

## GRANDFATHER'S PART IN DEBATE ACTIVITIES

Grandfather entered University of Wisconsin with an ambition to become a Latin professor. Two influences, however, during the first month changed his plan. In the first place, Grandfather had received a jolt on what he did not know about Jones' 40 Lessons in Latin Composition and realized it would be a painful task to become proficient in writing Latin and besides the debating which campus gossip was so full of sounded interesting. Why not debate?

So Grandfather applied for admission to Hesperia. But Grandfather was small and young and doubtless quite "green" and probably looked even greener than he was. At any rate, Hesperia filled its quota of Freshmen with more promising material and Grandfather would have been wholly out of luck except for the fact that shortly before he entered college three men of unusual ability, Bruce, Tarrant and Kronshage, who were great friends and fraternity brothers, decided instead of joining either Athona or Hesperia, to found a new debating society and named it Philomathia, probably after the oldest college debating society, Philomathia at University of Pennsylvania. They were the three outstanding men of their day in debating, but had started this forlorn venture to which they had attracted few men with ability until the unusually large class of 1893 arrived.

Athona and Hesperia soon had their quotas full and there was lots of material of first order left over. Philomathia, having plenty

of room, filled its quotas for all classes with Freshmen who soon "felt their oats" and started into a lively competition with each other. When teams were made for Freshman Blowout, Grandfather was not chosen one of the four debate leaders. This was a disappointment. He had worked faithfully and hoped he might win a place. He did, however, have, as did all other Freshmen, a place on one of their debates. However, he had been passed over for leader and his only chance for further opportunity lay in a five minute speech the night of the Blowout.

His topic involved Government land grants to railroads. His leader was a young man of promise, Laughlin, who for many years of his later life was attorney for Northern Life Insurance Company at Milwaukee. Grandfather's assignment covered a somewhat obscure phase of the topic and all was staked on making that phase of the subject clear and convincing. Two weeks later Grandfather was chosen one of the two leaders for the Semi-public.

Several years later, Grandfather visiting the society, heard a youthful aspirant for honors delivering the debate he had written years before. Grandfather had written his debate out to insure maximum use of his five minutes and a Senior gave the copy of his written debate to a Freshman who had passed it along, and it was still doing duty whenever that subject was scheduled.

Meanwhile Philomathia had been admitted to the Joint Debate League and henceforth it would be a triangular meet. There would, however, be only one debate each year; the society which lost would drop out a year. It had not been easy to persuade Athena and Hesperia to consent to this plan.

It had been a custom for upper classmen to visit other societies occasionally and when one did so, it was customary to invite the visitor to speak. Bruce paid frequent visits to Athena and Hesperia, and the brilliance of his extempore talks was impressive and his wit and good humor always left a cordial feeling. Bruce always closed by extending an invitation in his inimitable and tantalizing manner to meet Philomathia in Joint Debate. Finally the other two societies agreed to admit Philomathia into the league, but arbitrarily provided that the first debate under the league should be between Athena and Hesperia, thus eliminating the great triumvirate, for Bruce, Tarrant and Kronshage would all have graduated before Philomathia had a chance. Hence, leadership in Philomathia's first joint debate would fall on younger shoulders - presumably on A. R. Smith, the other leader chosen for sophomore Semi-public, a man more mature than most of us, with a fine presence and an unbounded nerve.

They used to tell a story of how one day as Smith was bicycling through the country, he stopped to borrow a few grapes from a farmer and was busily engaged sampling them when the farmer appeared with a gun. Smith, however, showed not the slightest confusion, went merrily on eating the grapes and casually remarked that he was the buyer for one of the large produce houses in Chicago and complimented the farmer on the condition of his crop, whereupon the farmer showed him over the place and gave him samples of his choicest kinds to take with him.

Associated with A. R. Smith was a youth by the name of Haskell, a fine locker, and possessed of much more of worldly shrewdness than most

of us. Haskell had made what seemed to the rest of us a fabulous sum selling Encyclopedia Britannica to professional men in Madison. Grandfather's associate, like himself, was young and, in comparison with the other two, quite unimpressive in appearance. However, that he had an excellent head was shown by the fact that he later became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of California.

However, the society's hope for the Joint Debate appeared to rest rest wholly on Smith, and when Smith began to run roughshod over your Grandfather and Meyers, the society backed him up, however preposterous his proposition was. A question concerning trade unions was agreed upon and Meyers and your grandfather worked most of the summer on it. In the Fall, on the phony plea that Haskell had misunderstood a letter his leader Smith had written him, the question was thrown overboard, and we started over once more and chose a new question - the constitutional correctness of secession.

We got worsted on several other counts and when we came to pick a jury, it became so evident that Smith would be backed by the society in picking whatever jury he pleased, that Grandfather proposed that Smith should name two judges and Grandfather would name one. Smith named two young attorneys whom we were afterward informed had agreed to vote for him if he would get them on as judges. Grandfather named Dean Birge, later president of the University - an honest, clear-thinking, dominant personality. We staked all on him. If we could convince him, we did not believe he would let two law students out-vote him. This proved to be correct reasoning. Grandfather and Meyers emerged with a decision in their favor.

Smith made the bluff that he would not be on the Joint Debate term unless he were the leader. The society called his bluff, elected your grandfather leader and left Smith off the team. For second man, the society elected J. J. Schlicher, a student of unusual ability. The third man became ill and in his place in the summer Schlicher and Grandfather selected Haskell, who had been A. R. Smith's partner in the Semi-public, as first speaker. His fine appearance and the excellent delivery of a speech which Schlicher and your grandfather could help him to prepare, together with his worldly shrewdness in picking judges would make him more valuable, we thought, than a more capable student might prove to be.

Now it happened that in the first debate of the new league, Hesperia won over Athena, so were to debate Hesperia, which had neglected to act favorably upon your grandfather's petition for membership. What an opportunity. Oh, boy! If! Never since has Grandfather ever carried so appalling a responsibility. He was nineteen, would be a Junior when the debate was held. It was Philomathia's first chance - probably their last unless we should win.

The other society had several generations of debaters back of them in their alumni and would receive much help from them. Their leader, Donovan, was the University's best Shakespearean actor, a man with fine presence, excellent voice and was generally picked to win. Their second speaker was a rapid-fire talker, an excellent student and very quick to take advantage of an opening. Their first speaker was not formidable, but would get by with a set speech. We felt the debate would

be won or lost by Donovan. Rogers would do very well, perhaps brilliantly but Grandfather would follow him with a half hour of opportunity and should be able to hold him. If Donovan should have the closing half hour, and if he measured up to his opportunity, he would win.

Philomathia had lost the flip of the coin and was required to submit the question. This was a handicap. Donovan would probably choose the negative to get the half hour close, which, as explained in the preceding chapter, the leader of the negative was allowed. The best chance to win was to propose a question so difficult that Donovan would not master it. Hence, we submitted the most difficult and the least understood question of the time, so worded as to give the advantage in merit to the affirmative.

"Question - Would it be expedient for Great Britain, France, Germany and the United States, by international agreement, to adopt Unrestricted Coinage and Unlimited Legal Tender of both gold and silver at the common fixed ratio of  $15\frac{1}{2}$  to 1; it being conceded by the negative that  $15\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 is preferable, for this purpose, to any other ratio."

Donovan, as expected, chose the negative, and the long grind was on. Schlicher and Grandfather worked all summer in the State Historical Library at Madison and corresponded with leaders of political and economic thought in every important country of the world. In the Fall they took light work "on the Hill" and burned midnight oil almost every night studying.

As the Winter term opened, the student body began to take a keen interest in the forthcoming forensic classic, and a new factor added

greatly to Grandfather's feeling of responsibility. Philomathia had been granted a large room in the tower of Science Hall, designed for a museum. We had gone "broke" decorating it and buying a carpet -- we were being pressed by our creditors and none of us had much money.

A bright lad, George Katz, of whom we may write later, offered a wild suggestion in secret session. The Joint Debate had always been a betting sport. We had no alumni to put up money and none of us had much. The betting odds were running heavily against us, and we had to do something to save our faces. Let us all put into one pool all we could afford individually to bet, let us give it to one man who was never known to have much money or ordinarily to bet, let him tease the other fellows into long odds and cover. If we won, the capital would return to the individuals who put it up, the winnings would go to the society, and we would be on "Easy Street". If we lost, well, we were bankrupt anyway and we might as well acknowledge inability to pay and disband.

The plan was adopted. My roommate, Fred Jackson, was made custodian of the fund, and jockeying the other fellows into making him some rash offers, suddenly whipped out a surprisingly large roll of bills, covered their offers of long odds and left everyone dazed as to just what had happened. So, you see, it was important that we win, but there was a big if in the program.

Finally the great day arrived. The early part of the debate went on as we expected. Haskell, who led for us, made a very favorable impression which was not offset by the first speaker on the other side. Schlicher, our second speaker, gave the most scholarly address of the

evening with fairly effective delivery. But Rogers, who followed him, sprung a surprise attack. He took a line of argument which had seemed to us unsound and which we had passed up as a possibility. But in that day, which preceded Bryan's free silver campaign, the subject of bimetallism was one with which the judges as well as the audience were in total ignorance, and Rogers with his rapid-fire delivery made the arguments seem plausible, and he appeared to reinforce his argument effectively with a series of charts.

The audience appeared to favor the negative as it came Grandfather's turn to speak. An unexpected situation needed to be met. At Joint Debates, a wire was strung across the room from gallery over the long speaker's platform and on this, before a speaker was introduced, his assistants hung his charts, so that all the charts were in view before he began speaking. It was the custom, as soon as a speaker closed, for his assistants to remove the charts. Rogers' assistants, for some reason, did not remove his charts when he had finished and this gave Grandfather his opportunity. Grandfather instructed his assistants to leave Rogers' charts. Abandoning nearly half of his prepared address, Grandfather began an analytical but humorous analysis of how the figures on the first chart had been made to show the worse to be the better reason. Then he attacked the second and then the third. When Grandfather suggested - "Let's now study the anatomy of the fourth chart," the audience all laughed and Grandfather saw he was safe in sweeping the rest aside with a gesture and turned to his prepared address.



The advantage had swung to the affirmative, but Donovan had one half hour to close the debate. That Donovan would out-orate us was conceded. The question was - Did Donovan understand bimetalism? The answer was he did not. His oratory was fine, but his grasp on the subject was weak. The strategy of selecting bimetalism for the subject had answered. The affirmative appeared safe. Donovan did not, as was customary for the last speaker, inquire whether the affirmative wished to ask a question. When he closed, Grandfather asked whether he would be permitted to ask a question. Donovan could not refuse. Grandfather's question put Donovan into a hole from which he could not extricate himself and the judges returned a verdict in favor of Philomathia.

The debate was long remembered; it had appealed to the imagination of the campus that a new debating society in its first effort had won over a society with a quarter of a century of accumulated joint debate experience and that a man rejected for membership had triumphed over the society which rejected him. This debate was one of the most satisfying accomplishments of Grandfather's life. Every rung up the ladder to debate championship had been won over more than usual obstacles in which at every step he had been discounted and the odds were rated heavily against him.

Philomathia, which appeared to be on the brink of dissolution, was saved. Through the financial plan of George Katz outlined above, the society found itself financially on "Easy Street". Debts were paid promptly, a huge victory flag was purchased, a new society cut was obtained

for the "Badger" and Philomathia went into the next year with money in the treasury and with prestige second to none. Philomathia was able to bid for the most able of next year's Freshmen and was well started on a long and successful career.

The professors helped with back lessons (for Grandfather had not attended a class for seven weeks before the debate), the class elected Grandfather president, a University mass meeting selected him for one of the editors on the new college daily which was about to be launched and which still retains the name its first board of editors gave it - the Daily Cardinal.

Grandfather ended his Junior year somewhat worn by the extra work and strain, but happy. His college career had reached a pleasing climax - his goal had been attained. There was no further power to which he aspired. Although he did not suspect it, his undergraduate college days had, as a fact of practical importance in his life, come to an end.