

## Section of Social Service

"Look Up, Lift Up."

### Writing a Speech for Peter

A Capital Reading for Your Next Social Evening

The lamplight showed the beads of perspiration on the lined and weather-beaten brow of Mr. McBean as he bent over the kitchen table whereon lay several sheets of ruled foolscap. One of the sheets was partly covered with very large writing in pencil. Here and there were blurred patches, where the writer had sought to delete a word by the simple process of rubbing it hard with the moistened forefinger; in more than one instance not only the words but also the paper had disappeared.

Mr. McBean groaned, wrote a word laboriously, stared at it, and groaned again.

"Marget," he said suddenly, without looking at his wife, who, while pretending to knit at the fireside, was really watching her man with stealthy but keen interest; "Marget, how dae ye spell unspeakable? Is't—ible or—able?"

"—able," said Mrs. McBean, promptly; then, doubtfully, "or else it's—ible. What is't ye're wantin' to say, Peter?"

"I'm sayin' that it gies us a' the maist unspeakable pleasure an' satisfaction to present him wi' sich a bewitchin' an' gorgeous bookcase, an' that I'm sure it gies him the maist unspeakable pleasure an' satisfaction to get it."

"Say it again, Peter."

Mr. McBean did as requested.

"If I was you," he remarked the old woman, "I wud leave out the bit about the meenister's satisfaction."

Mr. McBean threw down his pencil.

"Is't you or me that's to mak' the presentation?" he demanded, crossly.

"Of course it's you, Peter," she replied, soothingly.

"Weel," he said, his irritation giving place to sheer dejection, "I wish it was somebody else. This speech'll be the death o' me. Is't—able or ible?"

"Dinna faah yersel' 'bout the spellin' o' yer speech—naebdy's likely to see it. But pay attention to the meanin', for everybody's bound to hear it."

Again Mr. McBean groaned. Poor man; he had been highly flattered and gratified when first the village chose him to make the presentation to the minister, on the occasion of the latter's semi-jubilee; but as the important date drew nearer and nearer his self-confidence had steadily waned, and now misery and anxiety claimed him for their own. The prospect of standing up, in the church hall, before all his neighbors, not to mention the minister himself, utterly appalled him. For a week he had struggled with the composition of a suitable speech, and had used up at least a shilling's worth of paper and a whole pencil. He now realized that he was no further on than at the start, while the fateful evening was barely forty-eight hours distant.

"Wud ye no' tak' a bit rest, Peter?" said his wife, striving bravely to conceal her own misery and anxiety. "Ye'll hurt yer brain, if—"

"Rest!" he cried bitterly. "How can I rest when the event is boomlin' sae near?" (Possibly he meant "oomin'.")

"An' as for ma brain, it's no' that feeble, though it kens mair aboot garden no speeches."

"I didna say it was feeble. But

ye're pittin' an awful strain on it, an' I'm feart ye—"

"Aweel," he said in a dreary yet determined voice, "the speech has got to be made, even supposin' ma brain explodes on the spot."

"Ye a' a grue, speakin' like that. Read me what ye've wrote, an' then leave it till the morn'."

After some pressing the old man read, in a mumbling fashion, the lines which had cost so much mental pain.

"Ladies an' gentlemen an' frien's," he began.

"Wud ye no' jist ca' them a' frien's?" his wife mildly suggested.

"That wud be ower famecellar. The gentry wudna like it, though they're few."

"Weel, jist say 'ladies and gentlemen.'"

"Tits, wife! D'ye want the neighbors to think I'm makin' mock o' them?"

"Weel, weel; ha'e it yer ain way, Peter."

"Ye dinna need to get huffy, Marget."

"I'm no' huffy. But I dinna want ye to say the wrang thing."

"That's the reason I'm sayin' 'ladies an' gentlemen an' frien's.' It includes everybody."

"Except yer enemies," she said, in a poor attempt to be jocular.

"My! but ye're pernickety! I'est you or me that's to mak' the presentation?"

Mrs. McBean swallowed her natural desire for the last word, sighed, and requested her man to proceed. About five minutes later he did so.

"Ladies an' gentlemen an' frien's, it gives me great pleasure an' satisfaction to behold ye a' gathered together on this important occasion." (This was a quotation from a speech to which Mr. McBean had listened some year previously. He now wished he had listened more attentively.)

"As each o' ye has had the pleasure an' satisfaction o' subscribin' for this bewitchin' an' gorgeous bookcase for oor honored an' beloved meenister's simmy-jubilee, ye are a' aware o' the reason for this githerin' an' presentation. Ye are dootless surprised an' astonished to behold sich a bewitchin' an' gorgeous bookcase for yer money; an' I've got to explain that, if it hadna been for Maister Drummond g'ie'n five pounds—five pound!—the bookcase wud ha'e been a lot inferior. Ye a' ken—"

"D'ye think ye should speak about the five pound frae Maister Drummond, i'—or?" put Mrs. McBean.

"What we should I no' speak aboot it?" he asked, with some asperity.

Mrs. McBean found it impossible to express her objections, and presently begged him to continue.

"Ye a' ken," he resumed, "how weel af we are wi' oor honored an' beloved meenister, the Reverend Maister Shelbrook, which has labored amongst us for exactly five-an'-twenty year. He cam' to us a young man, wi' sma' experience, but noo he's aulder an' wiser. We're rale proud o' him an' his honored and beloved wife an' family. He preferred a bookcase to a siller teapot, et cetera, his wife's uncle havin' providit the same, accordin' to his last will an' testament. An' so, ladies an' gentlemen an' frien's, I arise for to say that it gives us a' the maist unspeakable pleasure an' satisfaction to present him wi' such a bewitchin' an' gorgeous book-

case, an' I'm sure it gies him the maist unspeakable pleasure an' satisfaction to get it."

Mr. McBean paused and drew a long breath.

"That's a' I've got wrote," he said, and eyed his spouse as if waiting for her opinion.

It was slow in coming. Mrs. McBean felt that all was not right with the speech, yet for the life of her she could not have stated definitely what was wrong.

"Ha'e ye set yer heart on speakin' aboot the meenister's satisfaction?" she ventured timidly at last. "Wud it no' be best to let him speak for himsel' aboot that, Peter?"

"What's wrang wi' me, speakin' aboot it? Is't no' the truth?"

"Oh, ay, I suppose it's the truth, but—"

"Oh, anything to please ye. I'll score it out! Is there onythin' else that's wrang?"

"Na, na. But I was wonderin' if he wud like ye tellin' everybody aboot the uncle an' the siller teapot. Ye see—"

"Anything else?" cried Mr. McBean, in a voice that seemed to burst from his chest.

"Na, na, Peter. Yer speech is rale fine—"

"That's no the speech; it's merely the introductory remarks."

Mrs. McBean gasped, and recovered herself.

"Weel, it's rale fine, whatever it is. But—but d'ye think ye need speak aboot the meenister belin' aulder an' wiser nor when he cam' first to the kirk? Mind ye, I'm no' sayin' there's onything wrang—Oh, Peter—Oh, Peter!"

The exclamation was full of dismay, caused by the sight of the old man crumpling up the paper and flinging it into the fire.

"Oh, Peter!"

"I hope ye're pleased, noo!" he said, half resentful, half ashamed. "Ye'll maybe explain at the meetin' on Friday that ye didna consider ma speech fit to be spoke. I wash ma han's o' the business. They can get some ither body to mak' the presentation. I'm gaun to ma bed."

"Oh, Peter!" she sighed.

But he refused to return to the subject.

Mr. McBean slept badly that night. Mrs. McBean slept not at all. Frequently he muttered in his sleep, and she caught such phrases as "honored and beloved," "unspeakable pleasure an' satisfaction," "gorgeous bookcase."

The old woman was distressed and sore afraid. She knew that her man would never seek the assistance of his neighbors—not that she desired him to do so, for she had some pride of her own; but she dreaded for his sake any blundering or breakdown on the great occasion, and still more, far more, she dreaded the effect of the strain on his mind.

It seemed to her that he was a different man from what he had been a week ago; his old buoyancy and heartiness had departed from him, and his appetite had decreased alarmingly. So she lay with aching thoughts, feeling very wretched and helpless.

In the dawn Peter arose, and, deeming her to be still asleep, dressed himself in silence. Presently he procured paper and pencil and seated himself at the kitchen table. Now and then a half-stifled groan escaped him.

Later he came to the bedside, looking humble and hopeless.

"It's ower big a job for me," he said despairingly. "It beats me completely. Can ye no' help me, wife?"

"Oh, Peter, I could never mak' a speech."

"Small trifles make up life; therefore they should be helpful trifles."