Marcus Tullius Cicero

On invention - 85 BC

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Table of Contents

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26

27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55

1
2
3
4=
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29

30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58

59

1

Table of Contents

I Have often and deeply resolved this question in my mind, whether fluency of language has been beneficial or injurious to men and to cities, with reference to the cultivation of the highest order of eloquence. For when I consider the disasters of our own republic, and when I call to mind also the ancient calamities of the most important states, I see that it is by no means the most insignificant portion of their distresses which has originated from the conduct of the most eloquent men. But, at the same time, when I set myself to trace back, by the aid of written memorials and documents, affairs which, by reason of their antiquity, are removed back out of the reach of any personal recollection, I perceive also that many cities have been established, many wars extinguished, many most enduring alliances and most holy friendships have been cemented by deliberate wisdom much assisted and facilitated by eloquence. And as I have been, as I say, considering all this for some time, reason itself especially induces me to think that wisdom without eloquence is but of little advantage to states, but that eloquence without wisdom is often most mischievous, and is never advantageous to them.

If then any one, neglecting all the most virtuous and honourable considerations of wisdom and duty, devotes his whole attention to the practice of speaking, that man is training himself to become useless to himself, and a citizen mischievous to his country; but a man who arms himself with eloquence in such a manner as not to oppose the

advantage of his country, but to be able to contend in behalf of them, he appears to me to be one who both as a man and a citizen will be of the greatest service to his own and the general interests, and most devoted to his country.

And if we are inclined to consider the origin of this thing which is called eloquence, whether it be a study, or an art, or some peculiar sort of training or some faculty given us by nature, we shall find that it has arisen from most honourable causes, and that it proceeds on the most excellent principles.

2

Table of Contents

For there was a time when men wandered at random over the fields, after the fashion of beasts, and supported life on the food of beasts; nor did they do anything by means of the reasoning powers of the mind; but almost everything by bodily strength. No attention was as yet paid to any considerations of the religious reverence due to the gods, or of the duties which are owed to mankind: no one had ever seen any legitimate marriages, no one had beheld any children whose parentage was indubitable; nor had any one any idea what great advantage there might be in a system of equal law. And so, owing to error and ignorance, cupidity, that blind and rash sovereign of the mind, abused its bodily strength, that most pernicious of servants, for the purpose of gratifying itself. At this time then a man,(1) a great and a wise man truly was he, perceived what materials there were, and what great fitness there was in the minds of men for the most important affairs, if any one

could only draw it out, and improve it by education. He, laying down a regular system, collected men, who were previously dispersed over the fields and hidden in habitations in the woods into one place, and united them, and leading them on to every useful and honourable pursuit, though, at first, from not being used to it they raised an outcry against it; he gradually, as they became more eager to listen to him on account of his wisdom and eloquence, made them gentle and civilized from having been savage and brutal. And it certainly seems to me that no wisdom which was silent and destitute of skill in speaking could have had such power as to turn men on a sudden from their previous customs, and to lead them to the adoption of a different system of life. And, moreover, after cities had been established how could men possibly have been induced to learn to cultivate integrity and to maintain justice, and to be accustomed willingly to obey others, and to think it right not only to encounter toil for the sake of the general advantage, but even to run the risk of losing their lives, if men had not been able to persuade them by eloquence of the truth of those principles which they had discovered by philosophy? Undoubtedly no one, if it had not been that he was influenced by dignified and sweet eloquence, would ever have chosen to condescend to appeal to law without violence, when he was the most powerful party of the two as far as strength went; so as to allow himself now to be put on a level with those men among whom he might have been preeminent, and of his own free will to abandon a custom most pleasant to him, and one which by reason of its antiquity had almost the force of nature.

And this is how eloquence appears to have originated at first, and to have advanced to greater perfection; and also, afterwards, to have become concerned in the most important transactions of peace and war, to the greatest advantage of mankind. But after that a certain sort of complaisance, a false copyist of virtue, without any consideration for real duty, arrived at some fluency of language, then wickedness, relying on ability, began to overturn cities, and to undermine the principles of human life.

3

Table of Contents

And, since we have mentioned the origin of the good done by eloquence, let us explain also the beginning of this evil.

It appears exceedingly probable to me that was a time when men who were destitute of eloquence and wisdom, were not accustomed to meddle with affairs of state, and when also great and eloquent men were not used to concern themselves about private causes; but, while the most important transactions were managed by the most eminent and able men, I think that there were others also, and those not very incompetent, who attended to the trifling disputes of private individuals; and as in these disputes it often happened that men had recourse to lies, and tried by such means to oppose the truth, constant practice in speaking encouraged audacity, so that it became unavoidable that those other more eminent men should, on account of the injuries sustained by the citizens, resist the

audacious and come to the assistance of their own individual friends.

Therefore, as that man had often appeared equal in speaking, and sometimes even superior, who having neglected the study of wisdom, had laboured to acquire nothing except eloquence, it happened that in the judgment of the multitude he appeared a man worthy to conduct even the affairs of the state. And hence it arose, and it is no wonder that it did, when rash and audacious men had seized on the helm of the republic, that great and terrible disasters occurred. Owing to which circumstances, eloquence fell under so much odium and unpopularity that the ablest men, (like men who seek a harbour to escape from some violent tempest) devoted themselves to any quiet pursuit, as a refuge from a life of sedition and tumult. So that other virtuous and honourable pursuits appear to me to have become popular subsequently from having been cultivated in tranquillity by excellent men, but that this pursuit having been abandoned by most of them, grew out of fashion and obsolete at the very time when it should have been more eagerly retained and more anxiously encouraged and strengthened.

For the more scandalously the temerity and audacity of foolish and worthless men was violating a most honourable and virtuous system, to the excessive injury of the republic, the more studiously did it become others to resist them, and to consult the welfare of the republic.

4

Table of Contents

And this principle which I have just laid down did not escape the notice of Cato, nor of Laelus, nor of their pupil, as I may fairly call him, Africanus, nor of the Gracchi the grandson of Africanus; men in whom there was consummate virtue and authority increased by their consummate virtue and eloquence, which might serve as an ornament to these qualities, and as a protection to the republic. Wherefore, in my opinion at least, men ought not the less to devote themselves to eloquence, although some men both in private and public affairs misuse it in a perverse manner; but I think rather that they should apply themselves to it with the more eagerness, in order to prevent wicked men from getting the greatest power to the exceeding injury of the good, and the common calamity of all men; especially as this is the only thing which is of the greatest influence on all affairs both public and private; and as it is by this same quality that life is rendered safe, and honourable, and illustrious, and pleasant. For it is from this source that the most numerous advantages accrue to the republic, if only it be accompanied by wisdom, that governor of all human affairs. From this source it is that praise and honour and dignity flow towards all those who have acquired it; from this source it is that the most certain and the safest defence is provided for their friends. And, indeed, it appears to me, that it is on this particular that men, who in many points are weaker and lower than the beasts, are especially superior to them, namely, in being able to speak.

Wherefore, that man appears to me to have acquired an excellent endowment, who is superior to other men in that very thing in which men are superior to beasts. And if this

art is acquired not by nature only, not by mere practice, but also by a sort of regular system of education, it appears to me not foreign to our purpose to consider what those men say who have left us some precepts on the subject of the attainment of it.

But, before we begin to speak of oratorical precepts, I think we must say something of the nature of the art itself; of its duty, of its end, of its materials, and of its divisions. For when we have ascertained those points, then each man's mind will, with the more ease and readiness, be able to comprehend the system itself, and the path which leads to excellence in it.

5

Table of Contents

There is a certain political science which is made up of many and important particulars. A very great and extensive portion of it is artificial eloquence, which men call rhetoric. For we do not agree with those men who think that the knowledge of political science is in no need of and has no connexion with eloquence; and we most widely disagree with those, on the other hand, who think that all political ability is comprehended under the skill and power of a rhetorician. On which account we will place this oratorical ability in such a class as to assert that it is a part of political science. But the duty of this faculty appears to be to speak in a manner suitable to persuading men; the end of it is to persuade by language. And there is difference between the duty of this faculty and its end; that with respect to the duty we consider what ought to be done; with respect to the end

we consider what is suitable to the duty. Just as we say, that it is the duty of a physician to prescribe for a patient in a way calculated to cure him; and that his end is to cure him by his prescriptions. And so we shall understand what we are to call the duty of an orator; and also what we are to call his end; since we shall call that his duty which he ought to do, and we shall term that his end for the sake of which he is bound to do his duty.

We shall call that the material of the art, on which the whole art, and all that ability which is derived from art, turns. Just as if we were to call diseases and wounds the material of medicine, because it is about them that all medical science is concerned. And in like manner, we call those subjects with which oratorical science and ability is conversant the materials of the art of rhetoric. And these subjects some have considered more numerous, and others less so. For Gorgias the Leontine, who is almost the oldest of all rhetoricians, considered that an orator was able to speak in the most excellent manner of all men on every subject. And when he says this he seems to be supplying an infinite and boundless stock of materials to this art. But Aristotle, who of all men has supplied the greatest number of aids and ornaments to this art, thought that the duty of the rhetorician was conversant with three kinds of subjects; with the demonstrative, and the deliberative, and the judicial.

The demonstrative is that which concerns itself with the praise or blame of some particular individual; the deliberative is that which, having its place in discussion and in political debate, comprises a deliberate statement of one's opinion; the judicial is that which, having its place in

judicial proceedings, comprehends the topics of accusation and defence; or of demand and refusal. And, as our own opinion at least inclines, the art and ability of the orator must be understood to be conversant with these tripartite materials.

6

Table of Contents

For Hermagoras, indeed, appears neither to attend to what he is saying, nor to understand what he is promising; for he divides the materials of an orator into the cause, and the examination. The cause he defines to be a thing which has in itself a controversy of language united with the interposition of certain characters. And that part, we too say, is assigned to the orator; for we give him those three parts which we have already mentioned,—the judicial, the deliberative, and the demonstrative. But the examination he defines to be that thing which has in itself a controversy of language, without the interposition of any particular characters; in this way .—"Whether there is anything good besides honesty?"— "Whether the senses may be trusted?"—"What is the shape of the world?"—"What is the size of the sun?" But I imagine that all men can easily see that all such questions are far removed from the business of an orator; for it appears the excess of insanity to attribute those subjects, in which we know that the most sublime genius of philosophers has been exhausted with infinite labour, as if they were inconsiderable matters, to a rhetorician or an orator.

But if Hermagoras himself had had any great acquaintance with these subjects, acquired with long study and training, then it would be supposed that he, from relying on his own knowledge, had laid down some false principles respecting the duty of an orator, and had explained not what his art could effect, but what he himself could do. But as it is, the character of the man is such, that any one would be much more inclined to deny him any knowledge of rhetoric, than to grant him any acquaintance with philosophy. Nor do I say this because the book on the art which he published appears to me to have been written with any particular incorrectness, (for, indeed, he appears to me to have shown very tolerable ingenuity and diligence in arranging topics which he had collected from ancient writings on the subject, and also to have advanced some new theories himself,) but it is the least part of the business of an orator to speak concerning his art, which is what he has done: his business is rather to speak from his art, which is what we all see that this Hermagoras was very little able to do. And so that, indeed, appears to us to be the proper materials of rhetoric, which we have said appeared to be such to Aristotle.

7

Table of Contents

And these are the divisions of it, as numerous writers have laid them down: Invention; Arrangement; Elocution; Memory; Delivery. Invention, is the conceiving of topics either true or probable, which may make one's cause appear probable; Arrangement, is the distribution of the

topics which have been thus conceived with regular order; Elocution, is the adaptation of suitable words and sentences to the topics so conceived; Memory, is the lasting sense in the mind of the matters and words corresponding to the reception of these topics. Delivery, is a regulating of the voice and body in a manner suitable to the dignity of the subjects spoken of and of the language employed.

Now, that these matters have been briefly defined, we may postpone to another time those considerations by which we may be able to elucidate the character and the duty and the object of this art; for they would require a very long argument, and they have no very intimate connexion with the definition of the art and the delivery of precepts relating to it. But we consider that the man who writes a treatise on the art of rhetoric ought to write about two other subjects also; namely, about the materials of the art, and about its divisions. And it seems, indeed, that we ought to treat of the materials and divisions of this art at the same time. Wherefore, let us first consider what sort of quality invention ought to be, which is the most important of all the divisions, and which applies to every description of cause in which an orator can be engaged.

8

Table of Contents

Every subject which contains in itself any controversy existing either in language or in disputation, contains a question either about a fact, or about a name, or about a class, or about an action. Therefore, that investigation out of which a cause arises we call a stating of a case. A stating of

a case is the first conflict of causes arising from a repulse of an accusation; in this way. "You did so and so;"—"I did not do so;" —or, "it was lawful for me to do so." When there is a dispute as to the fact, since the cause is confirmed by conjectures, it is called a conjectural statement. But when it is a dispute as to a name, because the force of a name is to be defined by words, it is then styled a definitive statement. But when the thing which is sought to be ascertained is what is the character of the matter under consideration, because it is a dispute about violence, and about the character of the affair; it is called a general statement. But when the cause depends on this circumstance, either that that man does not seem to plead who ought to plead, or that he does not plead with that man with whom he ought to plead, or that he does not plead before the proper people, at the proper time, in accordance with the proper law, urging the proper charge, and demanding the infliction of the proper penalty, then it is called a statement by way of demurrer; because the arguing of the case appears to stand in need of a demurrer and also of some alteration. And some one or other of these sorts of statement must of necessity be incidental to every cause. For if there be any one to which it is not incidental, in that there can be no dispute at all; on which account it has no right even to be considered a cause at all.

And a dispute as to fact may be distributed over every sort of time. For as to what has been done, an inquiry can be instituted in this way—"whether Ulysses slew Ajax;" and as to what is being done, in this way—"whether the people of Tregellae are well affected towards the Roman people;

"and as to what is going to happen, in this way—" if we leave Carthage uninjured, whether any inconvenience will accrue to the republic."

It is a dispute about a name, when parties are agreed as to the fact, and when the question is by what name that which has been done is to be designated. In which class of dispute it is inevitable on that account that there should be a dispute as to the name; not because the parties are not agreed about the fact, not because the fact is not notorious, but because that which has been done appears in a different light to different people, and on that account one calls it by one name and another by another. Wherefore, in disputes of this kind the matter must be defined by words, and described briefly; as, for instance, if any one has stolen any sacred vessel from a private place, whether he is to be considered a sacrilegious person, or a simple thief. For when that is inquired into, it is necessary to define both points—what is a thief, and what is a sacrilegious person,—and to show by one's own description that the matter which is under discussion ought to be called by a different name from that which the opposite party apply to it.

9

Table of Contents

The dispute about kind is, when it is agreed both what has been done, and when there is no question as to the name by which it ought to be designated; and nevertheless there is a question of what importance the matter is, and of what sort it is, and altogether of what character it is; in this way,—whether it be just or unjust; whether it be useful or

useless; and as to all other circumstances with reference to which there is any question what is the character of that which has been done, without there being any dispute as to its name. Hermagoras assigned four divisions to this sort of dispute: the deliberative, the demonstrative, the judicial, and the one relating to facts. And, as it seems to us, this was no ordinary blunder of his, and one which it is incumbent on us to reprove; though we may do so briefly, lest, if we were to pass it over in silence, we might be thought to have had no good reason for abandoning his guidance; or if we were to dwell too long on this point, we might appear to have interposed a delay and an obstacle to the other precepts which we wish to lay down.

If deliberation and demonstration are kinds of causes, then the divisions of any one kind cannot rightly be considered causes; for the same matter may appear to be a class to one person, and a division to another; but it cannot appear both a class and a division to the same person. But deliberation and demonstration are kinds of argument; for either there is no kind of argument at all, or there is the judicial kind alone, or there are all three kinds, the judicial and the demonstrative and the deliberative. Now, to say there is no kind of argument at the same time that he says that there are many arguments, and is giving precepts for them, is foolishness. How, too, is it possible that there should be one kind only, namely the judicial, when deliberation and demonstration in the first place do not resemble one another, and are exceedingly different from the judicial kind, and have each their separate object to which they ought to be referred. It follows, then, that there