

CICERO'S DIALOGUES  
D E O R A T O R E ;  
OR,  
ON THE CHARACTER OF THE ORATOR.

---

BOOK I.

THE ARGUMENT.

These Dialogues were written, or at least published, by Cicero in the year B.C. 55, when he was about fifty-two years old, in the second consulship of Pompey and Crassus. He composed them at the request of his brother Quintus, in order that he might set forth in better form, at a more advanced period of life, and after his long experience, those opinions on oratory which he had somewhat hastily and crudely advanced in his early years in his books on Invention. The Dialogues are supposed to have been held B.C. 91, when there were great contentions at Rome respecting the proposal of the tribune Marcus Livius Drusus to allow the senators, in common with the equites, to be judges on criminal trials.

The persons present at the dialogue related in the first book are Lucius Licinius Crassus, Marcus Antonius, his friend, the two most eminent orators of their day; Quintus Mucius Scævola, the father-in-law of Crassus, who was celebrated for his knowledge of the civil law, and from whom Cicero himself received instruction in his youth; and two young men, Caius Amelius Cotta, and Publius Sulpicius Rufus, youths of much ability and promise, who were anxious to distinguish themselves in oratory, and for whose instruction the precepts and observations conveyed in the Dialogues are supposed to have been delivered. The scene of the conversations is the Tusculan villa of Crassus, to which he had retired from the tumults at Rome, and where he was joined by the rest of the party.

The object of Cicero, in these books, was to set before his reader all that was important in the rhetorical treatises of Aristotle, Isocrates, and other ancient writers on oratory, divested of technicalities, and presented in a pleasing form.

Crassus and Antonius, in the first book, discourse on all the qualifications of a perfect orator, Crassus being the exponent of the sentiments of Cicero himself, and maintaining that a complete orator must be acquainted with the whole circle of art and science. Antonius expresses his opinion that far less learning is required in the orator than Crassus supposes, and that, as universal knowledge

is unattainable, it will be well for him not to attempt to acquire too much, as he will thus only distract his thoughts, and render himself less capable of attaining excellence in speaking, than if, contenting himself with moderate acquirements, he devoted his attention chiefly to the improvement of his natural talents and qualifications for oratory.

Cicero bestowed great consideration on the work, and had it long in hand. Ep. ad Att. iv. 12. See also Ad Att. iv. 16; xiii. 19; Ad Fam. i. 9.

I. As I frequently contemplate and call to mind the times of old, those in general seem to me, brother Quintus, to have been supremely happy, who, while they were distinguished with honours and the glory of their actions in the best days of the republic, were enabled to pursue such a course of life, that they could continue either in employment without danger, or in retirement with dignity. To myself, also, there was a time<sup>1</sup> when I thought that a season for relaxation, and for turning my thoughts again to the noble studies once pursued by both of us, would be fairly allowable, and be conceded by almost every one; if the infinite labour of forensic business and the occupations of ambition should be brought to a stand, either by the completion of my course of honours,<sup>2</sup> or by the decline of age. Such expectations, with regard to my studies and designs, not only the severe calamities resulting from public occurrences, but a variety of our own private troubles,<sup>3</sup> have disappointed. For in that period,<sup>4</sup> which seemed likely to offer most quiet and tranquillity, the greatest pressures of trouble and the most turbulent storms arose. Nor to our wishes and earnest desires has the enjoyment of leisure been granted, to cultivate and revive between ourselves those studies to which we have from early youth been addicted. For at our first entrance into life we fell amidst the perturbation<sup>5</sup> of all

<sup>1</sup> After his consulship, A.U.C. 691, in the forty-fourth year of his age.

<sup>2</sup> There was a certain course of honours through which the Romans passed. After attaining the quaestorship, they aspired to the aedileship, and then to the praetorship and consulate. Cicero was augur, quaestor, aedile, praetor, consul, and proconsul of Asia. *Proust.*

<sup>3</sup> He refers to his exile, and the proposed union between Caesar and Pompey to make themselves masters of the whole commonwealth; a matter to which he was unwilling to allude more plainly. *Ellendt.*

<sup>4</sup> *Qui locus. Quae vitae pars. Proust.*

<sup>5</sup> The civil wars of Marius and Sylla. *Ellendt.*

ancient order; in my consulship we were involved in struggles and the hazard of everything;<sup>1</sup> and all the time since that consulship we have had to make opposition to those waves which, prevented by my efforts from causing a general destruction, have abundantly recoiled upon myself. Yet, amidst the difficulties of affairs, and the straitness of time, I shall endeavour to gratify my love of literature; and whatever leisure the malice of enemies, the causes of friends, or the public service will allow me, I shall chiefly devote to writing. As to you, brother, I shall not fail to obey your exhortations and entreaties; for no person can have more influence with me than you have both by authority and affection.

II. Here the recollection of an old tradition must be revived in my mind, a recollection not indeed sufficiently distinct, but adapted, I think, so far to reply to what you ask, that you may understand what opinions the most famous and eloquent men entertained respecting the whole art of oratory. For you wish, as you have often said to me, (since what went abroad rough and incomplete<sup>2</sup> from our own notebooks, when we were boys or young men, is scarcely worthy of my present standing in life, and that experience which I have gained from so many and such important causes as I have pleaded,) that something more polished and complete should be offered by me on the same subjects; and you are at times inclined to dissent from me in our disputations on this matter; inasmuch as I consider eloquence to be the offspring of the accomplishments of the most learned men;<sup>3</sup> but you think it must be regarded as independent of elegant learning, and attributable to a peculiar kind of talent and practice.

Often, indeed, as I review in thought the greatest of mankind, and those endowed with the highest abilities, it has appeared to me worthy of inquiry what was the cause that a greater number of persons have been admirable in every other pursuit than in speaking. For which way soever you direct your view in thought and contemplation, you will see

<sup>1</sup> Alluding to the conspiracy of Catiline.

<sup>2</sup> The two books *De Inventione Rhetoricæ*.

<sup>3</sup> *Prudentissimorum*. Equivalent to *doctissimorum*. Pearce. Some manuscripts have *eruditissimorum*.

numbers excellent in every species, not only of the humble, but even of the highest arts. Who, indeed, is there, that, if he would measure the qualifications of illustrious men, either by the usefulness or magnitude of their actions, would not prefer a general to an orator? Yet who doubts that we can produce, from this city alone, almost innumerable excellent commanders, while we can number scarcely a few eminent in speaking? There have been many also in our own memory, and more in that of our fathers, and even of our forefathers, who had abilities to rule and govern affairs of state by their counsel and wisdom; while for a long period no tolerable orators were found, or scarcely one in every age. But lest any one should think that the art of speaking may more justly be compared with other pursuits, which depend upon abstruse studies, and a varied field of learning, than with the merits of a general, or the wisdom of a prudent senator, let him turn his thoughts to those particular sciences themselves, and contemplate who and how many have flourished in them, as he will thus be best enabled to judge how great a scarcity of orators there is and has ever been.

III. It does not escape your observation that what the Greeks call PHILOSOPHY, is esteemed by the most learned men, the originator, as it were, and parent of all the arts which merit praise; philosophy, I say, in which it is difficult to enumerate how many distinguished men there have been, and of how great knowledge, variety, and comprehensiveness in their studies, men who have not confined their labours to one province separately, but have embraced whatever they could master either by scientific investigations, or by processes of reasoning. Who is ignorant in how great obscurity of matter, in how abstruse, manifold, and subtle an art they who are called mathematicians are engaged? Yet in that pursuit so many men have arrived at excellence, that not one seems to have applied himself to the science in earnest without attaining in it whatever he desired. Who has ever devoted himself wholly to music; who has ever given himself up to the learning which they profess who are called grammarians, without compassing, in knowledge and understanding, the whole substance and matter of those sciences, though almost boundless? Of all those who have engaged in the most liberal pursuits and departments of such sciences, I think I

may truly say that a smaller number of eminent poets have arisen than of men distinguished in any other branch of literature; and in the whole multitude of the learned, among whom there rarely appears one of the highest excellence, there will be found, if you will but make a careful review of our own list and that of the Greeks, far fewer good orators than good poets. This ought to seem the more wonderful, as attainments in other sciences are drawn from recluse and hidden springs; but the whole art of speaking lies before us, and is concerned with common usage and the custom and language of all men; so that while in other things that is most excellent which is most remote from the knowledge and understanding of the illiterate, it is in speaking even the greatest of faults to vary from the ordinary kind of language, and the practice sanctioned by universal reason.

IV. Yet it cannot be said with truth, either that more are devoted to the other arts, or that they are excited by greater pleasure, more abundant hope, or more ample rewards; for to say nothing of Greece, which was always desirous to hold the first place in eloquence, and Athens, that inventress of all literature, in which the utmost power of oratory was both discovered and brought to perfection, in this very city of ours, assuredly, no studies were ever pursued with more earnestness than those tending to the acquisition of eloquence. For when our empire over all nations was established, and after a period of peace had secured tranquillity, there was scarcely a youth ambitious of praise who did not think that he must strive, with all his endeavours, to attain the art of speaking. For a time, indeed, as being ignorant of all method, and as thinking there was no course of exercise for them, or any precepts of art, they attained what they could by the single force of genius and thought. But afterwards, having heard the Greek orators, and gained an acquaintance with Greek literature, and procured instructors, our countrymen were inflamed with an incredible passion for eloquence. The magnitude, the variety, the multitude of all kind of causes, excited them to such a degree, that to that learning which each had acquired by his individual study, frequent practice, which was superior to the precepts of all masters, was at once added. There were then, as there are also now, the highest inducements offered for the

cultivation of this study, in regard to public favour, wealth, and dignity. The abilities of our countrymen (as we may judge from many particulars,) far excelled those of the men of every other nation. For which reasons, who would not justly wonder that in the records of all ages, times, and states, so small a number of orators should be found?

But the art of eloquence is something greater, and collected from more sciences and studies, than people imagine. V. For who can suppose that, amid the greatest multitude of students, the utmost abundance of masters, the most eminent geniuses among men, the infinite variety of causes, the most ample rewards offered to eloquence, there is any other reason to be found for the small number of orators than the incredible magnitude and difficulty of the art? A knowledge of a vast number of things is necessary, without which volubility of words is empty and ridiculous; speech itself is to be formed, not merely by choice, but by careful construction of words; and all the emotions of the mind, which nature has given to man, must be intimately known; for all the force and art of speaking must be employed in allaying or exciting the feelings of those who listen. To this must be added a certain portion of grace and wit, learning worthy of a well-bred man, and quickness and brevity in replying as well as attacking, accompanied with a refined decorum and urbanity. Besides, the whole of antiquity and a multitude of examples is to be kept in the memory; nor is the knowledge of laws in general, or of the civil law in particular, to be neglected. And why need I add any remarks on delivery itself, which is to be ordered by action of body, by gesture, by look, and by modulation and variation of the voice, the great power of which, alone and in itself, the comparatively trivial art of actors and the stage proves, on which though all bestow their utmost labour to form their look, voice, and gesture, who knows not how few there are, and have ever been, to whom we can attend with patience? What can I say of that repository for all things, the memory, which, unless it be made the keeper of the matter and words that are the fruits of thought and invention, all the talents of the orator, we see, though they be of the highest degree of excellence, will be of no avail? Let us then cease to wonder what is the cause of the scarcity of

good speakers, since eloquence results from all those qualifications, in each of which singly it is a great merit to labour successfully ; and let us rather exhort our children, and others whose glory and honour is dear to us, to contemplate in their minds the full magnitude of the object, and not to trust that they can reach the height at which they aim, by the aid of the precepts, masters, and exercises, that they are all now following, but to understand that they must adopt others of a different character.

VI. In my opinion, indeed, no man can be an orator possessed of every praiseworthy accomplishment, unless he has attained the knowledge of everything important, and of all liberal arts, for his language must be ornate and copious from knowledge, since, unless there be beneath the surface matter understood and felt by the speaker, oratory becomes an empty and almost puerile flow of words. Yet I will not lay so great a burden upon orators, especially our own, amid so many occupations of public and private life, as to think it allowable for them to be ignorant of nothing ; although the qualifications of an orator, and his very profession of speaking well, seem to undertake and promise that he can discourse gracefully and copiously on whatever subject is proposed to him. But because this, I doubt not, will appear to most people an immense and infinite undertaking, and because I see that the Greeks, men amply endowed not only with genius and learning, but also with leisure and application, have made a kind of partition of the arts, and have not singly laboured in the whole circle of oratory, but have separated from the other parts of rhetoric that department of eloquence which is used in the forum on trials or in deliberations, and have left this species only to the orator ; I shall not embrace in these books more than has been attributed to this kind of speaking<sup>1</sup> by the almost unanimous consent of the greatest men, after much examination and discussion of the subject ; and I shall repeat, not a series of precepts drawn from the infancy of our old and boyish learning, but matters which I have heard were formerly argued in a discussion among some of our countrymen who were of the highest eloquence, and of the first rank in every kind

<sup>1</sup> Deliberative and judicial oratory ; omitting the epideictic or demonstrative kind.

# END OF SAMPLE TEXT



The Complete Text can be found on our CD:  
**Primary Literary Sources For Ancient Literature**  
which can be purchased on our Website :  
[www.Brainfly.net](http://www.Brainfly.net)

or

by sending **\$64.95** in check or money order to :  
**Brainfly Inc.**  
**5100 Garfield Ave. #46**  
**Sacramento CA 95841-3839**

## **TEACHER'S DISCOUNT:**

If you are a **TEACHER** you can take advantage of our teacher's discount. Click on **Teachers Discount** on our website ([www.Brainfly.net](http://www.Brainfly.net)) or **Send us \$55.95** and we will send you a full copy of *Primary Literary Sources For Ancient Literature* **AND** our *5000 Classics CD (a collection of over 5000 classic works of literature in electronic format (.txt))* plus our *Wholesale price list*.

If you have any suggestions such as books you would like to see added to the collection or if you would like our wholesale prices list please send us an email to:

[webcomments@brainfly.net](mailto:webcomments@brainfly.net)