

SELECT ORATIONS

ILLUSTRATING AMERICAN POLITICAL HISTORY

SELECTED AND EDITED BY

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THE STORY OF THE MIDDLE AGES; ESSENTIALS IN MEDIÆVAL AND
MODERN HISTORY, ETC.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION ON ORATORICAL STYLE
AND STRUCTURE, AND NOTES, BY

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New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1923

PREFACE

A GREAT part of a people's history, where self-government prevails, may be found in the speeches of its public men. Such utterances are at once an index to the mental caliber of its electors and representatives, a measure of prevalent prejudices and predilections, and a synopsis of its political history. Pericles's oration over the first dead of the Peloponnesian war, and Demosthenes's orations against Philip of Macedon, have long been recognized as important documents in the study of Greek history. Cicero's orations against Verres and on the Catilinian conspiracy aid much to an understanding of the last period of the Roman republic. And it is a commonplace to say that the framework at least of a knowledge of modern English history must be sought in the speeches delivered in Parliament and in public meetings. In our own country, where government proceeds so largely in the open, this is especially true. Government here is the concern of the people themselves, and on all questions of public policy they must be consulted and informed. Public speeches with us, while not the sole means, are an important means to the formation and expression of what Sir Robert Peel once somewhat cynically called "that great compound of folly, weakness, prejudice, wrong feeling, right feeling, obstinacy, and newspaper paragraphs, which is called public opinion." And the record of a people's varying public opinion in political matters, it may be asserted, gives the essence of its political history. "He who moulds public sentiment," said Lincoln in his first debate

with Douglas, "goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions. He makes statutes and decisions possible or impossible to be executed."

The chief justification for the present volume of selections is the lack hitherto of any adequate collection of American political orations which comes within the compass of a single volume, and hence is usable for schools, clubs, and teachers' institutes. The preparation of the book was first proposed to the author by Mr. David W. Sanders, of Covington, Ind., whose acquaintance among teachers showed him the opening for it; and the assistance which the author has received from Mr. Sanders as the work has progressed, in determining the general plan and scope of the book, he wishes to acknowledge in the fullest manner.

The purpose of the selections, it must be understood, is primarily historical: they are designed to illustrate the political history and development of the United States. In every instance the tests applied in determining the inclusion or exclusion of a speech were these: Did it exert important influence on political action or political opinion at the time it was delivered? And will it, better than other speeches of the period, enable us to penetrate back into the spirit of the time?

Nevertheless, considerations of oratorical excellence were by no means disregarded, and it is believed that examples of the best public speaking of every epoch of our history will here be found, and in sufficient variety. With the aid of the Introduction, and the notes on the oratory of the several selections which are given at the back of the book, it is hoped that some place may also be found for the volume in classes in public speaking and the literary study of the oration.

It is perhaps needless to say that the choice of the orations has been made without regard to the editor's personal opinion as to which party or which position on any given question

was right. One of the benefits which it is hoped may come from the reading of the selections is a growth in that wide tolerance of mind which sees that at no time does any one party have a monopoly of political truth, and that wise political action can come only from weighing all the arguments in view of all the circumstances of a given case.

The wealth of material from which to select, and the reduction to the compass of a half-hour's reading of speeches which in some cases took several days to deliver, have been the chief difficulties of the task. It is hoped that a sufficiently large and representative list of names is presented, though it is inevitable that the omission of some notable orators and orations will be lamented.

The attempt has been made to confine the annotations to the narrowest limits possible, consistent with the aim of intelligibility. Where practicable, the information needed has been given in the historical introductions prefixed to the different sections and to the separate orations.

In conclusion the editor wishes publicly to express his appreciation of the kindness shown by his friend, Professor Clapp, in drawing upon his long experience in the teaching of English and public speaking to produce the introduction on "Oratorical Style and Structure," and the notes on the several orations, which form parts of this volume.

S. B. H.

BLOOMINGTON, IND., July 28, 1909.

Oratorical Style and Structure

As Professor Harding has said in his Preface, the purpose of this book is to furnish the student of American history a series of contemporary discussions of what time has proved to be the principal questions of the day in our national life. The interest of the collection lies in the fact that these are not mere records of contemporary opinion, such as one might find in old diaries or private letters, or in the news columns of periodicals. These publicly uttered opinions of the most influential men of the time were themselves most important forces in making history. If we read them appreciatively we may not only know what our ancestors thought, but we may feel the influences which led them to act as they did.

To understand these speeches, of course, we must first of all understand the circumstances of their delivery. We must try to realize the attitude of contemporary listeners, to whom the future—what to us is now the past—was dark and uncertain, and who were swayed by impulses and traditions, prejudices and enthusiasms, which for us of to-day no longer exist. Professor Harding's introductory sketches, sympathetic and admirably compact, should be studied carefully in connection with every speech. Since, moreover, these compositions are speeches, not essays—shaped primarily for the ear, not for the eye—they have characteristics of form, matters of style and of structure, which we can recognize, and which will affect us, if we will allow for them, somewhat at least as they affected contemporaries.

We may notice first the minuter points, the style. Discourse addressed to the ear must make an immediate impression. It must be, therefore, easily intelligible, vigorous, and smooth and easy in connection of ideas. These requirements give to spoken language certain peculiarities which may be called essential, which appear in all sorts of talk, whatever the worth of the ideas expressed. They are found in the harangues of the street fakir, in the rant of the "spellbinder," and no less in lectures, sermons, in such orations as those in this book, and, with some differences, in the language of the stage.

The effort for clearness in spoken language produces usually plainness and simplicity in the choice of words, and directness in their arrangement. The words need not be short—the words of conversation are not always short—but they must not sound unusual or learned. Unusual, learned, technical words may occur here and there, but they can not be frequent. The phrases, particularly, the groups of words which strike the ear as units, must be simple. Consider the following examples, from the speeches in this book:

"Will any man who entertains a wish for the safety of his country, trust the sword and the purse with a single assembly organized on principles so defective—so rotten? Though we might give to such a government certain powers with safety, yet to give them the full and unlimited powers of taxation and the national forces would be to establish a despotism; the definition of which is, a government in which all power is concentrated in a single body." (Alexander Hamilton; p. 107.)

"Of all men upon earth I am the least attached to any productions of my own mind. No man upon earth is more ready to surrender anything which I have proposed, and to accept in lieu of it anything that is better; but I put it to the candor of honorable Senators on the other side and upon

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all sides of the House, whether their duty will be performed by simply limiting themselves to objections to any or to all of the series of resolutions that I have offered. If my plan of peace, and accommodation, and harmony, is not right, present us your plan." (Henry Clay; p. 287.)

"To my mind it is either the most ignorant and shallow mistake of his duties, or the most brazen and impudent usurpation of power. It is claimed for him by some as the commander-in-chief of the army and navy. How absurd that a mere executive officer should claim creative powers! Though commander-in-chief by the Constitution, he would have nothing to command, either by land or water, until Congress raised both army and navy." (Thaddeus Stevens; p. 438.)

Widely as these extracts differ in idea, in spirit, and in the date of their utterance, in all of them the words are familiar, and are combined into easily grasped units of phrase, which have the directness, the idiomatic quality, of common conversation. This directness, which is perhaps the most characteristic feature of spoken language, differentiating it most surely from the language of writing, shows also in the sentence structure. The words follow, more closely than in writing, the normal order—subject, verb, object. The sentence as a whole may show inversion, may have what is called the periodic structure, but the clauses, one by one, are simple and light. Most of the sentences, it may be added, in most speeches, are short. This structure of phrase and sentence gives the style a quality which may be described as progressive completeness. The thought is built up in the listener's mind bit by bit, each item being clear and clearly connected with what precedes.

This quality involves, of course, the corresponding defect of diffuseness. Talk has rarely the terseness of writing. Exactness, precision of phrase, which good talk must have as well as good writing, cannot in talk be gained briefly; the phrase of precise definition must be set in a background

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of repetition and illustration. The speaker must pass smoothly from one idea to another. The writer may really go further in a few bold leaps, by omitting transitions, and trusting to the reader's reflection to see the relations of the thought; the speaker must travel all the road.

But he travels it, generally, on the run. The plainness, the directness, the diffuseness of speech are not more characteristic than its eagerness, its swift, vigorous movement of thought. This comes from the excitement which the speaker always feels, which impels him to speak—an excitement, of course, which may or may not be worthy. As compared with writing, most talk—connected talk—has more will in it. The speaker is not content with telling you what his ideas are; he is bent on driving them in, making you agree with him and do as he wishes. And this eagerness gives not only energy, but a charm which is quite different from the more subtle charm of the quieter written language.

Besides these essential qualities of spoken language, which are present in all talk, whether otherwise good or bad, there are two others which are almost always present, and which aid alike its intelligibility, its strength, and its attractiveness. One of these is vividness, picturesqueness. The eagerness of speech leads generally to a vivid concreteness; the words are full of pictures. The use of the concrete term, where writing might prefer the more general or the more abstract, may be seen in any of the orations in this book. The effort for picturesqueness leads also to a large use of figurative language, particularly of metaphor and personification; sometimes, though less often, of extended similes and apostrophes. It should be noted, however, that picturesqueness is not essential in spoken language. It may easily be overdone. It is most used in ornamental or vehement passages, where the speaker gives the rein to his fancy or to his emotions; and such passages, of course, are in most talk not

the substance, but the exception. On serious occasions, undue vividness of language may hinder real impressiveness. The speeches of Henry, Randolph, Phillips, Sumner, and Stevens, in this book, are undoubtedly weakened in this way.

Finally, spoken language has usually a decided musical quality, a smooth, flowing sound. We find this, in some sense, in nearly all speeches, whether good or bad, affected or earnest, shallow or profound. It appears in the declamations of dramatic poetry, in the wonderful sermons of Jeremy Taylor and Cardinal Newman, in the stately periods of Cicero and Burke, in the crisp rattle of Wendell Phillips or Macaulay, as well as in the glib flow of the street exhorter. In this book we find it in Lincoln, Calhoun, Jefferson Davis, no less truly than in Henry, Pinkney, Webster, and Grady. In our own day we find it alike in the utterances of President Eliot and of Mr. Bryan. The words seem to slide easily from the speaker's lips, and they fall agreeably upon the listener's ear; it is easy to listen to them, and easy also to read them. To read a printed oration, indeed, without allowing for this musical quality, is usually, though not always, to miss a large part of its power upon the listener's attention and upon his agreeable recollection. Fortunately, good speeches generally force some realization of this rhythmical quality upon the interested reader. The directness and eagerness of the style usually rouse in him sufficient excitement to catch the pulse of the rhythm; he may not utter the words aloud as his eyes follow the printed lines, but he half-hears them, nevertheless. The student, however, who is examining orations more coolly, who is on his guard, indeed, against the very excitement which is the legitimate result of the speech, is in danger of missing this quality of most spoken language, and thus of wrongly estimating, rating too low or too high, these works which were planned for the ear of the listener.

musical quality

✓ As to the style, then, we may say that all spoken language has these qualities of plainness, directness, diffuseness, and eagerness; usually it has also vividness and musical flow.

But there are many kinds of speeches, and each has peculiarities of its own. When we try to criticise the kinds represented in this book, we are at once involved in questions of structure. If we limit ourselves to connected formal discourse, and if we disregard also special forms, such as the technical lecture and the sermon, which are not here represented, we shall find useful the classification, still generally accepted, of Aristotle.

Aristotle recognized three distinct kinds of speeches, differing primarily according to the attitude of the listeners.

One variety—we may mention it here first, though Aristotle names it last—is what is now called the demonstrative or commemorative oration, the speech for a public occasion, such as an anniversary or a dinner, when there is no action contemplated, but when it seems proper for some one to “say something.” In such speeches the listeners are not vitally concerned, but are merely more or less interested spectators. Two of the speeches in this collection are clearly demonstrative orations; Jefferson Davis’s farewell to the United States Senate, and Wendell Phillips’s address at the funeral of Garrison. Lincoln’s address at Gettysburg and Grady’s at New York are not, I think, on the whole to be classed as demonstrative orations.

✓ (b) Another kind of speech, of marked characteristics, is the judicial or forensic oration, the argument in a court of law as to a matter of fact, as to whether a certain action is in accordance with the provisions of the law. Here the listeners—the judge, that is, or the members of the jury—are concerned, but not personally. Their attitude is, or should be, cool and dispassionate. The speech consists of a chain of exactly detailed evidence, all bearing upon one proposi-

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tion, namely, that the action in question does, or does not, correspond with the specific provisions of the law. In this collection there are three forensic orations: the arguments of Otis and Adams in colonial times, and the plea of Judge Curtis in defense of President Johnson. Portions, moreover, of the speeches of Pinkney and Webster show markedly the forensic manner.

The other speeches of this book, twenty-seven in all (if we omit Washington's farewell address and Johnson's message, which are rather essays, open letters, than speeches), are what Aristotle calls deliberative orations—of the class which he places first, and considers most important of the three kinds of speeches. Deliberative orations are addresses before popular audiences upon matters of public policy—discussions as to which course of action, among a number of possible courses, is best for the community—whether a nation, a city, or (for that matter) a club or society—to take. Here the listeners are very closely concerned. Whether as citizens in a political meeting, or as representatives in a legislative body, their own interests will be affected more or less deeply by every act of proposed legislation. They will wish the speeches discussing such action to be definite and comprehensive, sensible and fair. They will wish them to be simple, also, and easy to follow. They do not want mere logic. Not only are they unable to be cool and dispassionate, as is the judge in a court of law, but they are aware of the inadequacy of logic in matters of conduct, and they dis-trust elaborately involved reasoning. Now, the twenty-seven speeches in this book which I have called deliberative orations are very similar in their nature and form. In the fifteen delivered in legislative assemblies; in the five addresses at political meetings (by Douglas, Lincoln, Seward, Stephens and Beecher); in the five official enunciations of governmental policy (the declaration of the colonies in 1775,

Jefferson's inaugural in 1801, Lincoln's two inaugurals and Gettysburg address); and no less in Grady's speech at the New England dinner and Booker Washington's at the Atlanta Exposition—always we find that the speaker is trying to shape public policy upon a matter of great practical importance. Some of these speeches partake also of the nature of demonstrative orations, or of forensic orations, but, whatever their individual peculiarities, they all belong to what Trollope has characterized as "that continuous process of lucid explanation which we now call debate." They have on the whole the qualities of debate—directness and simplicity of presentation, avoidance not only of rant, but of ornament of all kinds, and (in most of them) a remarkable moderation of statement. That is the note of the debate, as opposed to the harangue; the speaker recognizes that among the hearers, or possible hearers, may be antagonists, *opponents* who may challenge incorrectness, and he warily avoids provocation.

The directness of presentation, both in details and in arrangement of matter, is very striking. In addition to the passages already quoted, consider the following:

✓ "The people then, sir, erected this government. They gave it a Constitution; and in that Constitution they have enumerated the powers which they bestow upon it. They have made it a limited government. They have defined its authority. They have restrained it to the exercise of such powers as are granted; and all others, they declare, are reserved to the States, or the people. But, sir, they have not stopped here. If they had, they would have accomplished but half their work. No definition can be so clear as to avoid possibility of doubt; no limitation so precise as to exclude all uncertainty. Who, then, shall construe this grant of the people? Who shall interpret their will, where it may be supposed they have left it doubtful? With whom do they repose this ultimate right of deciding on the powers of the

government? Sir, they have settled all this in the fullest manner. They have left it with the government itself, in its appropriate branches." (P. 233.) P

This sounds as direct as part of a discussion in a city council. It is more clear, more terse and vigorous in phrasing, perhaps, than most such talk, but it is not more showy, and it is just as business-like. Yet this is from what is universally regarded as the greatest of American orations, Webster's Reply to Hayne. And the greater part of that oration, which, if given in full, would fill some ninety pages of this book, is equally plain.

Most of these speeches, it may be remarked, were delivered extempore, though by no means impromptu. The general line of reasoning was pretty carefully planned in advance, but the language—of most of the speech, at least—and the detail treatment, were prompted by the occasion. In a few of them, of course—Sumner's, Seward's, the three inaugurals, and the Gettysburg speech—the language is evidently carefully prepared. In those of Pinkney, Schurz, Grady, the language may have been prepared in advance, but the fact does not show. ✓

The argumentative structure, moreover, in nearly all these deliberative orations, whether short or long, is simple, though orderly and logical. There is very little intricate reasoning. Hamilton's address on the Federal Constitution falls easily into three steps: (1) Our troubles came from the defects of the confederation; (2) objections to the plan presented in the Constitution are not valid; (3) if we reject this plan we may never have so good a plan. Pinkney's, on the Missouri question, falls into two parts: (1) A brief repudiation of the notion that the Union is in danger; (2) an examination, one by one, of the clauses of the Constitution on which the opposition have based their case. The speeches of

Webster, Clay, and Curtis, long and detailed as they are, are far from intricate in their reasoning.

These American deliberative orations, in fact, seem even more simple, in both phrasing and arrangement, than the deliberative orations of most other times and countries, with the exception of the England of Brougham, Cobden, and Bright. The reason is, perhaps, that the English and the American public men were alike addressing a responsible audience; not a crowd, swayed by impulse, but a body of persons who had not only power, but the prudence and practical sense bred of experience in self-government. This audience, in both England and America, was no less than the entire body of citizens. That explains the similarity of style between the speeches of this collection delivered before legislatures, and those delivered elsewhere. The audience addressed was the same, ultimately, in all cases. Pinkney, Webster, and Schurz, just as truly as Lincoln, Stephens, and Beecher, were addressing not only the comparative few within sound of their voices, but the hundreds of thousands who would read their speeches in the newspapers. Regard for this larger audience led, no doubt, to an extra degree of simplicity, and of caution as well. The speaker, whether in Congress or on the public platform, must make himself understood, not only by his listeners, but by his readers. He must, moreover, not only avoid the criticism of those who could rise at once to challenge his statements, but he must satisfy the judgment of the multitude of readers, who could weigh his speech, compare it with those of his opponents, and discover incorrectness of fact and weakness or fallacy of argument.

The simplicity of these orations can hardly be too strongly emphasized. These were no declamations, designed to exhibit a sonorous voice, or graceful gestures, or a majestic "stage presence." The speakers were not trying to

astonish their audience or to be admired for their elocution. They were busy men, trying to get their hearers to think as they did about some matter of importance, and then to take a certain course of action. That they were men of exceptional personal dignity, that constant practice in public discussion had given them exceptional distinctness and grace of utterance, are incidental matters. Unfortunately, in too many so-called classes in oratory the attention of student and teacher has been directed mainly toward these incidentals. These serious discussions of important matters, the greater part of which is simple talk, uttered earnestly but quietly, have been made ridiculous by being regarded as vocal fireworks. To a large proportion of Americans of to-day, I fear, American political orations of the past are represented mainly by Patrick Henry's "liberty or death" and the peroration of Webster's reply to Hayne, which have been recited, with appropriate "gestures," by generations of schoolboys who have had but faint notion of their meaning—who regard them, indeed, much as they regard "Spartacus to the Gladiators." I once knew a college freshman, a prize-winner at declamation contests, who contrived for himself a contest oration by piecing together the peroration of the seventh of March speech and the peroration of the reply to Hayne. Neither passage, alone, was quite long enough, he said, but the two together made a pretty fine speech! It would be well if all schoolboys could know that Henry's speech was almost as exceptional then as it would be to-day, and that the version of it which we have was written by his biographers; that Webster had been worked up to that tremendous outburst of vehement fancy by several hours of intense and serious thinking aloud before an audience that was almost as interested and almost as capable of severe thought as himself.

The moderation of these speeches is almost as notable as

their simplicity. The great men, on the great occasions, talked on the whole moderately, in spite of their strong feeling. Perhaps the most striking example is Henry Clay's great speech of 1850,—in one of the omitted passages of which, by the way, he rebukes the large and fashionable audience of the second day, telling them sharply that the occasion is too momentous to be treated as a show. This long speech, which would fill, altogether, eighty pages of this book, dealt with a subject on which he felt passionately, and, like nearly all the longer speeches of this collection, it is manifestly extempore in form. Yet it is not more remarkable for the intense feeling with which he appeals to one side after another, to be considerate and fair, than for the tact and moderation with which he handles his vast and complicated subject. Lincoln's answer to Douglas, at Ottawa—indeed, all the speeches from Lincoln in this book—will show the same quality in high degree. Beecher at Liverpool, Schurz on the amnesty bill, Booker Washington at Atlanta, furnish other examples of the instinctive moderation of the good deliberative oration, in which the speaker wisely refrains from weakening his case by over-statement.

This quality of these deliberative orations may be realized better by comparing them with the productions of such a man as Wendell Phillips, whose work was that of an agitator, who could stir interest in public questions, but who could give little practical help toward their settlement. Even in his case, it may be remarked, the manner of utterance was quiet enough; George William Curtis says that his delivery was merely that of "a gentleman conversing." But the language, the arrangement, the ideas, showed neither simplicity nor moderation; it was a torrent of epigram, antithesis, metaphor, poured from an extraordinarily active mind, and as inaccurate as it was striking. Phillips did not make good deliberative orations; he stirred, but he did not

convince. It is significant to run over the list of speakers in this collection who show most of Phillips's vividness and vehemence—Henry, Randolph, Sumner, Douglas, Seward, Stevens—and consider how doubtful was their contribution to the real development of the country. The really good deliberative oration sought not to dazzle as a display, nor to excite the passions of its hearers, but to win the assent of plain-thinking, fair-minded people. ✓

The importance of such deliberative orations, throughout American history, has been very great. For many years they furnished the chief instruction on political subjects of the great mass of men, who studied them privately, or heard them read aloud, in thousands of households and village stores. To a considerable degree they filled the place of the newspaper editorials of to-day, and of the magazine articles on political and economic topics as well. A large number of them, of course, were not good, were lacking in the qualities which gave those here printed their pre-eminence. But this book by no means contains all the good speeches of this sort. Others might be given, nearly if not quite as meritorious and as influential, from Ames, Webster, Calhoun, Clay, Sumner, Lincoln, Stephens, Schurz, as well as from several men not here represented. In estimating them the reader of to-day must remember that we cannot judge altogether by their immediate effect upon their hearers, as we can with forensic orations. In a court of law, a man convinces judge or jury that a certain thing is the fact, and the verdict is immediate. These deliberative orations of nineteenth century America, however, dealing with principles of public policy, rarely changed the votes of the hearers, nor did the speaker, probably, expect such immediate result. The speech was addressed to the mind of the public. The immediate vote of the Senate, as in the case of Schurz and the amnesty bill, or of the people of a State, as with

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