

WHO'LL WIN IN ORATORY?

---HERE'S A GUESS

OPINION EXPRESSED THAT MR. SHIELDS' ORATION IS ONE OF FOUR BEST.

Prof. Nichols Puts the Earlham, Ottawa, Michigan and Minnesota Orators at Top of the List.

Prof. E. R. Nichols has taken considerable time to review the ten orations in the Inter State oratorical contest and offers a review which will undoubtedly be of much interest to Ottawa students who want to see Kansas' man, John A. Shields, of Ottawa University, win out in the contest at Omaha on May 20th. Prof. Nichols says:

"To venture an opinion upon a set of orations before a contest is to run the risk of having your judgment discredited by the net result of that difference of opinion always manifest in judges. However, since Ottawa students and Ottawa people are interested in this year's Inter-State Contest (and this article is written primarily for them) and since I have had an opportunity to read all the orations I have the temerity to express my ideas about them, hoping to agree at least in part with the judges.

"There are ten orations in the contest—seven of them will be delivered at Omaha. The selection of the seven is the task before the five preliminary judges. Were I a judge I should eliminate the following three orations: 'The Moulding Power,' by Karl W. Becker, Wittenburg College, Ohio; 'Poland's Offering to the American,' by Lew R. Saretsky, Beloit College, Wisconsin; and 'The Spirit of Our Government,' by Walter David, William Jewell College, Missouri.

"My reasons for determining against these orations I shall state briefly before discussing the merits of the seven orations which I should admit to the contest. The first one, the Wittenburg oration, is rather an essay upon education than an oration with possibilities or merit from the speaking point of view. It is too abstract, savors too much of the academic, and fails, where failure is disastrous in holding the reader's attention.

"The Wisconsin oration to my mind falls below the Beloit standard—(this school having won several inter-

state contests—in that it is too narrow in scope, tries to make a problem where none exists, and failing resolves itself into a eulogy of Poland and some of its great men—a thing which Americans are not interested in. Also it lacks the universal note which might attract our favor. It is well written, but notwithstanding that must have won the state contest on Beloit's reputation.

"The William Jewell, or Missouri oration too nearly resembles a political science 'talk' or a treatise on government, with a rehash of Judge Lindsay's articles in Everybody's thrown in for good measure, to command respect as an oration of true inter-state caliber.

"Of the orations which I have placed in the seven, one, 'The Bard of the American Spirit,' from Knox College, Illinois, last place. As in Wisconsin Illinois must have had a weak contest or given way before Knox reputation. It is the only oration in the ten of the literary type—the bard of the American spirit being Walt Whitman. It is a good, intelligent piece of criticism, and with judges fond of the poet might gain considerable favor. The literary oration is not popular at present, but the departure from the great cause, great problem, or great man oration on the part of two such schools as Beloit and Knox may be significant. Compared with former orations of a literary type—Senator Robt. Lafollette's 'Iago' for instance—the Knox oration falls short of the true inter-state standard. In fact I may say before going farther that I look upon this inter-state contest as a rather weak one compared to some which have been held in the last decade—to say nothing of previous ones.

"'On the Sands of Time,' the Creighton University, Nebraska, oration is a good piece of work. If its writer had been content to take the scaffolding down after completing the fresco one would have been better pleased. He forces an obvious outline upon us, and this distracts from the literary merits of the production. The qualities of true greatness in the lives of heroic men is the subject of discussion in this oration. Devotion to duty is exemplified by St. Paul, perseverance by Columbus, and unselfishness by Lincoln, although the 'speaking' possibilities of this oration are good, it does not seem 'big enough' to command a high place. In fact I should not be surprised if it fails

to make the seven although I, personally, like it well enough to give it a place.

" 'The Philosophy of the Race Problem,'—viewed from the negro's standpoint—the Iowa oration from Cornell College, I should give a low place, recognizing the fact that from the point of view of delivery it is a fine speech—as good perhaps as any speech in the contest. In argument it is alternately strong and weak. I am in sympathy with the author's resentment toward Smith, Dixon, Tillman, Vardaman and others, but I do not like his method of manifesting it. There is enough distasteful egotism in one paragraph to ruin the whole oration. White or black, yellow or red—the following paragraph would command my condemnation and lose my vote:

" 'Mr. Dixon seems to believe that physical characteristics are more potent factors in determining racial possibilities than are mental and moral traits.' Still speaking of the negro, says: 'The more you educate, the more impossible you render his position in a democracy. Can you change the color of his skin, the kink of his hair, the bulge of his lips or the spread of his nose with a spelling book?' 'I thank an all-kind Creator for this tremendous possibility, that my skin, though black, may cover a heart as pure as any that beats within a Saxon's breast. I thank him that my hair, though kinked, may cover a brain which can think as clearly, and reason as profoundly as that of the fairest white. I thank Him that the bulge of my lips and the spread of my nose need not forever be the inevitable tokens of my disgrace,—that they may become my badge of honor if, after fifty years of education, I can show the rudiments, at least, of that mental and moral development, to acquire which, the Anglo-Saxon has taken a half-score of centuries.'

"A college oration above all demands modesty and a lack of the 'lyric element.' I wonder if the personal reference is in good taste here? Could not Mr. Dixon be answered with better judgment in a different manner?

"The four orations left—'The Evolution of a World Peace,' Earlham College, Indiana; 'The New Idea,' Albion College, Michigan; 'The Civic Message of the Pilgrims,' Carleton College, Minnesota; and 'Lincoln, the Master Politician,' Ottawa, Kansas,

are all excellent pieces of work and it is hard to decide their order in the first division.

"The Indiana oration is good until you reach the halfway point. It is the Earlham type of stuff that is far inferior, however, to the Earlham days of Kinney and Fuger. Its enthusiasm wanes at the very point where it should begin and we get the worn out, regularly offered proposition of the United States setting the nations an example of disarmament. There is nothing original about this—Glenn Porter Wishard did it all in a much better manner four or five years ago winning, in Northern Oratorical League and the Peace Contest. This peace subject is over worked and deserves a sabbatical year. There is very little that is oratorical about it anyway.

"The 'New Ideal' is a trifle too much in the quiet essay order—still its thought is so good that I have been moved to place it high. There are one or two references in it which are in bad taste, but these are not serious flaws. The general workmanship is good. If delivered well it has an excellent chance of winning. The same might be said of the Indiana oration.

"The Civic Message of the Pilgrims' made a strong appeal to me. Its picturing is superior to that of the Indiana oration;—its thought is on a par with that of the 'New Ideal,'—the Michigan oration; and more than that, it tells a story—it possesses patriotic interest. I fear its pleasing effect—as our orator is here met on his own ground—patriotism, admiration of high characters and story telling interest. This Minnesota oration, however seems to be a little abrupt in its departure from the Pilgrim and his story to present conditions and the need of the puritan spirit.

"Mr. Shields' oration on Lincoln seems to me to surpass the Minnesota oration in keeping up the story interest. I believe it is better constructed for delivery, and that it has a more effective conclusion. The Lincoln oration is open to the charge of lack of originality. Certainly, the material is common property as all history must be. It is upon the construction of the oration, upon the judicious comment in it, and upon its magnificent tendency to show up better when delivered than when read that I base hopes for its standing high in the contest. Once past the reading test, Mr. Shields should have an ex-

cellent chance. I believe he will be successful in getting into the seven, and I am inclined to concur with the judgment of critics in some of our neighboring institutions who say that he has one of the three best orations and real y ought to win.

“ In conclusion let me say again that these remarks are merely personal opinion—are not aimed as a criticism of the work of other schools, nor is it desired that they excite any controversy should they happen to penetrate the sanctum sanctorum of any of the colleges having orators in this contest.”
