

On the Voice

the least, unnecessary for you to imitate them. Speak as educated nature suggests to you, and you will do well; but let it be educated, and not raw, rude, uncultivated nature. Demosthenes took, as you know, unbounded pains with his voice, and Cicero, who was naturally weak, made a long journey into Greece to correct his manner of speaking. With far nobler themes, let us not be less ambitious to excel. 'Deprive me of everything else', says Gregory, of Nazianzen, 'but leave me eloquence, and I shall never regret the voyages which I have made in order to study it.'

ALWAYS SPEAK SO AS TO BE HEARD. I know a man who weighs sixteen stone, and ought to be able to be heard half-a-mile, who is so gracelessly indolent, that in his small place of worship you can scarcely hear him in the front of the gallery. What is the use of a preacher whom men cannot hear? Modesty should lead a voiceless man to give place to others who are more fitted for the work of proclaiming the messages of the King. Some men are loud enough, but they are not distinct, their words overlap each other, play at leap-frog, or trip each other up. Distinct utterance is far more important than wind-power. Do give a word a fair chance, do not break its back in your vehemence, or run it off its legs in your haste. It is hateful to hear a big fellow mutter and whisper when his lungs are quite strong enough for the loudest speech; but at the same time, let a man shout ever so lustily, he will not be well heard unless he learns to push his words forward with due space between. To speak too slowly is miserable work, and subjects active-minded hearers to the disease called the 'horrors'. It is impossible to hear a man who crawls along at a mile an hour. One word today and one tomorrow is a kind of slow-fire which martyrs only could enjoy. Excessively rapid speaking, tearing and raving into utter rant, is quite as inexcusable; it is not, and never can be powerful, except with idiots, for it turns what should be an army of words into a mob, and most effectually drowns the sense in floods of sound. Occasionally, one hears an infuriated orator of indistinct utterance, whose impetuosity hurries him on to such a confusion of sounds, that at a little distance one is reminded of Lucan's lines:

Her gabbling tongue a muttering tone confounds,
Discordant and unlike to human sounds;
It seem'd of dogs the bark, of wolves the howl,

LECTURES TO MY STUDENTS

The doleful screeching of the midnight owl;
 The hiss of snakes, the hungry lion's roar,
 The bound of billows beating on the shore;
 The groan of winds among the leafy wood,
 And burst of thunder from the rending cloud!
 'Twas these, all these in one.

It is an infliction not to be endured twice, to hear a brother who mistakes perspiration for inspiration, tear along like a wild horse with a hornet in his ear till he has no more wind, and must needs pause to pump his lungs full again; a repetition of this indecency several times in a sermon is not uncommon, but is most painful. Pause soon enough to prevent that 'hough, hough', which rather creates pity for the breathless orator than sympathy with the subject in hand. Your audience ought not to know that you breathe at all — the process of respiration should be as unobserved as the circulation of the blood. It is indecent to let the mere animal function of breathing cause any hiatus in your discourse.

DO NOT AS A RULE EXERT YOUR VOICE TO THE UTMOST IN ORDINARY PREACHING. Two or three earnest men, now present, are tearing themselves to pieces by needless bawling; their poor lungs are irritated, and their larynx inflamed by boisterous shouting, from which they seem unable to refrain. Now it is all very well to 'Cry aloud and spare not', but 'Do thyself no harm' is apostolical advice. When persons can hear you with half the amount of voice, it is as well to save the superfluous force for times when it may be wanted. 'Waste not, want not' may apply here as well as elsewhere. Be a little economical with that enormous volume of sound. Do not give your hearers head-aches when you mean to give them heart-aches: you aim to keep them from sleeping in their pews, but remember that it is not needful to burst the drums of their ears. 'The Lord is not in the wind.' Thunder is not lightning. Men do not hear in proportion to the noise created; in fact, too much noise stuns the ear, creates reverberations and echoes, and effectually injures the power of your sermons. Adapt your voice to your audience; when twenty thousand are before you, draw out the stops and give the full peal, but not in a room which will only hold a score or two. Whenever I enter a

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¹ Culverin: a can