

**ORATIONS DELIVERED AT
MINNESOTA INTERCOLLEGIATE
ORATORICAL CONTESTS 1881-
1886**

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Orations Delivered at Minnesota Intercollegiate Oratorical Contests 1881-1886 by Various

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VARIOUS

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MINNESOTA INTERCOLLEGIATE
ORATORICAL CONTESTS 1881-
1886**

ORATIONS

DELIVERED AT

By Minnesota Inter-Collegiate

Oratorical Contests

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ORATIONS

DELIVERED AT

Minnesota State Oratorical Contest,

1881-1886.

The First Inter-Collegiate Oratorical Contest
was held in Northfield Minnesota,

April 29th 1881.

PROGRESS, ITS SOURCES AND ITS LAWS.

OWEN MORRIS, —, *Coleton College.*

[Awarded First Place.]

From the very beginning of human society, two of its most important forces, Radicalism and Conservatism, have waged a bitter warfare. Social and moral advancement only furnishes them new questions for debate and new battle-fields on which to fight. Time, so far from assuaging the conflict, seems rather to aggravate it. Like the ceaseless heaving of the ocean, it is now subdued and scarcely discernible, and anon vehement and irrepressible, agitating the social mass to the very centre.

Conservatism is peculiarly sensitive to the influence of

antiquity, clings tenderly to the past, and sighs for the purity of the fathers. Dust-covered volumes, recording the valiant deeds of ancestors, compose its library. The chambers of its imagination are adorned with quaint pictures of tournaments. Rusty casques and swords decorate its halls. By its endeavor to control religion, it has made the church a storehouse of abuses and a citadel of tyranny. Occasionally, it may have checked the muddy stream of Error. Far oftener, it has dammed the crystalline river of Truth, and doomed the world for ages to the drouth of gloomy superstition. It chills enthusiasm, dreads the future, and appeals to custom and selfishness, rather than to righteousness and truth. Without self-sacrifice, it yet sacrifices self.

Radicalism, on the other hand, is opposed to everything that is tainted with antiquity, and is impetuous and extravagant in all its actions. It fights against authority, despises custom, and makes the end to sanction the means. To-day, a peacemaker, it condemns carnage and war; to-morrow, a demon, it may overshadow Bartholomew's Day, or beluge another Palestine with the blood of rash fanatics. It is a Madness that would go through oceans of blood merely to satisfy its caprice concerning ideal right. It hurls contempt on principles which have been vindicated before Caesar's judgment-seat and avowed at the stake. The fanatical votary of Quixotic change, it violates shrines by its polluting touch. Disregarding the warnings of experience, it plunges headlong into the terrible whirlpool whose flood but hastens it to certain ruin. Here are the two conflicting forces,—the one as the mountain torrent, rushing into the fruitful valley, scattering destruction on every side; the other, as the stagnant pool, emitting noisome malaria and destroying every form of life. Both, under the control of an all-wise Providence, mysteriously unite to form the majestic and ever-flowing river of Progress.

Philosophers have theorized much concerning progress, but their theories have only enveloped it in greater obscurity. Prejudiced antiquaries, viewing the subject in an unfavorable light, hold that there is no such thing as progress. In support of their views, they cite evidences from exhumed cities, seats of culture and refinement rivaling those which are the pride and glory of modern civilization, and affirm that they have searched the earth in vain for a living Homer or Plato, a modern Daniel or Paul. They see the present plainly, with all its ruggedness and deformity, its harshness and discord; but they have forgotten that time has erased the blots from the face of antiquity, given

it a brilliant color, and subdued its harshest tones into a mellow murmur. Let them use for a season proud Rome's farm implements, as described in the Georgics, and they will return with renewed relish to their patent plows, seeders, and threshing machines. Let them take a pleasure voyage in one of Homer's crooked-beaked galleys which crept timidly along the sea-coast, and they will be proud to embark on the modern soul-inspired steamship. We may not be able to boast of a prophet like Daniel, or an apostle like Paul, yet we can boast that we have outgrown the civilization which tolerated the casting of the one into the lion's den, and the staining of the sword with the other's blood.

Champions of lost arts are behind the times. Their ideas are ghosts which have passed the termination of natural life, and yet, like the mythological Grecian heroes, wander on this side of the impassible river, only because they have been denied the due rites of burial. In the darkest periods of history, amidst disappointment and opposition, turmoil and anarchy, society has never suffered a retrogression. When Truth and Virtue seemed asleep, when Science had laid down her telescope and Philosophy her torch, it was only to arouse from their slumbers refreshed, ready to pursue with renewed vigor their accustomed path, not in a circle toward a lost excellence, but directly onward toward a millennial perfection.

Healthy progress is not the result of accident, but it is governed by immutable law, and moves with steady, even revolution, like the steam engine controlled by its governor. The growth of the short-lived mushroom is rapid and sickly, while that of the giant-limbed oak, which endures for centuries, is by slow degrees. It was not the few hours of struggle at Marathon, at Waterloo, or at Gettysburg that determined the fate of nations. The real arbiter was a public sentiment produced by diligent and long-continued preparation, and reaching its culmination in these sharp and decisive contests. "The first furrow drawn by an English plow in the thin soil of Plymouth was truly the first line in our Declaration of Independence."

During the infancy of the race, physical strength was the greatest power. The highest ambition of the ancient Greek was to be victor at the Olympic Games. His great ideal was a Hercules or a mighty Zeus. The human body, in those early days, was as it were a new garment, and was worn for a long time, sometimes even for many centuries apparently undamaged. Now, it is an old vesture, easily torn, and scarcely lasts "three score years and ten." Yet, through the rents in this mantle of flesh, the great soul within sends