1-1-1918

Lesson No. 03, Purposes of the Speech

R. E. Pattinson Kline

EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SPEAKING

LESSON No. 3

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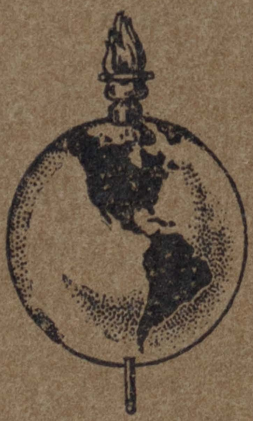

NORTH AMERICAN INSTITUTE
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PURPOSES OF THE SPEECH

LESSON No. 3

One of a Series of Lessons in

EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SPEAKING

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PURPOSES OF THE SPEECH

The purpose back of a speech is one of the vital relations which have to be carefully considered. There are a number of considerations which influence and decide the character of an address. Among the most important of these are: the length, the purpose, the occasion and the type of audience. Of these four the purpose has a more important bearing than the others. Many speak in a rambling, shifty sort of manner because they have not recognized just what is demanded of them by the topic. There is, therefore, nothing of a clearly related and constructive end before them—a result which brings about a scattering of the efforts. To hit the bull's eye one bullet is necessary,—a shot gun is not used for this purpose. So in speaking, there is a bull's eye to be hit. The subject is the bull's eye.

Therein are contained the demands to be made upon the speaker. Provided other aids are wisely used, singleness of thought and purpose is the bullet that will hit the bull's eye. So one must take the pains to understand clearly the end which is wrapped up in the subject, and the exact limits of the discussion determined by the end.

Consider some of the weaknesses which result when the purpose of the subject is not recognized. In the first place all the processes of speech development are very likely to be mistakenly applied. Without this understanding it will be difficult to determine most wisely the length, or the relation of the address to the occasion, or the effect of the character and limitations of the audience upon the matter and construction of the speech.

There is the danger further, that there will be little planning, or organization or construction applied to the ideas to be expressed. This results in a haphazard mode of expression, now one phase then another covered, with no actual relationship exist-

ing between them, or with the relationship vaguely shown or only suggested. The hearer may carry away with him many excellent ideas, but no effectively knit together whole.

In addition to this lack of thorough organization there is a great probability that the statement of the thought will be indefinite. Lacking a singleness of purpose there will be little to bind the ideas together or to compel unerring clearness of statement. Exact demands and limitations will be lost sight of. The thought will be too general in nature, or vague in statement, or obscure in suggestion. Ideas not belonging to the discussion will creep in, and illustrations will often fail to really illustrate. Exactness, preciseness, and accuracy of expression will easily be missed.

Further: Without a recognition of the exact task laid upon a speaker by the subject, an inadequate development of the thought is probable. Too much attention may be given to a minor division, and too little to a much more important division. Beyond this lack of proportionate discus-

sion of the various divisions of the thought, the whole general treatment may be lacking in thoroughness of statement, or the main idea may be entirely lost sight of. The error may be made of going into too great detail, when it is a general statement of the idea that is demanded, or the error of stating general truths when particular applications of one truth are needed.

A thorough examination of the topic to ascertain the exact demands of its statement, and the limits of discussion it provides, will do much to correct the errors suggested.

Someone has written that there are two reasons for literature: one, that the writer wishes to have the reader understand—see mentally—as he does; the other, that the writer wishes the reader to experience the same emotions he feels. This is well put. The same observations might be made, and correctly, of public speaking. But the individual does other things than think and feel. One other issue of life there is,—he acts. These three human processes, think-

ing, feeling, and acting, form the basis of all reasons for public or private speech.

Look at them somewhat more in detail. Much is being heard these days of the initiative and the referendum. At a meeting a speaker asks his hearers to support this political process. Many do not know what it is or how it is to operate, or what it is supposed to do. Before the speaker can hope to secure the support of those who are ignorant of the process he must make these points clear, thoroughly clear. If there remains still any lack of understanding of the process there is the possibility that the hearer will refuse to accept the speaker's appeal. Definition, explanation, illustration and application must be used to the degree needed. It is wiser to err on the side of saying more than may be needed, than to run any risk that the effort has failed because of a failure to say enough. Brevity may be the soul of wit, but it is also frequently the cause of failure in speech making. It is given to few men to speak with the brevity and the inclusiveness with which Lincoln spoke in

his Gettysburg address. To speak briefly, yet thoroughly effectively, is, however, to be cultivated as far as possible.

To make an idea clear, then, is the commonest of speech purposes. The great mass of speech has no other end. We are continually describing, explaining, limiting, qualifying, and unfolding to others those things and ideas which appeal to us. But, as common as the purpose is, the ability to be absolutely clear, and especially instantly clear, is a rather rare accomplishment.

But consider what a large part of our speech is given over to attempting to let others know how we feel about affairs,—that they may enter into the same feelings. Frequently there is a very positive display of feeling with no other desire than that those about may simply know what the feeling is and its intensity. But very frequently the emotion expressed has as its end the arousement of the same kind of emotion in the hearer, and of sympathy with the one speaking. So in public speech, the latter purpose is most frequent. An

appeal is made to the audience that it may participate in the same feelings which the speaker shows, with the purpose that the feelings shall have the same effect upon them as upon the speaker. It is said that misery loves company, and this statement expresses the principle. Men and women are social beings, and they desire to share their thoughts and feelings with others. A humorous story has been heard, a tragedy has been seen, a delightful bit of scenery has been viewed, and the social instinct leads us to share the feelings thus produced with our fellows. The theatre is largely explained by the desire of people to enter into the feelings of others. To develop feeling, then, is the second end of speech.

While the mental activity of many people ends with the absorption of information, there are those who really think, those who reason, who come to conclusions. Consider again the instance of one seeking to induce an audience to accept his ideas concerning the initiative and the referendum. He may explain, define, and illustrate this political

process until all is thoroughly clear, but that it is clear is no guarantee that the audience will accept it and vote to displace other processes. There will be those who will demand that the speaker prove first that the initiative and referendum are needed, and second that they will accomplish that which the speaker claims for them. I desire to buy an automobile, and being rather hard-headed, and perhaps somewhat tight-fisted, I compel the salesman to put the machine to every test to establish the claims which he has made for it. Were this demand for absolute proof made more insistently by audiences the doubt surrounding many questions before the public these days would be largely dispelled. To establish the truth of a statement or proposition so thoroughly that it gains complete acceptance, is the third end of speech.

But important as the ends which have been discussed are—securing clearness, producing feeling, and obtaining acceptance of a truth—the really vital matter in life is action. Without action all other things are

lost. Of what value is it to know, or to feel, or to be convinced if these do not translate themselves into the right kind of action? So, both in private and in public speech much as the other ends may be used, they have a direct bearing upon our actions.

Now, if the action is to be of the right sort, it is clear that intelligence must precede; and not alone is intelligence sufficient to bring about action: there must be the belief that this action is to be preferred to another. A knowledge of the facts connected with a situation, and a conviction of the right course to follow are frequently sufficient to produce the action desired.

But it is at this point that another consideration enters. The mistake of thinking that intelligence and conviction are always sufficient to secure action has often been made. If one will only consult his own daily life for a moment he will see that the statement just made is true. Has it not been true often that one has said, "I know I ought to do this thing, but I do not feel like it," or "I know I ought not to do this,

but I want to do it (I feel like doing it)" and so it is done?

Therefore, because of this trait in people of doing what they feel like doing, the public speaker needs to remember that knowledge and conviction frequently do not bring the action desired. In such instances the speaker must proceed to arouse the feelings before he can hope to secure action. The careful observer has seen those occasions, too, where an overflow of feeling has broken down all the restraining power of both knowledge and conviction and action is swept into, with the results of the action encountered before the person has realized what has been done.

So, in the case of the speaker and the initiative and the referendum; the audience may have a very clear understanding of what they are, and be convinced that they will do what is claimed for them, and yet withhold their support, simply because they are indifferent to the needs of the situation. They must be made to feel the situation before they will act.

On the other hand, there are many who

understand so thoroughly the relation of feeling to action that they secure the action desired purely through the appeal to the emotions, making no effort to set forth clearly the idea and prove its worth. As far as one's own thinking and action are concerned, he needs to hold the feelings in check and demand accurate, authoritative facts, and a logical proof of principles before allowing himself to take a new stand. Feeling based upon accurate information and thorough, controlled and logical thinking is safe; feeling not so based, is decidedly unsafe for both the individual and society.

These are, then, the purposes, or as others have called them, the ends of speech:

To make an idea clear.

To arouse feeling.

To convince.

To secure action.

EXERCISES.

These exercises are provided as a means of testing the students' knowledge of the subject and for training through actual practice. Exercises are not to be sent back to the School.

1. Consider the following subjects carefully and decide which of the four ends each suggests. How many of them give no clue to the purpose for which the speech on that subject was made? Secure the speeches if possible and ascertain whether the speech develops a single purpose or follows a mixture of purposes.

"The Majority and the Remnant," Matthew Arnold.

"Clear Grit," Robert Collyer.

"The American Scholar," Ralph Waldo Emerson.

"Work," John Ruskin.

"Salt," Henry Van Dyke.

"The Uses of the Imagination," George G. Goschen.

"To the Young Men of Italy," Guiseppe Mazzini.

"Ireland Worth Dying For," Daniel O'Connell.

"Against Licensing Gin Shops," Lord Chesterfield.

2. Take those topics which do not clearly show a purpose, and re-phrase them, making a new topic for each one of the four ends. Take care that each topic shows clearly the purpose or end.

3. Study the illustration below, and then proceed to work out new topics for the four purposes, using each one of the subjects listed.

Illustration:

America—the general topic.

First Purpose, To Make Clear:

America Possesses a Republican Form of Government.

Second Purpose, To Arouse Feeling:

The Deeds of American Heroes Stir the Heart.

Third Purpose, To Convince:

America is a Really Great Nation.

Fourth Purpose, To Secure Action:

Serve Your Country in Peace as well as in War.

Patriotism.
Brotherhood.
Farming.
Great Cities.
Heroism.

4. Make a three minute speech upon each of the four topics given in the illustration under Exercise "3."

5. Each time you read the newspaper study the topics of the editorials and other articles in order to determine how many of them clearly suggest the purpose or end of the article, and what that end is.

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