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PUBLIC- ORATORY: SOME SECRETS OF SUCCESS

"The first duty of a public speaker is to be audible " Such is the dictum of Mr. Cairns James, Professor of Elocution at the Royal College of Music, the Guildhall School of Music, and one of the principals of the School of Musical and Dramatic Art in New Oxford street (says the London Chronicle) And Mr. Cairns James speaks from a lively experience for it is his business in life to take the inaudible mutterer and transform him into a clear, incisive speaker.

Many an after dinner speaker with more than a local reputation owes the cogent manner in which he can utter his quips that are wont to set the table in a roar to this gentleman's tuition. New members, chairmen of companies, barristers, clergymen and cultured propagandists all in turn come to be initiated into the art of speaking effectively.

It was strange the way in which Mr. Cairns James came to adopt the calling that must have earned for him the unexpressed vote of thanks of any number of constituencies and members of audiences who have listened with delight to a rattling good speaker.

"I drifted into it in quite an informal manner" he told me "It was while I was playing the part of a solicitor in 'The Shop Girl,' in Mr. George Edward's company, that I received a note from Sir Hubert Parry, asking me to go and see him. It appears that his secretary, who was an Oxford friend of mine had mentioned my name to him as being likely to help him out of a difficulty A certain nobleman had come to him desirous of being equipped with the necessary qualifications for a good speaker. I undertook his tuition, assisted him in the compilation of his speeches and afterwards in, then effective delivery. It turned out so successfully that not only was my pupil very grateful, but he gave me such a cordial recommendation to Sir Hubert Parry that when the chair of Elocution at the Royal -College of Music fell vacant he offered it to me, and I accepted it."

To Mr. Cairns James's success as a teacher several circumstances contributed A good many of us know the correct way in which a thing should be done but to successfully convey that knowledge to another is quite a different matter. In this respect Mr. Cairns James was fortunate in being an assistant master at Merthyr College, South Wales. The principal was Thomas Fawcett brother of the blind Postmaster General. Recognising in his youthful assistant a strong dramatic bent, he advised him to go on the stage. Mr. Cairns James, already acquainted with the hazardous nature of his calling, remarked that he would like to do so if he could only get Mr. Fawcett's opinion corroborated by a competent critic. The headmaster regretted his lack of acquaintance among the dramatic profession.

"The only man I know " he said, with a touch of chagrin, "is W S Gilbert. I don't suppose he is any good, is he?"

In reply, young Cairns James said that if there is one man in England whose opinion was worth having on such a subject it was W S Gilbert's. In consequence, a letter of Introduction followed

and the embryo actor was permitted to recite some scenes from "Macbeth" and "The School for Scandal" to Sir William Gilbert, who in spite of a little caustic criticism, corroborated the advice of Mr. Fawcett, adding:

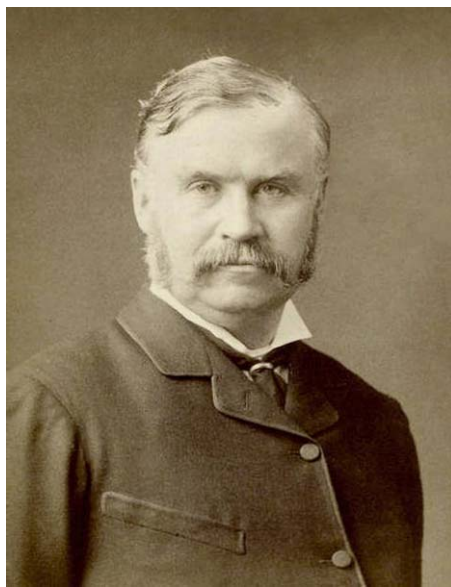
"But I'm sorry I cannot help you. The only companies I am interested in are those at the Savoy."

"Well, I can sing," ventured the novice, who as a boy was leading soprano chorister.

"Can you?" said Sir William. "Well, don't sing to me. I don't like music. Sing to Carte."

Thereupon Mr. D'Oyly Carte was apprised of the coming of a promising youngster who ought to be useful to him. The upshot was that Mr. Cairns James joined one of the Savoy companies, and after seven years was understudying George Thorne in Grossmith's parts.

"I tell you this," said he, "for two reasons; first, to show how I owe every bit of success I have ever had to Sir William Gilbert and Mr. D'Oyly Carte, and second, to show how I could not possibly have had the benefit of better training for my present work than what I received in the old Savoy opera companies. There the first requisite demanded of every member of the company was clearness of enunciation. At the trials it was always understood that D'Oyly Carte was somewhere in the theatre. It was generally believed that he was hid away at the back row of the upper circle. He was extremely particular that every syllable of every word should be audible in the remotest corner of the house.



Sir William Gilbert



Richard D'Oyly Carte

"And this anecdote should be taken to heart by everyone who aims to speak and sing in public. I hold it to be an impertinence for any man to get up in public who cannot make himself heard. It is not a question of shouting. The old tragedians' trick of rolling their r's and bellowing forth their sentences got to such a pitch that people began to think that noise could not be dissociated from Art. Nothing of the kind. I'll give you an illustration, to the contrary. Take George Grossmith, sen., in his performances at the Savoy and recitals in the country. He is a little man, with quite a

small voice, but his enunciation is perfect. In the Free Trade Hall, at Manchester, capable of holding 3000 people, every word he said or sung could be distinctly heard at the farthest end of the building. No, unless every member of an audience can hear a speaker plainly, without the least effort or straining, leaning back comfortably; he has no business to speak at all.

"I find that the tendency of the age is for rapid thought and consequently rapid utterance. We have no time nowadays for the elegancies of oratory, classical allusions, and pondered periods. The aim of every speechmaker should be to make his points, to be incisive, clear, lucid, forceful. I have clergymen of all denominations who come to me, barristers, lecturers on science and other subjects, and politicians. I take their speeches, rid them of the verbiage and circumlocutions and make them serviceable weapons of attack. The prime object to be aimed at in speaking is to arrest the attention of the audience within the first words, and hold it to the end. Not to dally with the graces of utterance, but to be cogent, lucid, distinct, and forceful - that is if forceful.

"A public speaker must always have in view the size of the building, courtyard, or street, or wherever he is speaking. The larger the building the slower he must speak. I remember an eminent judge once saying that he always knew the young man who was likely to be a success at the bar. It was not the man with great brilliancy of repartee or impressive mien, but the man who thought and spoke deliberately and clearly to make himself understood and heard. To hear any of the great public speakers will convince you of the soundness of this argument."

One of the greatest difficulties Mr. Cairns James has to contend against in fitting the budding orator for the public hustings or rostrum is his false pronunciation and local accent. These have to be dealt with summarily.

"Good English ought to be spoken without any accent whatever," he said. "It is curious how one has to hold the balance between mispronounced Words. The cockney, for example, says 'shime' for shame. The Scotsman calls it 'sheem,' and the Irishman 'shehm.' In the matter of r's the Englishman slurs them over or eliminates them in, his speech, while the Scotsman overdoes them, so one has to introduce them where they have been dropped, and soften them where they are over accented. Then in speaking the proper cadence is an important point. It should be even; neither downward, such as is in variably used, by the Irish, or upward in the manner of the Scotch. Again, in Welsh one gets waves of inflection. In Americans one meets with the drawl." All this time, Mr. Cairns James has been imitating the different accents with amazing, no less than amusing, fidelity.

"In. self-control lies one of the great secrets of successful public speaking." said Mr. James. "The first task I set myself to accomplish with a new comer is to teach him to control his nerves. I find that the more sincere a speaker the more nervous and inclined to fidget he is. It is absolutely essential to reduce such a one to a state of complete quiescence. This I frequently accomplish by giving him a piece of paper to hold behind his back to turn and twist."