in the three contests held was most gratifying, and the members of the two lower years evinced even more enthusiasm than their seniors. The ultimate victory of the freshmen class was on the whole a beneficial thing, for they, of all the years, needed the most encouragement to develop their debating capabilities, since on their future prowess rests the honor of Varsity on the debating platform.

These Inter-year debates, then, are intended to provide a training for the men who are to represent the College in outside events as well as to stir up an interest in debating in general. The first arena into which the University College representatives must enter are the lists of the Intercollegiate Debating League, composed of several affiliated colleges of Toronto University, of Osgoode Hall, Trinity and McMaster Universities. This League was formed during the session of 1898-1899, largely through the efforts of Dr. S. M. Wickett, then President of the Literary Society, and it has already had three most successful seasons. Many undergraduates still at Varsity will remember the splendid array of debating material which the Class of 1899 possessed. Thanks to their efforts University College was the first champion of the League. The following year Knox College won the laurels, and last year McMaster Hall's representatives were the successful contestants. The present season opens with the Osgoode-Varsity Debate on November 15th, at which Messrs. G. S. Hodgson and A. E. Hamilton represent Varsity.

But beyond and above these local contests there is a field of battle of a far wider importance, success on which should be the ultimate aim of all aspirants for debating honors at University College. The debates with Queen's University and McGill University should command a national interest, taking place as they do between institutions from which much of the bone and

sinew of the nation will develop. Debates with Queen's have been few in number and irregular, so that a consideration of them may be dropped. Turning to McGill, it is interesting to find that ever since January, 1892, an annual debate has been held between these two colleges, alternately at Toronto and Montreal. Of the series of ten debates, McGill has won seven. Still, while the men who debated made great efforts and acquitted themselves well, while the audiences, especially in Montreal, took great interest in the contests, and while the societies of the two universities supported the debates with much liberality, the great defect lay in the manner of settling on the winning side. There was no system whatever, and as a rule the decision lay in the hand of the chairman alone, who was invariably a Professor of the College at which the debate was held. On one occasion in Montreal (1893) the decision was left to the audience, which, being largely composed of McGill students, naturally favored their own side, whilst on other occasions, out of courtesy, the honors of the debate were conferred on the visitors.

The formation of a definite league between McGill, Queen's and Varsity last spring, was intended to remedy this and other defects as far as possible. While at present the Literary Society of University College represents the University of Toronto in the League, there is no reason why in time the latter should not draw from all the affiliated institutions of that university, and just as the four years compose the Literary Society, and the colleges of Toronto form the Intercollegiate League, so should the University of Toronto, and not University College, be a member of the Inter-University League.

Returning to the Literary Society, it seems as if two ideas now acted on should be rooted out before a successful system of debating can be adopted. The first is the idea that debaters in the important contests should be seniors necessarily, and the second is that the debaters should be appointed by popular vote. In all American colleges, which it must be confessed are ahead of us in debating matters, neither plan is countenanced. Any man, whatever his year, may enter for the trial debates, which always precede the big contests. If his abilities are superior he receives the appointment, and often a money prize in addition. For example, at Harvard University, Mr. Coolidge, by presenting a fund of \$5,000 has provided the two Coolidge Debating Prizes of \$100 each, awarded to the best speakers of each of the trial debates for the representatives in the Harvard-Yale and Harvard-Princeton debates. Such a prize, smaller in comparison, would, it is believed, do much to encourage debaters at Toronto, and steps are now being taken to secure some such donation. Though nothing definite may be accomplished before the Queen's-Varsity debate, which will probably be held in Kingston on December 14th, it seems likely that if our representatives are successful there, that in the subsequent McGill-Varsity debate some tangible recognition of their services will be bestowed on the debaters.

W.A.C.