

**AMERICAN ORATORS
AND ORATORY: BEING A
REPORT OF LECTURES
DELIVERED. PP.10-91**

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American Orators and Oratory: Being a Report of Lectures Delivered. pp.10-91 by Thomas Wentworth Higginson

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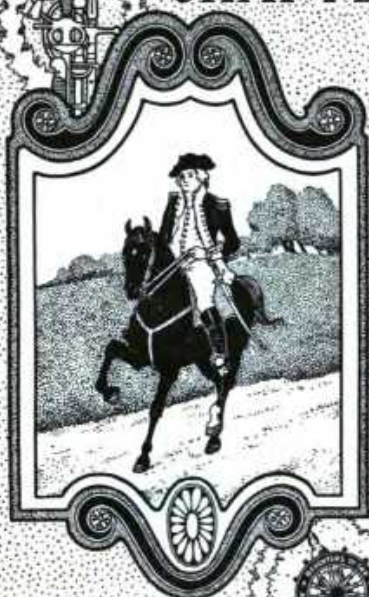
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THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON

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WESTERN
RESERVE
CHAPTER



DAUGHTERS *of*
the AMERICAN
REVOLUTION



C L Y D E E A R R O L L H O R T O N

AMERICAN ORATORS
AND
ORATORY.

Being a report of lectures delivered by
THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON,
at Western Reserve University, under the
auspices of the Western Reserve Chapter
Daughters of the American Revolution.



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A Prefatory Note.

In the year 1899, the Western Reserve Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, founded a Lectureship of American History in the College for Women, Western Reserve University, -to be filled each year by some eminent historian.

In January, 1900, the Lectureship was auspiciously opened by the late Moses Coit Tyler, of Cornell University. His winning personality and his profound scholarship will always remain a precious memory to those who had the privilege of listening at that time to this distinguished historian.

For the second of this series the Chapter was so fortunate as to secure Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson.

The enthusiastic reception of these lectures suggested the desirability of issuing them in permanent form for the members.

The Chapter here offers a verbatim report of these lectures, for which it is indebted to Mr. Charles W. Chesnutt.

A special acknowledgment is made to Mr. Charles Orr for his helpful suggestions in the preparation of this book.

THE PUBLISHING COMMITTEE.

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special point. He makes his point at last, as good perhaps as the Englishman's, possibly better. But then when he has made it you find that he goes feeling on for some other good point, and he feels and feels so long, that perhaps he sits down at last without having made it.

My ideal of a perfect speech in public would be that it should be conducted by a syndicate or trust, as it were, of the two nations, and that the guaranty should be that an American should be provided to begin every speech and an Englishman provided to end it.

Then, when we go a little farther and consider the act of speech itself, and its relation to the word, we sometimes meet with a doubt that we see expressed occasionally in the daily papers provided for us with twenty pages per diem and thirty-two on Sunday, whether we will need much longer anything but what is called sometimes by clergymen "the printed word"—whether the whole form of communication through oral speech will not diminish or fade away.

It seems to me a truly groundless fear—like wondering whether there will ever be a race with only one arm or one leg, or a race of people who live only by the eye or by the ear. The difference between the written word and the spoken word is the difference between solitude and companionship, between meditation and something so near action that it is at least half-

way to action and creates action. It is perfectly supposable to imagine a whole race of authors of whom not one should ever exchange a word with a human being while his greatest work is being produced.

The greatest work of American literature, artistically speaking, Hawthorne's "Scarlet Letter," was thus produced. His wife records that during the year that he was writing it, he shut himself up in his study every day. She asked no questions; he volunteered no information. She only knew that something was going on by the knot in his forehead which he carried all that year. At the end of the year he came from his study and read over to her the whole book; a work of genius was added to the world. It was the fruit of solitude.

And sometimes solitude, I regret as an author to say, extends to the perusal of the book, for I have known at least one volume of poems of which not a copy was ever sold; and I know another of which only one copy was sold through my betraying the secret of the author and mentioning the book to a class-mate, who bought that one copy.

Therefore, in a general way, we may say that literature speaks in a manner the voice of solitude. As soon as the spoken word comes in, you have companionship. There can be no speech without at least one person present, if it is only the janitor of the church. Dean Swift in reading

the Church of England service to his man-servant only, adapted the service as follows: "Dearly beloved Roger, the Scripture moveth thee and me in sundry places," etc.; but in that very economy of speech he realized the presence of an audience. It takes a speaker and an audience together to make a speech—I can say to you what I could not first have said to myself. "The sea of upturned faces," as Daniel Webster said, borrowing the phrase however from Scott's "Rob Roy"—"the sea of upturned faces makes half the speech." And therefore we may assume that there will always be this form of communication. It has, both for the speaker and for the audience, this one vast advantage.

A brilliant woman once said to me that she had often wondered which taught us the most about any man or any woman—to know every act of their lives, to read every word they had written, or the first glance at their faces. The orator has the advantage of that collective glance, and often the audience has the melancholy advantage of looking at one face and very often wishing that there were more to be seen in it.

Thus I have laid out in a general way the ground and basis of oratory—the communication of man with men. There have been in this country several successive periods of oratory, one of which I am to describe as the Colonial Period—what I might call, in other words, "The Reign of the Clergy."

We get from the Scriptures themselves the origin of the early practice among the Puritans, of having what they called a pastor and a teacher to every church. They had, you will notice, in nearly all the early Puritan churches, that double combination and that double ministry. They were bred on the Old Testament, and easily recalled that strange scene in the Book of Exodus, where the Prophet Moses, endeavoring to get rid of the terrible responsibility demanded of him by the Deity, begs off on the ground that,

"O my Lord, I am not eloquent; but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue."

And we read there that the Lord was wroth with Moses, and said to him:

"Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people."

So the forces were joined, the pastor and the teacher. And we may truly say that the two great Puritan migrations—the Plymouth and the Salem migrations—both began in eloquence, that they were founded upon eloquent words.

When John Robinson said to the pilgrims, at their last meeting in Europe before the Plymouth colony was launched, "I charge you in the sight of God that ye follow me no farther than as ye see that I follow Christ; there is more light yet to break out of the Word of God," he predicted the whole subsequent development of New England theology. And when the leaders of the