

**THE HIGH SCHOOL
PRIZE SPEAKER**

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The high school prize speaker by William Leonard Snow

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WILLIAM LEONARD SNOW

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EDITED BY

WILLIAM LEONARD SNOW, A.M.

Master in the Brookline (Mass.) High School



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PREFACE

THIS is a collection of literary selections which have taken prizes at the J. Murray Kay Prize-Speaking Contest held annually for the last quarter of a century at the Brookline High School, together with other selections of equal merit which on these occasions have either won honorable mention or been received with especial favor by the audience.

The interest which Mr. Kay took in establishing and maintaining these contests set a high standard of excellence, and no pains were spared by the school to make the selections and their interpretation the best possible. The committee of the faculty which guided the contestants in the choice of suitable pieces insisted first that the selection must be from the work of a good author; for it held that the amount of time spent by teacher and student in preparation for prize-speaking could hardly be justified if the selections themselves possessed little or no literary merit.

The best literature has most fully the latent power to move the hearer, and waits only for the speaker's art to become kinetic. Indeed, this power to grip and hold the audience which is native to our great masterpieces may be felt even when the reading is from the silent page. But prose or poetry which makes no strong appeal to our imagination, convictions, or sympathies, but savors of shallow sentimentalism, is not good literature and fails when put to the test before an audience refined in taste and critical in judgment.

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Moreover, prize-speaking is properly a phase of the work of the English department, and therefore there cannot consistently be one literary standard for the classroom and another for the platform. The community judges a school and its work more or less by its public exhibitions. Unless care be exercised in choosing selections from the best literature, the performance is not likely to be eminently successful, the English department is open to criticism, and the reputation of the school suffers.

The task of finding choice selections which are in themselves suitable for public entertainment is, however, a small part of the work which such exercises impose upon teachers. The success of the performance is not more dependent upon the intrinsic worth of the selections than upon the skillful choice of a piece to fit the peculiar abilities and characteristics of each speaker. A well-varied program is not only desirable for the hearer; it is essential for the participants in the attainment of the greatest individual success. One boy reaches his highest excellence with a plea, an invective, or other oration; another may better choose a dramatic narrative; while a third may be best fitted to interpret a selection where the appeal lies in its pathos or humor. There are girls who are naturally most effective in the child's rôle, while others who have not the childish charm can thrill an audience by their power to depict stirring scenes and spirited action. The selections in this book meet this need of variety. They have proved themselves adapted to those types of temperament and personality which boys and girls of high-school age present.

In the preliminary trials for the J. Murray Kay contests each of the speakers is assigned an adviser from

the committee, and is urged to make his own selection from a number suggested by the adviser or submitted by the student. Never are the pieces arbitrarily chosen for the contestants. For if a selection does not appeal to the student, experience proves that it is not wise to urge it upon him, however excellent in itself it may be. The committee are thereby the better enabled to judge what each can do, to prevent misfits in the final competition, and to secure for the audience an interesting program.

In view of the favor with which these programs through the years have been received by able judges and a critical public, it has seemed worth while to gather within the covers of a single book the prize-winning pieces, together with some others that gave equal pleasure to hearers and won honorable mention from the judges.

To teachers who insist that the work of the Elocution and English departments be well correlated and that they coöperate toward common ends, this book may prove serviceable; for herein are many standard selections that are old but not hackneyed, and also new material worthy to take its place by the side of the familiar.

Teachers in secondary schools often spend long hours in hunting for choice selections suitable for public recital. The number of such is increasing since more and more high schools and academies are having prize-speaking contests as established yearly events. It is hoped that this book may shorten the quest of these teachers, for its contents not only stand the test of literary criticism, as may be seen from a glance at the list of authors, but also are suited to pupils of high-school age, and make a strong appeal to popular

interest and sympathy, covering as they do a wide range of thought and emotion.

We take this opportunity to express our grateful thanks to the authors and publishers who have courteously permitted us to use their publications. Due acknowledgment is made in a footnote in each case, as their copyright selections appear in the book.

WILLIAM LEONARD SNOW.

THE HIGH SCHOOL, BROOKLINE, MASS.

May 16, 1916.

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