

the reporters of his extreme gratification at the wonderful fidelity of their report! Why he does so I have never been able to discover, but the fact is as undoubted as that the most correct speakers are generally the readiest to acknowledge their occasional indebtedness to the knights of the flying pen.

In addition to the difficulties with which the official corps at Ottawa have to contend, in common with the reporters of every parliamentary body, there are others which are peculiar to their position. I do not now allude to the undoubted fact that, man for man, Canadian parliamentary orators speak more rapidly, less distinctly, and with less attention to the structure of their sentences than either the members of the Imperial House of Commons or those of the American Congress. Nor do I refer to the equally indisputable fact that, owing to causes which I need not here discuss, the vocabulary employed by our public men in parliament is much more varied and technical than that which appears on the printed pages of either the English *Hansard* or the *Congressional Record*. These are all difficulties which every reporter will appreciate, but as "practise makes perfect" they may be overcome by that acquaintance with the peculiarities of the speakers and the topics they discuss which comes of long experience in this branch of reporting. But as distinct hearing is obviously an essential antecedent to correct reporting, it will be seen that no amount of practice will ever fully overcome the difficulty of hearing which daily and hourly besets the members of the *Hansard* staff, and adds so constant a burden of anxiety to the severe physical and nervous strain under which their work is nearly always performed. I have no hesitation in saying that to any ordinary listener who should seat himself at the reporters' table nearly one-half the eloquence of hon. members would be little more than a pantomimic display; and the fact that complaints of misreporting are seldom or never made can only be attributed to the almost preternatural acuteness of hearing which is developed by long training, combined with a thorough acquaintance with the various questions which come up for discussion.

When an official reporter at Washington encounters one of these whispered speeches I believe he simply leaves his place at the table, and with that free and easy disregard of traditional forms which prevails in the legislative bodies of the Great Republic, seats himself beside the orator. I shudder when I contemplate the awful consequences which might follow the application of this democratic device to our more conservative House of Commons. I remember that one evening, not many sessions ago, shortly after the Speaker had taken the chair, the keen eye of the Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms discovered a free and independent stranger quietly seated beside his representative, leisurely surveying the luxurious appointments of the chamber, and doubtless congratulating himself on having secured so comfortable a seat free of cost. It was a terribly anxious moment for every lover of parliamentary institutions. Even that glittering bauble, the mace, seemed to tremble as it reposed on its gorgeous cushions. A vague look of horror overspread the countenances of some of the older and more conservative members, while a few of the younger and more radical fellows incontinently laughed at the imminent peril. But the threatened danger was averted by the prompt and courageous conduct of the Sergeant. The intruding stranger was unceremoniously hustled out at the point of the sword, and consigned presumably to the parliamentary donjon keep, though his exact doom remains a mystery and a warning to this day. If I were asked exactly

what consequences would ensue if a reporter in the Canadian House of Commons should take a seat beside an hon. member, without complying with the usual preliminaries to that honour, I would have to make the same reply as Mr. Speaker Onslow, of the English House of Commons, made to a somewhat similar question. He was fond of threatening inattentive or disorderly members with the words: "Sir, I must name you." On being asked what would be the consequence of carrying this terrible threat into execution, he replied, "The Lord in Heaven knows."

Sir John Macdonald is not by any means a rapid speaker, and yet he is not always a particularly easy one to "take" verbatim. He is fond of illustrating his arguments by quotations or anecdotes drawn from the bye-ways rather than the highways of history and literature; and besides, his best speeches are full of

"Jest and youthful jollity,
Quips, and cranks, and wanton wiles,
Nods, and becks and wreathed smiles."

These characteristics of the Premier's speeches not only require for their reproduction in print—so far at least as they can be reproduced—the closest concentration of the faculties in the process of note-taking, but unless the reporter is pretty well equipped for his work by a tolerably wide range of reading, he will often find himself "floored" in attempting to "take" Sir John—as he will, indeed, in the case of any but the plainest and most matter of fact speeches. Without such an equipment he may perhaps be able to secure the substance of the speech, but the flavour—the bouquet—will be lacking, and the result will be disappointing to the speaker and discreditable to the reporter.

The leader of the Opposition is usually accounted a "terror" to the young reporter, and he is frequently trying enough to the oldest hand. Although his usual pace, judged by the Canadian standard of speed, is not extremely rapid, yet on occasions he pours out his words in such a torrent as almost to paralyze the reporter's pencil, and strain to the utmost the possibilities of his art. But there are other reasons why the announcement—made, say, at three o'clock in the morning—that Mr. Blake has the floor, does not have a particularly tranquillizing effect on the fagged-out occupants of *Hansard* room. Though his sentences are nearly always faultlessly correct in construction, they are frequently long and complex. Moreover, so thoroughly does he exhaust every detail of his subject that his longer speeches abound in subordinate and parenthetical clauses; and woe to the unfortunate reporter who does not catch every word, or who finds when he retires to *Hansard* room that he cannot readily transcribe his swiftly-written notes into printer's copy. Mr. Blake's diction and his collocation of words are such that if the smallest particle or connective is missing, the reporter, when he comes to write out his "take," is likely to experience those symptoms which are variously described, in the language of the craft, as "sweating" or "spitting blood," according to their severity. The reporter who "takes" Mr. Blake has also to encounter a great variety of illustration and an unusually comprehensive vocabulary; and when to these are added an occasional quotation in French or Latin, every one will understand—except perhaps those juveniles who are accustomed to regard reporting as a merely mechanical operation—that to report Mr. Blake verbatim is not always a particularly easy task.

I had intended referring, from a reporter's point of view, to the oratorical peculiarities of other leading members of the House, but I must reserve my remarks for another paper.—Geo. ERYE.