

THE VAN VLIETT CONTEST.

ALFRED M. HITCHCOCK.

The tragic moment came as John mounted the platform—came on the very last stair save one. Let the consequence be what it might, how old do it.

The decision one reached, he felt new courage—a determination such as he had never before known. He feared nothing. Strangely calm and free from nervousness he bowed to the president, then turned and faced the audience—

Then, as he advanced, the buzz of conversation, the flutter of fans died away. All were interested in this young man, last of the six competitors for the Van Vliett oratorical prize. They had listened with patience to one after another, some good, some indifferent, some attracted by that indescribable something which makes all youthful competition fascinating. Opinion thus far was divided, the honors apparently lying between the genial young man who had begun his dissertation on the "Distribution of Labor" by the start of his query, "Is there a collier in the house?" and the fiery youth who spoke on an old-fashioned subject. The first had pleased by his ingenuity and his easy manner, yet to some seemed to lack dignity and earnestness; the second had been more dramatic, yet the judges might decide that this was due more to his subject than to his own ability. There remained but this one competitor, a "dark horse" concerning whom even his classmates did not care to venture an opinion.

But before John begins, you must be told what was going on in his mind. What was the mighty struggle in which he had come out victorious only at the last minute.

As he looked out over that great field of faces, he saw no one distinctly, yet he knew that scattered here and there were classmates with whom he had associated in a quiet way for four years, and it was his natural habit that he should wish them to think well of him in after years, even though few could call him an intimate friend. Perhaps he was equally desirous of appearing well in the eyes of the army of kindfolk that had so lately taken possession of the town and completely changed it from a sleepy village into a carnival of gaiety. Then there were the judges, their eyes upon him, watching, calculating, ready to note each little fault.

It was not of any of these, however, that he thought about. Somewhere, probably well back toward the door, was a hale old westerner, stout, energetic, a man who had pushed his way to a small political prominence in far away Montana, yet had been too honest, perhaps, to prosper in any large way. Two days before, he had invaded Ryeville among the first, somewhat too conspicuous because of a very broad brimmed hat, a long linen duster, and a faded umbrella which could not have been rolled very compactly even had the strap by which it was designed to be bound not been missing.

He had come a long way, yet from Montana to Connecticut, and as he scraped acquaintance with him and talked of anything except his son, John, whom he had not seen in the five years the young fellow had been east. He had talked rather loudly and with forceful gestures, too, occasionally bringing his broad hand down upon his knee with a resounding slap that sent the crowd around him into a fit of nervousness. Once as he waxed eloquent in his hearty way concerning his son's brilliant future, he happened to be sitting close to a tap between the shoulders by way of emphasis that the stranger had a fit of coughing and stammered, "No doubt—no doubt, sir," as he edged a little away from the vigorous westerner.

John had met his father at the train, had received his greeting on the crowded platform, had insisted on carrying his trunk traveling bag up the crowded street, though they might have taken the path through the fields. He was too manly a fellow to be ashamed, though it may be admitted that he was carrying Montana country stores and clothes so different from the neat cuts of the easterner. He regretted that Montana people had such loud voices. Yet he was not ashamed because he understood. It was almost an unmitigated pleasure when time and again, before the dormitory was reached, his father faced about and, a hand on each shoulder, looked down into his face with a parent's pride and affection.

"You've grown, my boy—like a weed," he said more than once. "You'll never be a big one like your dad, son, but you'll fill out some day." Or, "You're more like your mother than ever, more like Mary. How she wanted to live to see you through! You've got her quiet way, and you've got her mind. Your old dad ain't much of a book scholar, son; he's a half-fellow, big in the girth, breezy and afraid of nobody. But I never could read, somehow, John. I'll furnish gristle and you learning; that's the team that wins! How's the oration?"

It was the question that John dreaded. The orator of Jones county, Montana, had been overjoyed when he heard that his son had won a place among the Van Vliett competitors. It seemed the best possible climax to his college course. He had sent him letter after letter about it, graced inky pages filled with well-meant advice which might have been summed up in the old injunction of Demosthenes: "Action!—action!" "Keep your arms moving, lad," he had written more than once; "walk about the stage; open your mouth wide, and let it roar out! They're the tactics that win. Show 'em you're alive and in dead earnest."

"Well, father," John replied after a moment of hesitation, "it's written and it's learned; but—you mustn't expect too much, I'm afraid it's—"

for much; it's the delivery that does it all. What's it about?"

"De Quincey? Never heard of him. Some statesman—a patriot?"

"No, just an author."

"I'm. What'd he do?"

"Why, he wrote."

"Sure enough. But—what about him? Going to attack him?"

"No, hardly that. In fact it isn't what you would call an oration; just a plain estimate of what he did, and why he failed to do much better. I'm afraid it's little more than an essay. The truth is, father, I simply couldn't write a spirited oration. I tried and tried—tried hard on every subject you suggested, but it was of no use. I just couldn't make them go. They didn't take hold of me, and whatever I wrote seemed so artificial that I—"

"Oh, well, cheer up, son! It's better than you think, I doubt. We'll look it over together when we get to your room."

Yet for all his hearty assurance, it was plain that the old gentleman was not a little disappointed. And to this slight cloud a second was slowly gathering; for as they proceeded up the street toward the college buildings the old gentleman's eyes were too wide open to let certain things escape his notice. He began to lose something of his careless ease, and at last blurted out, interrupting John, who was pointing out this and that object of interest, or telling him the arrangements he had made for the next few days. "I say, son, don't people herabouts wear pretty good clothes? I dunno's my togs are good enough. I got a first-class shine in Albany, but blacking won't make a \$15 suit a \$30 one. It was the best Burdick had in stock and I thought it would do mighty well. You're not ashamed of your dad, are you? I dunno's I'd better go to your room. Ain't there a small hotel somewhere? Folks'd never guess I was your father, and—"

"Nonsense. Not a bit of it! You're all right, father. Your clothes are all right. You look clean and wholesome, and that's all good breeding asks of anyone."

"I could keep out of the way a bit," he went on, scarce noticing John's protest, "and just slip into a back seat tomorrow night, when you speak your piece. I can't miss that."

"Father, you're to go straight to my room. You're to sleep in my bed. I'm going to bunk with Will. You remember, Will, roommate?"

Still he was not fully assured. His eyes continued to inventory those whom they passed, even though the conversation for awhile turned upon the familiar topic of home affairs in Montana. At last he broke out again.

"John, I don't think I understand; I'm a bit thick-headed, as it were. These fellows here, they're students, ain't they?"

"Yes, father."

"Son, they're dressed better than you are. I'm afraid I've scrippled you, John. You should have let me know. I didn't understand. I'm not rich, but I'd have sold everything I own—sold the store, rather than not have you well cared for. You're all I've got in the world. I want you to be a gentleman. Your mother wanted it."

of the thing, it's full of action. Let me go through it and show you how."

Through it he did go, in a dramatic fashion quite ridiculous. And as he proceeded, his interest grew, his voice thundered forth so that John feared it would rouse the dormitory. As he closed he reached for his hat.

"I say, John, we've no time to lose; we've got to rehearse. Let's go to the hall—it'll be empty to-night, won't it?—and I'll put you through the drill. We'll pull out of this yet."

"But, father, do you think it would do—to speak it so vigorously? I hadn't planned to use many gestures. The fellows don't use them very much here, and I had thought the oration didn't call for many."

"Nonsense, boy; you're too modest. Oratory's gone west since Patrick Henry's day; the east has forgotten the art. We'll show 'em a thing or two that'll open their eyes. I ain't been stumped speaking for ten years without learning some of the tricks. Let's be going."

What could John do? For two long hours they worked, the one like a beaver, the other like a horse in a treadmill. Every gesture hurred, yet he made them as ordered, each new attempt bringing new delight to the drill master. His good spirits returned. He rubbed his hands. In anticipation he saw his son carrying off the honors amid tumultuous applause. John had beaten the college.

Now, do you understand what the battle was that John had to fight? Do you wonder that he debated with himself, arguing the case, for and against? Should he make a spectacle of himself before a father who did not understand, or should he deliver his oration as he felt that it should be given, as he had planned to give it? He debated with himself during the night, when he should have slept. All during the day he was at it, even while going through more rehearsals that were little short of agony. He was still at it as one by one his competitors went through their orations. He was not wholly decided as at last it came his turn to walk on the side aisle and mount the platform stairs, earnestly wishing, at every step that something—anything—might occur to prevent his disgrace. Only at the final moment was his mind made up. Every gesture should be made. Nay, he would even throw in extra ones. He would declaim himself as if addressing a rabble; let come what might, he would do it!

Before beginning he paused, paused so long that the room became breathless, so long that a fan moved. Every eye was upon him. Then gathering himself for a mighty effort, every nerve in his body tense, he began—slowly, deliberately, with a clear, firm voice that reached the farthest corner. It was a grand beginning, ably worded, ably delivered. The language, the voice, the speaker's manner harmonized. There was no suggestion of forced effort, nothing of the artificial; nothing but plain, appropriate earnestness. The first sentence, the second, then came the dreaded third where the gestures were to begin, a whirlwind of them which was to continue with few breaks to the end. Would his determination fail at the crucial moment? On the instant, up went his arm with a vigor that would have delighted a pugilist. The disgrace was an accomplished fact.

No, not quite, for at that moment something happened as if the gesture were a preconcerted signal, and no one was more surprised than John himself. The electric lights, which had been dim, having dimly for several minutes past, now dying down to half brilliancy, suddenly went out together. The hall was as dark as a pocket.

There was a momentary rustle of whispering voices. One or two in the rear hastily left the hall in search of the janitor. "Go on! Go on!" whispered a voice from behind which he recognized as the president's. "Don't stop; they'll come up again presently."

And on he went with scarcely a perceptible pause. He threw himself into the delivery with even greater earnestness than before, yet with proper restraint. Voice alone must do it now, meaning must be brought out by skillful modulation, by clean-cut articulation. It was a supreme moment. Could he hold the audience, or would they break away? He must hold the situation—had he not spellbound wondering at the plainness and simplicity of his exposition, touched by the tender vein of pathos which gave an artistic value all the other orations had lacked. It was more than cold analysis; it was sympathetic interpretation which forgot the speaker and thought but of the great writer who had failed to win the highest rank because of a single weakness. It was true eloquence from the first sentence to the last; and when he finished, the hush that often comes over a great assembly for a moment after a great effort is ended, changed to a spontaneous outburst of applause.

And in the midst of it all, as suddenly as they had gone out, the lights burst into full power again. The break in the wire, caused by no one knew how, had been still located. Someone in the back part of the hall, apparently quite forgetting himself, rose and roared about it all, "Hooray!" then sank back into his seat as if conscious too late that he had done the wrong thing.

The Van Vliett prize of \$100 was awarded by unanimous vote of the judges to John Williamson of Montana.

"Son—son, I'm a proud man!" exclaimed the latter, as arm in arm they walked back to the dormitory, after carrying a crowd of seniors who would have carried the champion off for a jollification. "I'm a proud man. You did it noble."

"You whipped 'em all, John. And, mind you, in the dark, John! You did it in the dark! Why, boy, if there'd been light to see your gestures—you made 'em didn't you?"

"Every one, father."

"If there'd been light to see your gestures then other fellows'd been completely snowed under!"

Mr. Williamson passed away long since, else the tale could not have been told. To John's credit be it said that the warm-hearted old man was never allowed to suspect that the victory was not due in part to him. And perhaps he was right in thinking so.—The American boy.

ST. ALOYSIUS, PATRON OF YOUTH.

JUNE 21.

There was one incident in the life of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, whose anniversary occurs on June 21st, which is very striking and contains a good lesson for us all. His father, Marquis Castiglione, was general of the army, and very naturally desired that his son, Aloysius, should follow in his footsteps and become a military man. For this purpose he furnished him when a child with little guns and swords as playthings, and when scarcely seven years old took him into camp where there were three thousand soldiers, with all the glorious panoply of war, that he might become familiar with warlike demonstrations. He dressed him in fancy uniform, gave him a pike and a little cannon, and he was delighted to see him with his pike marching in front of the ranks. One day the little fellow took a notion to try the metal of his camp, to the great consternation of the soldiers, as it was liable to be mistaken for a signal of attack. Of course, the father was delighted, though he was careful to show the child that he had violated a very strict rule of the service.

When Aloysius returned home his mother was much surprised one day to hear him using profane words which he had learned from his association with the soldiers, but of course, without the least idea of their impropriety. She explained to him that the use of such language was offensive to Almighty God. "Why, dear mother," he said, "I did not know that the language was bad; the soldiers used it." But the mother said, "but the soldiers are not always good men and they use very bad language." She explained to him that as he did not know that the language was bad he did not commit any sin. But the little fellow was so overwhelmed with sorrow to think that he had, even ignorantly, used language that was offensive to Almighty God that he was inconsolable. He never forgot it, and he used to accuse himself and do penance for it just as if it had been a sin.

The first words he pronounced were the holy names of Jesus and Mary. When he was nine years of age he made a vow of perpetual virginity, and by a special grace was ever exempted from temptations against purity. He received his first Communion at the hands of St. Charles Borromeo. At an early age he resolved to leave the world, and in a vision was directed by our Blessed Lady to join the Society of Jesus. The Saint's mother rejoiced on learning his determination to become a religious, but his father for three years refused his consent. At length St. Aloysius obtained permission to enter the novitiate on the 24th of November, 1555. He took his vows after two years, and went through the ordinary course of theology. During his last year of theology a malignant fever broke out in Rome; the Saint offered himself for the service of the sick, and he was accepted for the dangerous duty. Several of the brothers caught the fever and St. Aloysius was of the number. He was brought to the point of death, but recovered only a few days, however, into a slow fever, which carried him off after three months. He died, repeating the Holy Name, a little after midnight, on the 20th and 21st of June on the octave of Corpus Christi, being rather more than twenty-three years of age.

Cardinal Bellarmine, the Saint's confessor, testified that he had never mortally offended God. Yet he chastised his body rigorously, rose at night to pray, and shed many tears for his sins. Pray that, not having followed his innocence, you may yet imitate his penance.

St. Aloysius was wont to say he doubted whether without penance grace would continue to make head against nature, which when not afflicted and chastised, tends gradually to relapse into its old state, losing the habit of suffering acquired by the labor of years. "I am a crooked piece of iron," he said, "and am come into religion to be made straight by the hammer of mortification and penance."

He had a very tender conscience and a very clear apprehension of the enormity of sin in the sight of God. Would to God that the spirit of this young saint were more generally appreciated by the young people of the present generation!

CATHOLIC EXAMPLE AND THE METHODISTS.

At the New England Annual Methodist Conference held in Boston during the week just ending some conscious and some unconscious testimony was rendered to the power of Catholic example on that large and wide-spread sect.

In an address on "Woman's Work," Lucy Rider Meyer, M. D., Principal of the Chicago Training School, and well known among Methodists as the organizer of the Deaconesses' Movement, said:

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"On this line we would do well to copy our Catholic brethren. They have about 60,000 mercy women and 600 hospitals, and excellent service in general. They say they are nothing but catspaws, but they get the chestnuts. They do the work. We ought to copy them."

Conventional life was one of the first targets for the onslaughts of the "Reformers." The ruins of the monasteries of women as well as of men, with their schools and orphanages and hospitals, marked in England and in Germany, the "advance" of the so-called Reformation.

To-day, the religious communities devoted to education and charity among the Anglicans, and the Deaconesses' Homes among the Methodists are guideposts along the road that leads back to Christian unity.

At another session of the conference Dr. W. F. McDowell spoke on education among the Methodists. He urged that Methodist children be sent to Methodist schools. We suspect that Dr. McDowell was indulging in a little sarcasm at the expense of those of his weaker brethren who might want a "gentle" or an "intellectual" president for obedience to religious duty when he said that once he feared narrowness and bigotry in such advice as he had just given; but that since President Eliot had urged the sending of Unitarian children to Unitarian schools, he had no hesitation in following so respectable an example.

Dr. McDowell concluded, as a Catholic priest might conclude: "We must make our schools the best on earth, and keep Christ in the midst of them."

We are glad to record this unequivocal testimony of Dr. McDowell for Christian education. If all the members of Protestant denominations would put aside their fear of doing justice to Catholics, and unite in a courageous demand for their rights in the schools, the school question would soon be settled.

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