

**A DISSERTATION UPON
FUNERAL ORATIONS:
READ AT THE ISLINGTON
LITERARY INSTITUTION**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649236763

A Dissertation Upon Funeral Orations: Read at the Islington Literary Institution by Alfred A. Fry

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

ALFRED A. FRY

**A DISSERTATION UPON
FUNERAL ORATIONS:
READ AT THE ISLINGTON
LITERARY INSTITUTION**

A DISSERTATION
UPON
FUNERAL ORATIONS,

READ AT THE
ISLINGTON LITERARY INSTITUTION,

BY
ALFRED A. FRY, Esq.

OF LINCOLN'S INN.

" La Religion a fait naître parmi nous un autre genre d'Eloquence, qui, considéré seulement sous le rapport du goût, n'est pas moins riche pour le talent, ni moins favorable à ces mouvemens de l'ame qui font le grand Orateur."—M. VILLEMAIN.

" Man was made to mourn."—BURNS.

LONDON :
HENRY HOOPER, PALL MALL, EAST.

1839.

TO
JOHN J. J. SUDLOW, ESQ.
A VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE
ISLINGTON LITERARY INSTITUTION,
AND
ONE OF ITS FOUNDERS,
THIS DISSERTATION
IS
DEDICATED,
WITH EVERY SENTIMENT OF ESTEEM,
BY THE AUTHOR,
ONCE HIS PUPIL, AND NOW
HIS SINCERELY ATTACHED FRIEND.

The Dissertation now printed, was lately read by the Author at the Literary Meeting of the Islington Institution; and the reception there given to it, tempts him to introduce it to the public notice.

In the interesting debate which took place upon it, the object of the author was misunderstood to be a desire to advocate the revival of an old, or the introduction of a new, practice of delivering Funeral Orations. But no such design induced the Dissertation. The author is fully aware of the distinctions which exist between this country and those in which the practice has prevailed. His object really and merely was to point the attention of his hearers (as now of his readers) to an interesting, but little examined, department of Eloquence; historically to deduce, and practically to explain, the origin and effects among men, of the custom of Posthumous Panegyric; and to present specimens of the treasures which exist in this peculiar portion of Literature. He humbly ventures to think the task may be a useful one, as no critical work upon Funeral Eloquence exists in our language. Dr. Campbell, and Dr. Blair, in their respective Treatises on Rhetoric, touch it not. The last-named of these elegant writers, indeed, devotes two chapters of his work to Pulpit Eloquence; but they are confined to judicious instructions for the delivery of Sermons, properly so called.

Chancery Lane,
February, 1839.

A DISSERTATION
UPON
FUNERAL ORATIONS.

AN earnest anxiety for posthumous reputation is natural to man. In the greatest spirits it is an enthusiastic passion, which animates them to the most glorious deeds, and induces them to sacrifice even life itself to indulge it. "For "if," says one in whose breast it reigned with almost sovereign sway, in the most philosophical oration of antiquity,* "the mind had no regard for futurity, and bounded its "thoughts by the same limits within which the space of "life is circumscribed, it would not weary itself with so "many labours, nor vex itself with so many cares and "watchings. But there is implanted in every excellent "man a virtuous principle, which animates his soul day "and night with the excitement of glory, and whispers to "him that the mention of our name will not cease with the "short period of life, but will endure through all after-ages." And in later times, one even greater than he, Lord Bacon, in his splendid work, "The Advancement of Learning,"† (which should be read by every person who wishes to see the highest possible combination of the "universality" of a philosopher, the knowledge of a scholar, and the imagination of a poet,) has observed, that "that whereunto man's

* Cicero pro Archia. "Certe, si nihil animus præsenteiret in posterum, et si quibus regionibus vite spatium circumscriptum sit, eisdem omnes cogitationes terminaret suas; nec tantis se laboribus frangeret, neque tot curis vigiliisque angeretur. . . . Nunc insidet quedam in optimo quoque virtus, que noctes et dies animum gloria stimulis concitat; atque admonet, non cum vite tempore esse dimittendam commemorationem nominis nostri, sed cum omni posteritate adaugendam."

† Book I.

“ nature doth most aspire is immortality or continuance ;
 “ to which tendeth the desire of memory, fame, and cele-
 “ bration.” By this principle, the Lawgivers and States-
 men, the Philosophers and Orators of antiquity were strongly
 animated ; and hence their “ memory immortal grew.”—
 But even in lesser men it operates with power. We find it
 displayed and acted upon in the earliest annals of our race.
 The Egyptians passed solemn judgment on their dead,* and
 only permitted the rites of burial after a scrutinizing exam-
 ination into the character of the deceased. On those who
 were deemed worthy of interment by the judges of the
 State, panegyrics were pronounced, which referred to their
 personal merit ; and afterwards the people besought the
 Gods to receive them into the assembly of the Just, and to
 admit them to partake of everlasting felicity. From this
 scrutiny not even kings were exempt ; and this portion of
 the custom was imitated by the Israelites, as we read in
 Scripture that bad sovereigns were not interred in the
 monuments of their ancestors. The earliest Funeral Ora-
 tion, too, extant, is to be found in the Sacred volume ; I
 refer to the touching lamentation by David over Saul and
 Jonathan.†

“ The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places ; how are
 the mighty fallen ! Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets
 of Askelon ; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the
 daughters of the uncircumcised triumph ! Ye mountains of Gilboa,
 let there be no dew, neither let there be rain upon you, nor fields
 of offerings ; for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away,
 the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil.
 From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow
 of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not
 empty. Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives,
 and in their deaths they were not divided. They were swifter than
 eagles, they were stronger than lions. Ye daughters of Israel, weep
 over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, and put
 on ornaments of gold upon your apparel. How are the mighty
 fallen in the midst of the battle ! Oh ! Jonathan, thou wast slain
 in thine high places ! I am distressed for thee, my brother Jona-
 than, very pleasant hast thou been unto me. Thy love to me was

* The assembly of the judges met on the side of a lake, which they crossed
 in a boat ; he who sat at the helm was called, in the Egyptian language, *Charon* ;
 hence the Greek mythological fiction of that redoubted personage.

† 2 Samuel, ch. i, ver. 17.

wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"*

Among the Greeks, the influence of Fame was extremely strong. It was almost the very life-blood of the State.—Unanimated by the hopes inspired into us by Christianity, and untaught the awful responsibility of each individual, the feeling of personality was merged in the sentiment of citizenship. Death (deprived of the terrors arising from the consciousness of a future judgment) was held a minor evil compared with a life of dishonour, while public opinion in a small community of freemen was omnipotent. Hence the sacrifice at Thermopylæ, hence the victory of Platæa! "For," says Demosthenes, in the most celebrated passage of ancient eloquence, "all those illustrious sons of Athens whose remains lie deposited in the public monuments, all received the same honourable interment from their country, and not only they who were victorious. What was the part of gallant men, they all performed; their success was such as the Gods dispensed to each."† It was by this passion of Fame (excited to a degree unknown before or since in any other country) that Greece attained her proud pre-eminence among nations. That glorious country felt and acted upon the truth so nobly expressed in the Inscription on the monument of Lord Chatham,‡ that, "the means by which Providence raises a nation to greatness, are the virtues inspired into great men; and that to withhold from those virtues, either of the living or the dead, the tribute of esteem and admiration, is to deny to itself the means of happiness and honour." The apotheosis of her heroes made every man a warrior; her splendid statues inspired those virtues of which they were the memorial and the result; and the Public Interments and Funeral Orations decreed to her patriots, caused

* This exquisite lamentation is indelibly impressed with associations of a pleasing melancholy on the minds, not only of all who admire eloquence, but of every lover of music, by the magnificent harmony to which it has been united by Handel, in the Oratorio of Saul.

† Oration on the Crown. Leland's Translation.

‡ In the Guildhall of the city of London. It was written, I believe, by Edmund Burke.

the blood of every Athenian to quicken at the mention of the name of Marathon !*

The most interesting Greek Funeral Oration which has been preserved to us, is the celebrated one pronounced by Pericles, on the Athenians who fell during the first year of the Peloponnesian war.† Whether the great speech attributed to him by the historian of that struggle, was really delivered by Pericles, or whether, as is more probable, it now appears not in his splendid style, but with the severe cast of that of Thucydides, we know not ; but there can be no doubt that *some* Oration was delivered on that interesting occasion. I shall present before you a specimen of so famous a speech, which has received the panegyrics of two thousand years. We are informed by Rollin, (quoting Thucydides) that at this public funeral, “ according to ancient custom, the Greeks set up, three days before, a tent, “ in which the bones of the deceased citizens were exposed, “ and every person strewed flowers, incense, perfumes, and “ other things of the same kind upon their remains. They “ afterwards were put on carriages, in coffins made ofypress wood, every tribe having its particular coffin and “ carriage ; but in one carriage a large empty coffin was “ placed in honour of those whose bodies had not been found. “ The procession marched with a grave, majestic, and religious pomp ; a great number of both citizens and foreigners assisting at the mournful solemnity. The relations of “ the deceased warriors stood weeping at the sepulchre. “ Their bones were carried to a public monument in the “ finest suburb of the city, called the Ceramicus, where “ were buried in all ages those who lost their lives in war, “ except the warriors of Marathon ; who, to immortalize “ their rare valour, were interred in the field of battle. “ Earth was afterwards laid on them ; and then Pericles “ went from the Sepulchre to the Tribunal and pronounced

* “ And Marathon became a magic word ! ”—Childe Harold, canto 2.

† The twenty-third book of the Iliad describes the Funeral rites of Patroclus : they consist of sacrifices and games ; but no Oration was pronounced over the dead. Achilles prays, and invokes the spirit of Patroclus ; but neither he nor any of the Grecian chiefs address the army on the merits of their lost champion. I suppose that at this early period in Greece, the practice of pronouncing Funeral Orations had not commenced.