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Lesson No. 10, The Speech as Affected by the Occasion

R. E. Pattinson Kline

H. C. Fox

EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SPEAKING

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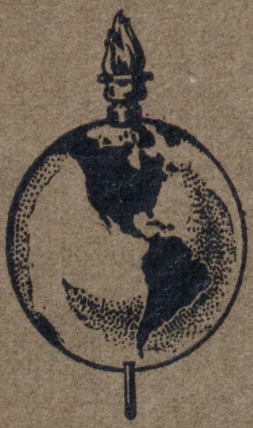

NORTH AMERICAN INSTITUTE
CHICAGO

THE SPEECH AS AFFECTED BY THE OCCASION

LESSON No. 10

One of a Series of Lessons in

EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SPEAKING

By

R. E. PATTISON KLINE

Dean Public Speaking Department,
Columbia College of Expression, Chicago

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THE SPEECH AS AFFECTED BY THE OCCASION

There have been considered those limitations laid upon the speaker that come by reason of the nature of the audience. The character of an address is also conditioned by the occasion upon which it is to be delivered and the time provided for it. A little thought will show that each of these considerations is very important, making it necessary for the speaker to give adequate attention to the manner in which the speech will be thus affected.

There will be discussed, first, the question of the time allotted. There was once a gentleman who determined to write a history of Massachusetts. He began with the creation of the world, and after writing a number of years he died. His heirs discovered that he had reached in his history the Norman Conquest in 1066. Now,

there is no question but that the history of Massachusetts can be traced to the very beginning of the human race, but there will be very few who will wish to reach that far back in an ordinary treatise.

There are many to-day who make a mistake of the same kind, although they do not make it in the same extreme degree. Observation of modern speakers will reveal the fact that there is not enough consideration given to the fitting of a speech to the time allowed the speaker.

Time was when the clergyman thought nothing of occupying two and three hours with his sermon. To-day there is a growing belief that a sermon should seldom occupy more than a half hour. In the lyceum field of public speech speakers are more and more limiting the length of their addresses to an hour and a quarter. This indicates that many believe what has been laid down as a rule by some, that the really vital material which a speaker possesses can be given, as far as a particular subject is concerned, within from a half hour to an hour and a half at the outmost.

There is another reason for the limitation of the time, which is found in the fact that not many people can listen intently and retentively for more than an hour to an hour and a half. However, there is still another point that bears on the matter: It is wiser to send an audience away desiring more than to send them away wishing the speaker had ceased much sooner than he did.

It is important therefore that careful consideration be given to determining just how much and what material can be said in the time set aside. As far as the amount is concerned that may be fairly readily settled. Some men speak far more rapidly than others, but it may be put down as a fairly good rule to follow, that one can speak effectively about one hundred and fifty words a minute. This number will vary according to special conditions.

It is not so easy, though, to fix upon what shall be said in the given time. The main question that has to be decided in this instance is, the amount of time that is to be given to the various parts or divisions of

the speech. There are three main divisions as a rule, the introduction, the discussion and the closing. The proportion of time to be allowed each division is not to be arbitrarily decided, much less is it to be a matter of chance.

A little thought upon the matter will show that the purpose of the speech, the occasion, and the expectancy of the audience will have much to do with determining just how much time shall be given to each division. The nature of the audience will occasionally be a determining factor.

It may be stated as a general principle, that those ideas which are of the greater importance are to be given the greater attention. Now as the occasion, or the purpose, or the nature or expectancy of an audience changes, the points of greater importance—those ideas which are to be made emphatic, in other words—change. Suppose a representative of a college is making addresses in a series of towns endeavoring to secure the support of the people for the college. In one city he asks for money, and this demand for money will

make it necessary for him to give greater attention to one group of ideas. On another occasion he is making a plea for students, and this time the greater time and emphasis will be placed upon an entirely different group of ideas. At still another time he is attempting to show the rank of the college among educational institutions, so a very different set of ideas will need to make up the main body of the address.

But let us carry this one step farther. Suppose this representative had a general speech in which he dwelt upon the general characteristics of the college. It will still be necessary for him to vary the points of emphasis. In one community the men and women who have sons and daughters to send to college will wish to know concerning the moral character of the faculty and the student body. In another city, the parents will wish to know rather, what the equipment of the institution is, and others, what the scholarship of the faculty, and yet again there would be those in some places who would wish particularly to know what the graduates of this college

were doing in the world, and whether they were in demand. All these matters upon which an audience might demand special information will determine the amount of space to be devoted to various divisions of thought. This very simple illustration will make clear the general principle in this direction.

Consider this same matter of proportion from the angle of the nature of the audience. Suppose a speaker is delivering a number of addresses upon Socialism, one in each city. It would be unwise to have a set speech which he would give in each place, considering that he is to make a speech of an hour in length in each place. A set speech would not permit him to shift the point or points of emphasis. In one place the audience might be very uninformed concerning the nature and purpose of Socialism. In another, they might have some ideas of what this economic theory is but their ideas might be very incorrect, and because of this fact, there might be much prejudice present in the audience. On another occasion, the audience might be well

informed upon the theory of Socialism, but question its practicability. It will be readily seen that a set speech would often make it difficult for a speaker to meet the special need in each city. Therefore, if the speaker is wise he will so plan and prepare his speech, that after making inquiries concerning the nature of his audience, he can satisfy their special need.

Consider further how the occasion affects the proportion of the parts of a speech. Let us say that one has fixed upon the following topic: "The Place of Woman in Our Present Civilization." If this topic were to be assigned as a toast at a banquet, one group of ideas would become the prominent divisions of thought. If the same subject were the topic in a memorial service, held in memory of some noted woman, who had greatly influenced her time, the greater space would be given to an entirely different set of thoughts. If the occasion were a national gathering of women, still another group of ideas would become those of uppermost importance.

In closing this phase of the question, let

the concluding advice be: Too careful consideration cannot be given to the proper proportioning of the divisions of a speech. The same subject may have to be discussed on different occasions with less or more time allotted. It will be necessary, then, as the time varies, more carefully to determine just how much time shall be given to each phase of the thought.

A special word needs to be said regarding the introduction. Care will have to be taken that it does not occupy too much space. Let there be no more introductory matter than is actually necessary. Whenever the nature of the subject, or the nature of the occasion, or the character of the audience makes an introduction imperative, then let there be thorough study of just what shall be said and what shall not be said. A skillful introduction, paving the way for the discussion proper, may do very much to increase the efficiency of the speech. A bungling introduction has more times than imagined, weakened an appeal.

See to it, also, that sufficient time is saved for the closing of the speech. Leave no

ragged edge. Whether it be a summary, the restatement of the general principle under discussion, the enforcement of a conclusion, or an appeal to the sentiments that is needed, let it be used. Be sure that in the conclusion you do not make the speech over again.

The Demands of the Occasion.

The demand made upon a speaker by the character of an occasion upon which the speech is made must be very thoughtfully considered. It has been the experience of all of us in private relations—and sometimes it has been a bitter experience—that we have said the unwise, tactless, even senseless, and occasionally the tragic thing. To be able to say the right thing at the right moment marks one as an exceedingly wise and accomplished and artful conversationalist. No less can be said of public speaking. One can afford no more to say the unwise, tactless, unfitting remark in public than he can afford to do so in private. The truth of the matter is, he can

less afford to fail to recognize the needs of the public occasion.

There have been times when the utterance of an unwise statement has not only destroyed the value of a speech, but has also blasted a career. It is true in many instances that it may be of little consequence whether one has taken this point into account or not, but there are occasions and topics of such nature that some things may be said, some things must be said, and some things must not be said.

In planning the scale of treatment of a given subject, what may, may not and must be said will have to be determined in the way that will permit of bringing the matter within the time allotted for the speech. This process will be greatly simplified if one will first fix upon those matters which are to be eliminated from the discussion. To determine what must be said will, then, prove more easy of selection. Having selected that which must be said, and eliminated what is not to be said, one is at liberty to add, if the time permits, such other ideas as he deems of real value.

Consider, for a moment, the elements which make the occasion. There is the purpose of the occasion; the event or occurrence, or reason for the call of the occasion; the person or persons who issued the call for the meeting; the number and the character of the people in the audience. While all of these elements may not influence the choice of material for a speech in every instance, on the other hand there will be many times when all will have to be considered. The purpose which made necessary a special meeting will undoubtedly affect the type of the material used more than the purpose which demands regular meetings at stated intervals. When the purpose or plan for a meeting has not been agreed upon previous to the assembling of the audience, the choice of matter may not be easy to make, and at times may not be made at all until the discussion has been opened. The nature of the event which caused the meeting must be thought of with care. The extent to which the event is to color the address and the exact color which it is to give are not considerations that

may be passed over lightly at all times. The mood of the audience will have to be weighed in respect to its effect upon the nature of the material that is to be set before them.

A thoughtful reading of many speeches will reveal the fact that many speakers take pains to state in the introduction their recognition of the obligations which the occasion lays upon them.

Special caution needs to be observed by a speaker when he is compelled to address an audience that is much wrought up over some issue. Then it is that the feelings rather than the reason are in control; prejudices are often rampant; a spirit of riot may be ready to break out and the air is tense with expectation. It is at such a time as this that the speaker is put to the severest test. Self-control, clear-headedness, charity and good judgment alone can carry the hour for him. There are many who have "lost their heads" on occasions far less difficult to meet than the one suggested. Continual discipline for self-con-

trol is the only method that will prepare one for the unusual occasion.

Below are enumerated some of the special occasions which would make it necsary for a speaker to consider the particular obligations which the subject might lay upon him.

The Eulogy.

The Commemorative Address.

Dedications.

The Funeral Address.

The Speech of Welcome.

An Inaugural Address.

A Farewell Address.

The Academic Address.

The Address on a Social Question.

The Address on a Political Occasion.

A Legislative Address.

The Address for a Cause.

The After Dinner Speech.

The Address at the Laying of a Cornerstone.

A Speech of Presentation.

A Speech of Acceptance.

Response in Accepting an Honor.

The Speech of an Official Representative.

The Speech of a Political Representative.

EXERCISES.

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

Set down the main ideas which ought to be used in speeches fitted to the following occasions. Opposite to these place the main ideas that ought to be left out.

1. A memorial address delivered at a service in memory of a general slain in battle.

2. A speech delivered at a meeting of appreciation of the services of a Chief of Police who has been murdered while trying to arrest the inmates of a blind tiger.

3. A speech protesting the election of a candidate for the presidency of an important public organization.

4. An appeal against Child Labor, the audience being made up in part of those who use child labor.

5. An appeal for Americanism during war times.

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proved by his speech."

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