

## 304 LECTURES ON SACRED RHETORIC.

of our remaining time; another consideration is the belief that detailed and technical rules on this head can never make an orator. In truth, the main foundation for right or wrong action has been laid long before you come here, in the mode of reading to which you were trained in the primary school, and in the habits of utterance formed in the society amidst which you were reared. The great teachers of correct expression are the mother and the master of the reading-school. And then it must be your own ear, taste, heart and intellect which shall teach you the right emphasis and gesture. He who has the gift of native ear and sensibility will learn how to speak from listening to good models. There is no other tuition which is efficient, and there is, for such a pupil, no other that is needed. But yet attention and diligence may do much to amend our faults and to perfect our taste. It is with this view I am to point out to you briefly the elements of rhetorical action. I treat first of utterance.

Part 1: Utterance

I Audibility

A. Loudness

Speech is addressed to the ear. Its first requisite is, therefore, audibility: we must so utter it as to be heard. This simple remark will suggest to your good sense the rule as to the general gauge of loudness. The voice should be always loud enough to be heard throughout the audience, and, except in animated passages, it should not be much louder. To secure that result, it is well to direct the eyes generally toward the farthest circle of hearers; for the voice will naturally adjust itself to the distance of those we address. This rule is useful also in guarding us against the distraction of our attention and the loss of our thread of thought, by noting too closely any individual countenance or trivial

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event in the audience near us. But there is an element more essential to audibility than loudness: this is distinctness. By distinctness I mean these traits: clearness or purity of tone, due deliberation or separation of the syllables, and especially careful articulation. The public speaker must never move so rapidly as to huddle his syllables. While he observes due accent and emphasis, he must give space for the distinct enunciation of both the vowels and consonants of all unaccented syllables. There is a tendency growing in this our material age to a curtness and hurry of enunciation, which threaten to destroy the melody and the very identity of the English as a spoken language. This fashion is to disregard the characteristic vowel-sounds of all syllables except the one which bears the accent, and to reduce them to the *e* mute of the French or to the *sheva* sound of the Hebrew. Such speakers pronounce the adjective "capital," for instance, as though it were "*cáp'tle*;" "cardinal" in their mouths is "*cárd'nle*," "memory" is "*mém'ry*," "governor" is "*gúv'n'r*," "innocent" is "*innic'nt*." This detestable usage would reduce our noble tongue to a torrent of sibilant dissyllables. It is the vowels which are heard: they constitute the real voice of language; the consonants are but the checks or stoppages which the tongue, teeth, lips and palate impose upon the stream of sound. To suppress or diminish the vowel-sounds tends, therefore, to substitute for the music of the flowing river the perpetual gurgle and clatter of the valves of the mill. Rhetorical melody resides in the vowel-sounds. If you would possess this charming grace of speech, the vowels must be each one distinctly uttered.

B. Distinctness