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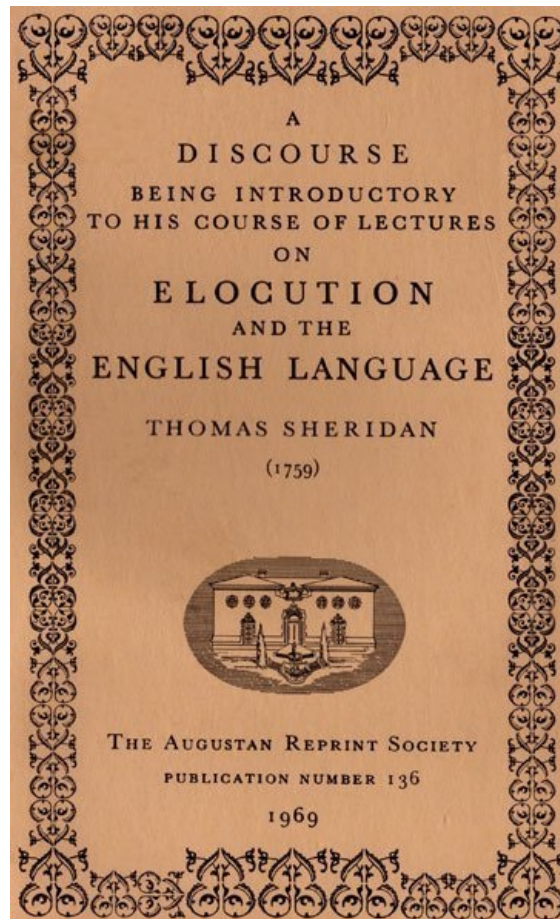
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THOMAS SHERIDAN

A DISCOURSE

BEING INTRODUCTORY

TO HIS COURSE OF LECTURES

ON

ELOCUTION

AND THE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

(1759)

Introduction by

G. P. Mohrmann

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INTRODUCTION

Thomas Sheridan (1718-1788) devoted his life to enterprises within the sphere of spoken English, and although he achieved more than common success in all his undertakings, it was his fate to have his reputation eclipsed by more famous contemporaries and eroded by the passage of time. On the stage, he was compared favorably with Garrick, but his name lives in the theatre only through his son Richard Brinsley. A leading theorist of the elocutionary movement, his

pronouncing dictionary ranks after the works of Dr. Johnson and John Walker, and his entire contribution dimmed when the movement fell into disrepute.^[1]

Sheridan attained his greatest renown through his writing and lecturing on elocution, and the fervor with which he pursued the study of tones, looks, and gestures in speaking animates *A Discourse Delivered in the Theatre at Oxford, in the Senate-House at Cambridge, and at Spring-Garden in London*. This lecture, "Being Introductory to His Course of Lectures on Elocution and the English Language," displays both the man and the elocutionary movement. Throughout the work, Sheridan exhibits his missionary zeal, his dedication to "a visionary hypothesis that dazzled his mind."^[2] At the same time, he presents the basic principles of elocutionary theory and reveals the forces that made the movement a dominant pattern in English rhetoric.

It is difficult to account for Sheridan's millennial approach to elocution, but his absorption in language study is most understandable. His father, Dr. Thomas Sheridan, was a minister and teacher, judged to be "a good classical scholar, and an excellent schoolmaster."^[3] He supervised his son's early education, and Sheridan was being pointed toward a career as school master. His exposure to, and interest in, English were reinforced by his godfather, Dean Swift, who was long an intimate of the elder Sheridan. In later years, Sheridan was eager to acknowledge that his attitudes had been profoundly influenced by those of Swift.

To some degree Sheridan's dedication to language study is evidenced in his theatrical activities. As an undergraduate, he wrote a play that was later published; and almost immediately after taking his M.A. at Trinity College, he made his professional acting debut in Dublin. This was 1743, and forty years later he was taking part in Attic Entertainments, performances "consisting of recitation, singing, and music."^[4] A selective chronology suggests his involvement with the stage: 1744, acting in London with Garrick; 1750, acting and managing in Dublin; 1760, acting in London; 1780, acting manager for his son at Drury Lane.

Successful as an actor, Sheridan appears to have missed greatness because he could not overcome an inflexibility and obstinacy in personality; and the same characteristics helped to precipitate a number of squabbles and riots that marred his managerial efforts. However, much of his frustration in the theatre must be attributed to the more compelling attraction to the theory of delivery in speaking. The stage provided a practical outlet, but Sheridan's fascination with elocutionary theory dominated and deflected the interest in theatre.

That elocution was his primary concern is demonstrated in his major publications: *British Education*, 1756; *Lectures on Elocution*, 1762; *A Plan of Education*, 1769; *Lectures on the Art of Reading*, 1775; and *A General Dictionary of the English Language*, 1780. In all of these works the central argument remained unchanged after its initial statement in the complete title of *British Education*.^[5] There, Sheridan suggested that a revival of the art of speaking would improve religion, morality, and constitutional government; would undergird a refining of the language; and would pave the way for ultimate perfection in all the arts.

Having posited this thesis in 1756, Sheridan was reiterating it still in the material prefatory to his pronouncing dictionary in 1780, and he never rested with publication alone. As early as 1757 he lectured on the principles of education, and he first presented his course of lectures on elocution in 1758-59 at Oxford and Cambridge. Over the years the course proved to be both popular and financially rewarding, and Sheridan sometimes presented the lectures in order to relieve financial embarrassment. Nevertheless, his devotion to the cause was the crucial factor. His interest in language somehow became an almost blind devotion to spoken English, and through his course he could carry his message to influential audiences in England, Ireland, and Scotland; the Edinburgh Select Society sponsored two series in 1761, and Sheridan was lecturing on elocution as late as 1785.

The *Discourse* typifies Sheridan's simplistic interpretation and the evangelistic ardor with which he addressed his audiences. He was not content to fault an overemphasis in the study of Latin, nor was he satisfied to argue that "the support of our establishments, both ecclesiastical and civil" rests upon public discussion. Many in his audiences would have agreed, and few would have taken issue with the contention that the "art of elocution" needed further cultivation. But Sheridan pressed on to insist that the written language, being an invention of man, "can have no natural power," and he argued that the "highest delights" of aesthetic pleasures must wait upon the perfection of spoken English. He even went so far as to suggest that the study of "grammar, rhetorick, and oratory" explained the outstanding artistic achievements of Greece and Rome.

Moreover, "other benefits to society" would add to "the glory of the nation" and to the "ornament of individuals, and of the state in general" through a loosing of silent tongues. Sheridan dreamed that the study of elocution, with a voice "far sweeter than the syren's song," would so entrance young students that they would linger long in native academic groves, avoiding the baneful influence of travel abroad "at the most unfit and dangerous season of life." Thus, individual and social perfection had to be predicated upon the study of spoken English, and Sheridan implied that to slight this study was to offer an affront to the divine plan for earthly progress.

This panacean outlook prompted Hume to remark that "Mr. Sheridan's Lectures are vastly too enthusiastic. He is to do every thing by Oratory."^[6] And it is not surprising that the critical, the Johnsons and Humes, should have been distressed by Sheridan's enthusiasm, an enthusiasm that permitted him to posit such unlikely goals and to see himself as the sole authority on elocution.

Yet, for every negative reaction, the elocutionists enlisted countless believers. Sheridan and other theorists capitalized upon a number of intellectual currents and social pressures of the era that centered attention upon delivery in speaking and that helped aggrandize this facet of rhetorical training. A number of forces can be isolated, but most relate to the classical inheritance, to the belief that tones, looks, and gestures constitute a natural language of the passions, and to the methodology of science.^[7]

The classical inheritance was important to the elocutionists because of the impetus given to all language study. Sheridan did no more than echo a common complaint when he worried over the "many bad consequences" attending a neglect of the English language; countless writers addressed themselves to a determination of phonology and pronunciation in the attempt "to methodize" the language. Furthermore, the example of ancient oratory spoke loudly to a people striving to perfect both the individual and social institutions. Any educated man was expected to be able to express himself well in public, particularly if his vocation found him "in the pulpit, the senate-house, or at the bar." The pulpit was a favorite target, and critics regularly lamented the atrocious state of speaking "in the very service of the Most High." The elocutionists and others appear to have been convinced that the doubt and scepticism of the age would be much relieved if only the preachers would learn to speak properly. Theirs seemed the best of all possible religions, and it needed but a vitalization through adequate pulpit oratory to transcend anything accomplished by the Popish devotees on the Continent. Certainly Sheridan's references to the Continent also reflect a strong overlay of nationalism, and the same spirit creeps into his worship of Greece and Rome; but he and the other elocutionists knew that they owed a profound debt to classical rhetorical theory. Beyond supporting language study generally and beyond encouraging an interest in public speaking, ancient rhetoric justified a concentration on delivery.

After centuries of a chameleon-like existence, the complete Ciceronian rhetoric emerged in England just in time to meet a savage onslaught from the methods of science and the new epistemology.^[8] Eventually, rhetoricians such as Campbell and Blair were to successfully blend the old and the new, but the elocutionists found fertile ground in delivery alone. They began, as Sheridan did, with the testimony of Cicero and Quintilian because *actio*, or *pronuntiatio*, was one of the five established canons of classical rhetoric. A favorite citation, though Sheridan did not use it, was Demosthenes' reputed response when asked to name the three most important parts of rhetoric: "Actio, actio, actio." The endorsement of antiquity lent powerful support to the study of delivery, and this was the one canon that had not been subjected to regular exhaustive analyses throughout the rhetorical tradition. Here was a topic ripe for further investigation, and by Sheridan's day, the tones, looks, and gestures of delivery had achieved commonplace status in discussions of man's emotions.

Sheridan spoke as if this natural language of the passions were "hardly ever thought of," but the belief that tones, looks, and gestures were external signs of internal emotions was firmly established by the middle of the eighteenth century. The notion has received some attention throughout western thought, but most speculation appears to date from Descartes' *Les Passions de l'ame* in 1650. The increasing concern with mind-body problems encouraged inquiries into the nature and function of the natural language in all areas relating directly to man's emotion and its expression. The topics were as various as religion and physiognomy, but discussions of the natural language construct centered upon human communication, particularly in the arts.

The construct became especially significant in analyses of painting and sculpture. Examples of its impress can be seen in Le Brun's sketches of the passions,^[9] in Hogarth's having embraced "the commonly received opinion, that the face is the index of the mind,"^[10] and in Dryden's contention that "to express the passions which are seated in the heart, by outward signs, is one great precept of the painters." Dryden added that "in poetry, the same passions and motions of the mind are to be expressed,"^[11] and the natural language found its way into most discussions of tragedy and the epic. Other examples of literary analysis in which the construct operated include Steele's *Prosodia Rationalis*, Say's *An Essay on Harmony, Variety, and Power of Numbers*, and Kames' *Elements of Criticism*. In sum, it was almost universally accepted that the creative artist was to observe and record the natural language of the passions. In Sheridan's words, he was to perceive and delineate the "operations, affections, and energies, of the mind itself ... manifested and communicated in speech."

The methodology of science was indirectly responsible for giving added support to this facet of elocutionary rationale. When British empiricism was pressed to the limit, considerable doubt and scepticism resulted; and the Scottish common sense philosophy was, in large part, a counter response. The operation of the natural language became one of the first principles of common sense; and in their discussions of philosophy, aesthetics, and rhetoric, the Scots argued for the study of elocution.^[12]

Science contributed directly to the movement by providing the framework for analysis. Without the empirical approach and the confidence in scientific methodology, theorists simply would not have attempted to isolate and describe the elements in the external signs of the emotions. Science forced Sheridan to think in terms of empirical observation and categorization, and science permitted him to call for "sure and sufficient rules" in order that "the art of speaking like that of writing ... be reduced to a system." It is even symptomatic that he should have referred to the design of the "Great Mechanist."

Almost as enthusiastic as Sheridan, a number of other elocutionists expressed similar views and

found their theories invigorated by the same forces. James Burgh in the *Art of Speaking* (1761), John Walker in *Elements of Elocution* (1781) and a number of other works, and Gilbert Austin in *Chironomia* (1806) were among the more influential elocutionary theorists. Numerous other writers in both England and America participated in making the study of elocution an established part of the English rhetorical tradition.

In America, the study gained acceptance at all levels of education, and the class in elocution became a standard course in colleges and universities. Elocution centered upon oral reading and public speaking, and written composition came to be the exclusive province of the rhetoric class. The resultant distinctions between oral and written discourse played a significant role in the eventual development of separate departments of speech and English in American colleges and universities.^[13]

Although speech departments grew out of elocutionary studies, elocution disappeared from the curriculum because of an association with an excessive emphasis upon performance as performance. Reaction was compounded by a sophistication in psychology that made early theory seem naïve, but neither later excesses nor seeming naïvety should be permitted to distort the main thrust of the elocutionary movement. Concentrating upon language in use, the elocutionists encouraged and anticipated analyses now being vigorously pursued in a range extending from linguistics to nonverbal communication. Their contribution has for too long been ignored, and it is happily foreshadowed in Thomas Sheridan's enthusiastic *Discourse*.

University of California,
Davis

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

- [1] See Wallace A. Bacon, "The Elocutionary Career of Thomas Sheridan (1718-1788)," *Speech Monographs*, XXXI (1964), 1-53.
- [2] John Watkins, *Memoirs of the Right Honorable R. B. Sheridan*, (London, 1817), I, 43.
- [3] *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- [4] *Ibid.*, pp. 145-146.
- [5] *British Education: Or, The Source of the Disorders of Great Britain. Being An Essay towards proving, that the Immorality, Ignorance, and false Taste, which so generally prevail, are the natural and necessary Consequences of the present defective System of Education. With An Attempt to shew, that a Revival of the Art of Speaking, and the Study of Our Own Language, might contribute, in a great measure, to the Cure of those Evils. In Three Parts. I. Of the Use of these Studies to Religion, and Morality; as also, to the Support of the British Constitution. II. Their absolute Necessity in order to refine, ascertain, and fix the English Language. III. Their Use in the Cultivation of the Imitative Arts: shewing, that were the Study of Oratory made a necessary Branch of the Education of Youth; Poetry, Musick, Painting, and Sculpture, might arrive at as high a Pitch of Perfection in England, as ever they did in Athens or Rome.*
- [6] James Boswell, *Private Papers of James Boswell* (Mt. Vernon, New York, 1928-34), I, 129.
- [7] See Frederick W. Haberman, "English Sources of American Elocution," *History of Speech Education in America*, ed. Karl Wallace (New York, 1954), pp. 105-126.
- [8] See Wilbur Samuel Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500-1700* (Princeton, 1956).
- [9] Charles Le Brun, *Conférence de Monsieur Le Brun sur l'expression generale & particulière* (Amsterdam, 1698).
- [10] William Hogarth, *Analysis of Beauty*, ed. Joseph Burke (Oxford, 1955), p. 136.
- [11] John Dryden, "A Parallel of Poetry and Painting," in *Essays*, ed. W. P. Ker (Oxford, 1900), II, 145.
- [12] See G. P. Mohrmann, "The Language of Nature and Elocutionary Theory," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, LII (1966), 116-124.
- [13] See studies reported in *History of Speech Education in America*.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN

The THEATRE at OXFORD,
IN
The SENATE-HOUSE at CAMBRIDGE,
AND
At SPRING-GARDEN in LONDON.
By **THOMAS SHERIDAN, M. A.**
Being Introductory to
His COURSE of LECTURES
ON
ELOCUTION and the ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

Ut enim hominis decus ingenium, sic ingenii ipsius

lumen est eloquentia.

Cic. de Orat.

LONDON:

Printed for A. MILLAR, in The Strand;

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M.DCC.LIX.

TO

THE TWO LEARNED UNIVERSITIES

OF

Oxford AND CAMBRIDGE,

The following Discourse

(As a small token of gratitude

For the candour with which they received,

And the generosity with which they encouraged,

His attempt

Towards improving Elocution,

And promoting the study of the ENGLISH Language)

Is,

With all humility,

And the most profound respect,

**Inscribed,
By their
very faithful
and devoted servant,
THOMAS SHERIDAN.**

**A
DISCOURSE**

**DELIVERED IN
The THEATRE at OXFORD,
IN
The Senate-House at CAMBRIDGE,
AND
At SPRING-GARDEN in LONDON.**

It has been a long time since all men, who have turned their thoughts to the subject, have been convinced, that the neglect of studying our own language, and the art of speaking it in public, has been attended with many bad consequences; and some of our most eminent writers have freely delivered their thoughts upon this head to the world. Amongst the foremost of this number are Milton, Dryden, Clarendon, Locke, Addison, Berkley, and Swift; besides multitudes of less note. But as they have only pointed out the evil, without examining into its source, or proposing an adequate remedy; as they have shewn the good consequences which would follow from the introduction of those studies, only in theory, without laying down any probable method, by which their speculations might be reduced to practice, their endeavours in this way, however laudable, have hitherto proved but of little benefit to mankind.

Any attempt, therefore, towards a practicable plan, whereby such studies may be introduced, will well deserve the attention of the best and wisest men; and, if it should meet with their approbation, will necessarily also obtain their encouragement and assistance.

This consideration it was, which emboldened me to appear before this learned assembly; and though, when I reflect on the knowlege, wisdom, and nice discernment, of my hearers, I am filled with that awe and reverence which are due to so respectable a body, yet, as candour and humanity are the inseparable attendants on wisdom and knowlege (for as the brave are ever the most merciful, so are the wise the most indulgent), I can have no cause to fear the submitting my opinions to the decision of such judges as are here assembled. Whatever shall appear to be founded in reason and truth cannot fail of producing its due effect in this region of true philosophy: and whatever errors or faults may be committed, as they cannot escape the penetration, so will they be corrected and amended by the skill and benevolence of such hearers. A point to be wished, not dreaded; as to an inquirer after truth, next to the being right, the thing most to be desired is the being set right. In either way, a person engaged in a new undertaking is sure to be a gainer, where honour, and certainty of success, will follow judicious approbation; where benefit, and the means of succeeding, will attend just censure.

Encouraged by these reflections, I shall therefore, without farther preface, enter upon my subject.

That the English are the only civilized people, either of ancient or modern times, who neglected to cultivate their language, or to methodize it in such a way, as that the knowlege of it might be regularly acquired, is a proposition no less strange than true.

That the English are the only free nation recorded in history, possessed of all the advantages of literature, who never studied the art of elocution, or founded any institutions, whereby, they who were most interested in the cultivation of that art; they whose professions necessarily called upon them to speak in public, might be instructed to acquit themselves properly on such occasions, and be enabled to deliver their sentiments with propriety and grace, is also a point as true as it is strange.

These neglects are the more astonishing, because, upon examination, it will appear, that there neither is, nor ever was a nation upon earth, to the flourishing state of whose constitution and government, such studies were so absolutely necessary. Since it must be obvious to the slightest

enquirer, that the support of our establishments, both ecclesiastical and civil, in their due vigour, must in a great measure depend upon the powers of elocution in public debates, or other oratorical performances, displayed in the pulpit, the senate-house, or at the bar.

But to leave the public interests out of the question; is it not amazing that these studies have never been established here, even upon selfish principles, which, in all other cases seldom fail of having their due force? since it can be shewn, that there never was a state wherein so many individuals were so necessarily and deeply concerned in the prosecution of those studies; or where it was the interest, as well as duty, of such numbers, to display the powers of oratory in their native language.

There is not a single point, in which the study of oratory was necessary to the ancients, wherein it is not equally so to us; nor was there any incitement to the knowledge and practice of that art, whether of pleasure, profit, or honour, which with us is not of equal strength.

We, as well as the ancients, have councils, senates, and assemblies of the people (by their representatives) whose deliberations and debates turn upon matters of as much moment, where oratory has fields as ample, in which it may exert all its various powers, and where the rewards and honours, attendant on eloquence are equal. "If we look into the history of England, for more than a century past, we shall find, that most persons have made their way to the head of affairs, and got into the highest employments, not on account of birth or fortune, but by being, what is commonly called, good speakers."

Nor is oratory less necessary to us at the bar, than it was to the ancients; nor are the rewards of profit, fame, and preferment, less attendant on it there; as has been experienced by all in that profession, who took pains to improve their talents in that way.

But there is one point, a most momentous one, in which oratory is essentially necessary to us, but was not in the least so to the ancients. The article I mean, is of the utmost importance to us; it is the basis of our government, and pillar of our state. It is the vivifying principle, the soul of our constitution, without which, it cannot subsist; I mean religion.

"As the religion of the ancients consisted chiefly of rites and ceremonies, it could derive no assistance from oratory; but there is not the smallest branch of ours which can be well executed, without skill in speaking; and the more important parts, calculated to answer the great ends, evidently require the whole oratorical powers."

Let it be observed, that in this profession alone, there are more persons employed throughout these realms, than there were citizens of Athens, at any given period.

Since, therefore, we have so much stronger motives to the cultivation of this art, what can be the reason that even an attempt towards it has never hitherto been made? One would imagine, that in a country where the ancients are admired, revered, nay, almost adored, that we should certainly follow their example, and adopt all their wise institutions, so far at least as they coincided with the spirit of our government, and were of equal necessity to the well being of the state. But on the contrary, we seem to have made it a law, that we should sit down contented with seeing and admiring their excellence, but that we should never attempt to use the means, by which alone we might be enabled to rival them. If it were difficult to come at the knowledge of those means; if the method taken by the ancients, in educating their youth to qualify them for such great performances, had not been handed down to us; or if there were any thing in the method itself, which would be found impracticable in these times, there might be some excuse for not taking the same course. But on the contrary, when many of their most eminent writers have minutely described to us the precise course of education, passed through by all who were liberally trained; when they tell us, that both at Athens and Rome, one of the chief studies was that of their native language in each country; and that the art most assiduously sought after, and practised in both, was that of oratory: shall we be surprised that their languages were more polished and beautiful, and consequently that all works which depended upon the elegance and charms of language, should be more finished than those of a people, who never took any pains in that way? or that oratory, and all the arts dependant on it, or connected with it, together with all the benefits and advantages resulting from it, should appear in a more conspicuous light, in regions, where that art was cultivated with the utmost pains and labour, than in a country where it has been utterly neglected. Is there any natural impediment in our way, is there any invincible obstacle to the pursuit of these studies, and to the attainment of these arts? Have we not a language to study as well as they? and do we not, on many accounts, stand in more need of studying that language? Have we not the same organs of speech, the same features, the same limbs, muscles, and nerves, that the ancients had? What want we then, but to apply ourselves to the regulation of these, and to study their true use in enforcing and adorning our sentiments, when delivered by speech, to rival or even excel them in their favourite art? How did the ancients attain this art? By study, and practice. Would not the same means bring us to the same end? And have we not the advantage of all their lights to guide us in our enquiries? Have we not the foundation of their experience to build upon, ready to our hands, whenever we are wise enough to set about raising the noble edifice? Did the ancients possess any advantages over us from nature, either in point of intellectual faculties, or the animal œconomy? With respect to the mental powers, it is undoubtedly clear, that we have carried our discoveries much farther than they did, both in the physical and moral world. And with respect to the bodily organs, true philosophy must deride any attempts, to shew that we are not framed exactly in the same manner. In all the *sciences*, to which we *have* applied, we have far outdone them; and if they still excel us in many of the *arts*, it is either because we have wholly neglected their cultivation, or

where we have made the attempt, we have taken a wrong course; and unwisely deserted the method pointed out by the ancients towards their attainment, and which, with them, had been always crowned with success.

In short, the difference between the ancients and us, arises from one obvious cause. In the course of education, we have pursued most of the studies, which they did; but some we have wholly omitted. In all studies, which we followed in common with them, we have far excelled them: that they have excelled us in those which were peculiar to themselves, cannot be a matter of wonder. The chief points in which they differed from us, were the study of their native language, and oratory. And it can be indisputably shewn, that they possessed no advantage over us, but what arose, either immediately, or consequentially from their knowledge, skill, and practice; in grammar, rhetoric, and oratory. Now, as we have excelled them far, in all the studies to which we *have* applied, there can be no good reason assigned, that with a due degree of attention and pains, we might not surpass them in these also? On the contrary, I hope, on another occasion, to be able to prove, that from certain lights furnished by time, from peculiar advantages arising from our pure and holy religion, and from the nature of our admirable constitution, we might, with moderate pains, and in no long space of time, as far surpass them in those arts, and all that depend upon them, or have a connection with them, as we have already done in the sciences.

But though, upon trial, we should not find ourselves able to surpass the ancients, let us not shamefully suffer ourselves to be outdone in those arts by the moderns. If the Briton should own himself unequal to the contest with Greeks and Romans, let him not yield the palm to Frenchmen also. If, in despair of victory, he should say like Mnestheus in Virgil, "Non jam prima peto," let him add to his countrymen, "extremos pudeat rediisse!"

Believe me, there is no time to be lost. The Italians, the French, and the Spaniards, are far before you. Their languages and authors are well known through Europe, whilst yours have got admission only into the closets of a few. You have but to rouse yourselves from your lethargy, and to exert your native vigour, soon to outstrip them all. Should you set about refining and ascertaining your language, with the same spirit of industry, which you have often exerted on less important occasions, the work will not be long accomplishing; and you will not only immediately raise your credit in the eyes of Europe, but hand down to your posterity, one of the noblest legacies which it is in your power to bequeath. If the task should be accomplished, how will that posterity wonder, that their ancestors should have been for more than two centuries in possession of so rich a jewel, without once examining its value; and that, merely through a neglect of polishing, they should have suffered a diamond of the first water and magnitude, to be outshone by the cut glass, or pebbles, of their poorer, but more industrious neighbours.

The true source of the neglect of these studies, will, upon examination, be found to be this; that from the first introduction of letters into this kingdom, the minds of all trained in the knowledge of them, have to this hour, from early institution, got a wrong bias with respect to language: in consequence of which, the universal attention of the natives of this country, has been turned from the natural, the more forcible, and more pleasing kind, to that which is artificial, weaker, and accompanied with no natural delight.

I do not doubt, but that this proposition will excite no small surprise in my hearers; nor do I suppose, they will easily comprehend my meaning, till they recollect a distinction, which is hardly ever thought of, and yet, which ought often to be had in remembrance, that we have two kinds of language; one which is *spoken*, another which is *written*. Or that there are two different methods used of communicating our ideas, one through the channel of the ear, the other through that of the eye.

It is true, that as articulate sounds are by compact symbols of our ideas, and as written characters are by compact symbols of those articulate sounds, they may, at first view, seem calculated to accomplish one and the same end; and from habit, an opinion may be formed, that it is a matter of indifference which way the communication is made, as the end will be equally well answered by either.

But, upon a nearer examination, it will appear that this opinion is ill founded, and that, in whatever country it prevails, so far as to affect the practice of the people, it must be attended with proportional bad consequences, both to individuals, and to society in general.

In order to prove this, it will be necessary to shew, that the difference between these two kinds of language is not more in form, than in substance; in the means of their communication, than in their end: that they widely differ from each other, in the nature, degree, and extent of their power; that they have each their several offices and limits belonging to them, which they ought never to exceed; and that, where one encroaches on the province of the other, it can never equally well discharge its office.

All these points will be made sufficiently clear, only by examining the nature and constitution, of these two kinds of language.

First, as to that which is spoken. Speech is the universal gift of God to all mankind. But as in his wise dispensations, in order to excite industry, and make reward the attendant on service, in the most excellent things of this life, he has only furnished the materials, and left it to man to find out, and make a right use of them; so has he laid down this just law, in regard to the great article of speech; which in all nations must prove either barbarous, discordant, and defective; or

polished, harmonious, and copious, according to the culture or neglect of it. As the chief delight and improvement of a social, rational being, must arise from a communication of sentiments and affections, and all that passes in the mind of man; the powers of opening such a communication are furnished in a suitable degree, and with a liberal hand. In proportion to their acquisition of ideas, men will find no want of articulate sounds to be their symbols. In proportion to their progress in knowledge, they will find adequate powers in the organs of speech, to communicate that knowledge. In proportion to the exertion of the powers of the intellect, or the imagination, the various emotions of the mind, the different degrees of sensibility, and all the feelings of the heart; they will find, upon searching for them, that in the human frame there are tones, looks, and gestures of such efficacy, as not only to make all these obvious, but to transfuse all those operations, energies, and emotions into others: without which, indeed, the mere communication of ideas would be attended with but little delight.

A wise nation will therefore, above all things, apply themselves to advance the powers of elocution, to as high a degree as possible; and they will find their labours well rewarded, not only by opening a source of one of the highest delights, which the nature of man is capable of feeling in this life, but also by the extraordinary benefits and advantages thence resulting to society, which cannot possibly be procured in any other way. "It has pleased the All-wise Creator to annex to elocution, when in its perfect state, powers almost miraculous! and an energy nearly divine! He has given to it tones to charm the ear, and penetrate the heart: he has joined to it actions, and looks, to move the inmost soul. By that, attention is kept up without pain, and conviction carried to the mind with delight. Persuasion is ever its attendant, and the passions own it for a master. Great as is the force of its powers, so unbounded is their extent. All mankind are capable of its impressions, the ignorant as well as the wise, the illiterate as well as the learned."

Such is the nature, such the constitution, such the effects, of cultivated speech. Let us now examine the properties of written language. "That is wholly the invention of man, a mere work of art, and therefore can contain no natural power. Its use is to give stability to sound, and permanence to thought; to preserve words that otherwise might perish as they are spoke, and to arrest ideas that might vanish as they rise in the mind; to assist the memory in treasuring these up, and to convey knowledge at distance through the eye, where it could find no entrance by the ear. In short, it may be considered as a grand repository of the wisdom of ages, from which the greatest plenty of materials may be furnished, for the use of speech, and the best supplies given to the powers of elocution."

Here we may see, that these two kinds of language essentially differ from each other in their nature and use: and, from this view, we may plainly perceive the vast superiority which the former must have over the latter, in the main end aimed at by both, that of communicating all that passes in the mind of man; inasmuch as the former works by the whole force of natural, as well as artificial means; the latter, by artificial means only. In the one case, many hundreds may be made partakers at one and the same time, of instruction and delight; in the other, knowledge must be parceled out only to individuals. In the one, not only the sense of hearing may receive the highest gratification, from sounds the most pleasing, and congenial to the organs of man; but the sight also may be delighted with viewing the noblest work of the Great Mechanist put in motion, to answer the noblest ends: and, whilst the charmed ear easily admits the words of truth, the faithful eye, even of the illiterate, can read their credentials, in the legible hand of Nature, visibly characterized in the countenance and gesture of the speaker. In the other, none of the senses are in the least gratified. The eye can have no pleasure in viewing a succession of crooked characters, however accurately formed; and the ear cannot be much concerned in silent reading.

If any doubt remains about pre-eminence with regard to these two, the dispute may, at once, be settled in the same way that Cicero determined the controversy between oratory and philosophy; "Sin quærimus quid unum excellat ex omnibus, docto oratori palma danda est: quem si patiuntur eundem esse philosophum, sublata controversia est. Sin eos disjunctent, hoc erunt inferiores, quod in oratore perfecto, inest omnis illorum scientia, in philosophorum autem cognitione, non continuo est eloquentia." In like manner it may be said, in this case, that he who is master of speaking cannot, on that account, be retarded, though he may be much advanced thereby in knowledge of written language; whereas he who is master of the written language only, is by no means advanced thereby in the art of speaking. Indeed, the one should be considered only as an handmaid to the other, and employed chiefly in such offices as she cannot do in her own person.

But should any nation be so unfortunately circumstanced, as from habit, or institution, to bestow all their labour and pains upon cultivating the artificial language, the invention of man, to the utter neglect of that which is natural, and the gift of God, it must be allowed, that they are in a wrong course; and that they must necessarily lose some of the greatest blessings that can be enjoyed by rational, social beings, and which can flow from no other source but that of cultivated speech. Whether this be not our case, is well worth considering; and the point may be settled by the establishment of a few facts. In order to this, let us take a view of the perfections, and imperfections, of each kind of language; see in which of them we take most pains to attain the one, and avoid the other; and, in consequence of such pains, which of them is at this day in the best state amongst us.

The chief object of both, is the communication of ideas and emotions from mind to mind, but they use different mediums for this purpose. Speech makes use of sound, and reaches the mind through the ear: writing makes use of characters, and conveys knowledge through the eye. The ideas that rise in the mind of the speaker, together with the operations, affections, and energies, of the mind itself, are manifested and communicated in speech, by articulate sounds, combined,

or separated in various proportions; by rests of the voice in certain places; by accents, emphases, and tones. The same is attempted in writing, by different combinations of letters, according to stated rules, and by certain points, stops, and lines. But that it cannot be done with equal success in the latter case, is clear from this, that sound contains in itself a natural power over the human frame, in rousing the faculties of man, and exciting the affections, as is clearly proved by the force of music.

By the loud trumpet, which our courage aids,
We learn that sound, as well as sense, persuades.

But written characters have, in themselves, no sort of virtue, nor the least influence on the mind of man: and the utmost extent of their artificial power can reach no farther, than that of exciting ideas of sounds, which belong to spoken words, for which those combinations of letters stand, and consequently cannot produce equal effects with the sounds themselves.

To instruct our youth in the arts of reading and writing, there are many seminaries established every-where throughout this realm; and, accordingly, all of a liberal education are well versed in them. But who in these countries ever heard of a master for the improvement of articulation, for teaching the due proportion of sound and quantity of syllables in English, and for pointing out to his pupils, by precept and example, the right use of accents, emphases, and tones, when they read aloud, or speak in public? If this has never yet been done, surely it is a great omission, when we reflect of how much more importance the one art is than the other; how much more nice and subtle in its nature, which renders it more difficult to be acquired, and consequently demands more the benefit of instruction. Accordingly, the bad fruits of this neglect are every day perceived. Each man's experience will tell him, how few public readers, or speakers, he has heard acquit themselves well; and even of those few, those very few, who have acquired any name in that way, it would be found, upon a critical inquiry, that they have, for the most part, but a comparative excellence; and that their superiority over others arises from pre-eminence in the natural faculties of speech, and an happier construction of the organs, rather than any skill, or mastery, in the art of elocution. It is thus that, in countries where music is learned by the ear only, they who have the nicest ear, and most tuneable voices, will pass for the best singers, and, of course, be accounted excellent. But, when they come to be compared with those of another country, regularly trained in the art of music, it will soon be perceived, what amazing advantages such culture has given to the latter singers over the former; not only in point of musical skill, and variety of tones, but also in the vast improvement made in the singing instrument itself, with respect to all its powers of sweetness, strength, volubility, or expression, which have been gradually brought forward to their utmost perfection. Could some of the orators of old arise from the dead, and be confronted with the best of these times, perhaps the difference would be still more striking.

There cannot be a more flagrant proof of the preference given to the inferior species of language, over that of the nobler kind; nor, at the same time, one which will afford a more glaring instance of the uncontrollable power of fashion, however absurdly founded, than when we reflect, that it is reckoned a great disgrace for a gentleman to spell ill, though not to speak or read ill: and yet, if we were to weigh these defects in the true balance, and consider them only with respect to the bad consequences which follow from each, the former will appear to be scarce an object worthy of our attention, and the latter ought to excite universal indignation.

A gentleman writes a letter to his friend, or upon business (the chief use which gentlemen in general make of writing); there are many words in it mis-spelt; this is a great scandal, and lessens him in the eyes of those who read it: and yet, where is the mighty matter in this! The unusual manner of placing letters in words, gives no pain to the organs of sight; the reader can soon correct any error; or, if he should be puzzled, he can take time to examine and make out the sense by the context; and then the end of the letter is answered.

On the other hand, a man shall rise up in a public assembly, and, without the least mark of shame, deliver a discourse to many hundred auditors, in such disagreeable tones, and unharmonious cadences, as to disgust every ear; and with such improper and false use of emphasis, as to conceal or pervert the sense and all this without fear of any consequential disgrace, "quia defendit numerus." When we consider that this is often done on the most awful occasions, in the very service of the Most High! at times when words, delivered with due force and energy, might be productive of the noblest consequences to society, afford the highest delight to the auditory, and give honour and dignity to the person of the speaker, may we not justly cry out, O custom! thou art properly called second nature, with respect to the immensity of thy power; but thou usurpest her place, thou art her tyrant, thou tramplest her under foot, and with thy scepter of iron, thou swayest the powers of reason and truth at thy will!

Indeed, nothing but such an uncontrollable power, could possibly have made a civilized and enlightened people continue, for such a length of time, in a course so opposite to all the rules of common sense. For upon farther examination it will appear, that even the written language, to which they solely apply, can never reach the perfection whereof it is capable, nor answer its noblest purposes, without the previous cultivation of that which is spoken.

When it is considered that articulate sounds or words are the types of ideas, and that written characters are the types of articulate sounds or words, it is evident that all the qualities of the latter must be circumscribed by the former, as the type cannot exceed its archetype. Accordingly we find, that the charms of style, in the writers of all ages and countries, have arisen from the

beauty of the language spoken in those countries; and the beauty of language arose not from chance, but culture; for it is not time, but care, that will bring a language to perfection. If time alone would do, those of the most barbarous nations in the world, ought to be superior to those of the most civilized, as they are infinitely more ancient. It was to the constant pains and labour, the study and application successively given by the choicest wits, and men of brightest parts in each age, to the improvement and establishment of their native tongues, that we owe those two glorious languages of Greece and Rome, which have justly been the wonder of the world, and which will last to the end of time. And is it not owing to the excellence of their languages, that the noble works of their writers have been preserved? Had Demosthenes written his orations in such a language as High Dutch, or Virgil his poems in such a one as Irish or Welsh, their names would not long have outlived themselves.

That the state of all the more elegant and beautiful compositions, and the effects which they are capable of producing, must chiefly depend upon the art of speaking, may be clearly deduced from considering the nature and ends of such writings.

By the art of writing, sentiments can be communicated, either through the eye only, or through the eye and ear together, to individuals; or through the ear only to numbers; the first of these, by silent reading, the other two, by reading aloud. In the first instance, ideas of things are excited by written words, as the symbols of words spoken; and by association, the idea of the sounds also which accompany those words. Now at the best, supposing the ideas of the properest sounds, were always to be associated by the silent reader, the effect of any composition must be much weaker than if it were spoken, as far as ideas fall short of realities. But if, through ignorance in the art of speaking, or through vicious habits, he annexes the ideas of wrong sounds and tones to the words, it is impossible he can perceive the true force and beauty of the composition, so far at least as they depend upon sound and tone.

To trace this custom, therefore, to its original, may not only be a matter of curiosity, but, by shewing the weakness of its foundation, tempt us to abolish it, and substitute a nobler one in its room.

When our system of education was first established on the revival of literature, by means of the introduction of the languages of Greece and Rome, men's thoughts were wholly turned to books, and consequently to written language. The English, then poor and barbarous, was soon supplanted by the richer, and more polished Latin. The service of the church was in Latin, the laws in Latin. The religious controversies which embroiled all Europe, after the writings of Luther and Calvin had appeared, were all carried on in Latin. Men of the brightest parts throughout Europe, were necessarily engaged in the closest application to that language, which became the universal vehicle of knowledge, in all works of genius and learning. No was its use confined to writing only, but it was also adopted into speech amongst the polite; it revived, in a manner, from its tomb, and once more became a living tongue. Not, indeed, in its original beauty and strength; it might rather be considered as the ghost of the old Roman, haunting different countries in different shapes. For as the true pronunciation of a dead language could not be known, each nation gave to it the sounds which belonged to their own; and consequently it differed as much in point of sound in the several countries where it was spoken, as the native tongues differed from each other in that respect. But as they all agreed in one uniform manner of writing it, for which they had models before them, in the works of the ancients, we need not wonder that the chief attention was given to the written language, in preference to that which was spoken, as they had sure rules to guide them in the one, and none at all in the other. Latin words, upon paper, were universally intelligible to all nations, as they all agreed in the *orthography*, or true manner of writing them, though they were far from agreeing with respect to the *orthoepy*, or true manner of pronouncing them; in which the difference was so great, that the people of one country could scarce understand Latin, or know it to be the same language, when pronounced by those of another.

This will sufficiently account for the fashion which prevailed in those days universally, of applying their time chiefly to the acquisition of skill in letters, not sounds; in writing, not speaking; in words presented to the eye by the sure pen, not in those offered to the ear by the uncertain or erroneous tongue.

Afterwards, when some of the nations of Europe wisely set about the cultivation of their native tongues, in proportion as they grew more perfect, the Latin fell into disuse; till at last it was reduced to its former state of a dead language, and confined chiefly to books. But whilst the Italians, French, and Spaniards were vying with each other, in the improvements of their several tongues, by giving all manner of encouragement to so useful a work, by establishing several societies and academies for the purpose, from whose joint labours excellent grammars and dictionaries were produced; by the assistance of which, and the instruction of masters, not only natives, but foreigners might acquire the most accurate knowledge of those tongues with ease; the English alone remained in the old track, and never to this hour, either by public or private encouragement, have taken one step towards regulating or ascertaining theirs. And yet this seems to have been a point of much more moment to them, and to which they were in a more peculiar manner, and much earlier called upon to give their attention, as the church service, upon the reformation, was performed in their own tongue, which is not the case to this day in those countries, where Latin still maintains that post. The refiners of those living languages justly gave great attention to sound and pronunciation, in the regulations which they established; the English, who from the nature of their constitution and public worship, had infinitely more occasion for the refinement and regulation of their tongue in that respect, left theirs wholly to

chance. Nor are we to wonder at this, when we consider that we have made no alteration in our institutions, with the alteration of times and circumstances. Our establishments for training youth, pursue invariably the same plan, and inculcate only the same studies, which they did before the reformation, when Latin was the universal language; nor has any change been made since the English came into general use. At that time there was no necessity to apply to the study of it; and the barbarous structure of its words could afford no inducement to try what might be done in it, by the power of sounds. Accordingly those who taught English, were amongst the most ignorant of mankind. Their whole business was only to teach pupils the letters, to spell, and read words, no matter with what kind of tones, so as they were well acquainted with the characters, in order to fit them for the Latin school; where the learned languages only being the object of attention, their farther progress in English was neglected. Is not this the case at this day? Are not the rudiments of English now taught by low and ignorant masters, for wretched stipends, and for the same ends? Is it afterwards any-where *regularly taught*? Does not Latin still continue to be the chief language taught in schools, in the same manner as when it was the chief language used on all the important occasions of life? Only with this difference, that whilst it was in a manner a living tongue, by being used in conversation, more care was probably taken with regard to pronunciation, which at present is chiefly transferred to understanding and writing it correctly; and whoever has a mind to make himself master of those points, may have all the guidance of rules, and aid of preceptors: but with regard to the English, he is left to make his own way, as well as he can. This will serve as an explanation of many extraordinary phænomena in this country. Such as, that there are numbers who understand Latin well, who do not understand their native tongue. That there are many who can write Latin elegantly, who are remarkably incorrect in their English style. And that there are many who can produce excellent compositions both in Latin and English, who can neither read aloud, or repeat those very compositions with tolerable propriety, much less with grace. Of these facts, I dare venture to say, there is not one of my hearers who cannot immediately suggest to himself sufficient instances. The natural consequence, indeed, of neglecting the art of elocution, is that of reducing a living language at best to the state of a dead one. For in just and true elocution alone, consists the life of language; that which is false or disagreeable, places it below its dead written state, by the uneasiness and disgust which it occasions. If language, when spoken, gives no pleasure, if it excites no emotions, it is in that case, for the mere purpose of information, far below that which is written; inasmuch as the reader of words can take his own time to make himself master of their meaning, and consider their force. But if public speaking in any country should in general rather give pain than pleasure, occasion satiety, instead of rousing attention, and far from illustrating, should render the sentiments obscure, the people of that country will be necessitated to give their attention to written language; they must prefer the invention of man, to the gift of God; and the noblest ends, and highest delights which language can answer or afford, will be frustrated and lost. Whether we are in that condition or not, let our army of writers, and scarcity of speakers declare.

They who have seen in the clearest light the fatal consequences of this course, did not, at the same time, see the only method by which it might be changed. They did not know how impregnable are the bulwarks which surround the fortress of custom to all attacks by storm, though they may easily be reduced by sapping the foundations. And though the tyrant may be dethroned by reason; yet cannot reason supply his place. His scepter can be wielded only by one of his own race, and custom alone can succeed to custom. All that reason can do, is to preside at the election, and endeavour to fix the choice on the most worthy.

Till a new custom, therefore, shall have opened the way to skill in the art of speaking, so that it may be as easily and certainly attainable, by pursuing that road, as skill in the art of writing now is, by pursuing the others, the latter path must continue to be most frequented. And nothing can assist the new custom in its progress, but the same means that brought forward the old. The art of speaking, like that of writing, must be reduced to a system; it must have sure and sufficient rules to guide such as apply to the study of it; it must have masters to teach it, and to enforce the rules by examples. This alone can ensure success to the studious in that way; and till that be done, it cannot be expected that many will employ their time in laborious researches into an intricate, difficult, and obscure subject, without the least moral certainty of attaining their point, when a clear, obvious, and certain method lies open to them, of arriving at, what they imagine to be, the same end. But had they a like certainty of success in the one way, as in the other, there cannot be any doubt to which the preference would be given, not only on account of the superior advantages resulting from it, but also the superior pleasure which would attend their progress, and the delight which would crown the attainment of that art. How exquisite that must have been when eloquence was at its height, may be gathered from the testimony of Cicero, who, in his Brutus, does not scruple to affirm, "That neither the fruits nor glory which he derived from eloquence, gave him so much delight as the study and practice of the art itself." His words are, "Dicendi autem me non tam fructus & gloria, quam studium ipsum exercitatioque delectat."

The neglect, therefore, to this hour, of so useful, so necessary, so delightful an art, may well excite wonder and amazement. And, indeed, it is hardly possible, but that it should long ere this have got some footing amongst us, had not all, who have pointed out the defect, and proposed methods of supplying it, agreed in laying the blame at the wrong door, and consequently pointing to a wrong quarter for redress. Thus the nation in general, influenced by their sentiments, has, from year to year, waited like the countryman,

"— dum defluat amnis: At ille
"Labitur, & labetur in omne volubilis ævum."

All writers on this subject have agreed in laying the fault on the schools and universities, and that the redress can only come from them. Than which there cannot be any thing more unjust as to the charge, nor more ill-founded than the conclusion.

Thus the author of the Spectator says—"We must bear with this false modesty in our young nobility and gentry, till they cease at Oxford and Cambridge to grow dumb in the study of eloquence." And one of the bishop of Cloyne's queries is, "Whether half the learning and study of these kingdoms is not useless, for want of a proper delivery and pronunciation being taught in our schools and colleges?" Mr. Locke bears hard upon the masters, for not instructing their pupils in English, as well as Latin and Greek, in the following passage. "To write and speak correctly, gives a grace, and gains a favourable attention to what one has to say: and since it is English that an English gentleman will have constant use of, that is the language he should chiefly cultivate, and wherein most care should be taken to polish and perfect his style. This I find universally neglected, nor no care taken any-where to improve young men in their own language, that they may thoroughly understand and be masters of it. If any one among us have a facility or purity more than ordinary in his mother tongue, it is owing to chance, or his genius, or any thing, rather than to his education, or any care of his teacher. To mind what English his pupil speaks or writes, is below the dignity of one bred up amongst Greek and Latin, though he have but little of them himself. These are the learned languages, fit only for learned men to meddle with, and teach; English is the language of the illiterate vulgar: though yet we see the polity of some of our neighbours hath not thought it beneath the public care to promote and reward the improvement of their own language. Polishing and enriching their tongue, is no small business amongst them; it hath colleges and stipends appointed it; and there is raised amongst them a great ambition and emulation of writing correctly: and we see what they are come to by it, and how far they have spread one of the worst languages possibly in this part of the world, if we look upon it as it was in some few reigns backwards, whatever it be now. The great men among the Romans were daily exercising themselves in their own tongue; and we find yet upon record the names of orators, who taught some of their emperors Latin, though it were their mother tongue. 'Tis plain the Greeks were yet more nice in theirs: all other speech was barbarous to them but their own; and no foreign language appears to have been studied or valued amongst that learned and acute people; though it be past doubt that they borrowed their learning and philosophy from abroad." To this Mr. Locke adds, "I am not here speaking against Greek and Latin; I think they ought to be studied, and the Latin at least understood well by every gentleman. But whatever foreign languages a young man meddles with, (and the more he knows, the better) that which he should critically study, and labour to get a facility, clearness, and elegancy to express himself in, should be his own; and to this purpose he should daily be exercised in it."

To the same effect, have many other eminent authors written on this subject; but surely they must have been under the influence of strong prejudice, to charge men with neglect of points, which do not at all belong to their office; and with the omission of studies and arts, which they never profess to teach. A master of a grammar-school is to teach grammar, not oratory; he is to teach Latin, and Greek, not English. And this is what all masters of endowed schools are bound to do; and it is upon these terms, that all others receive their pay. But it may be said, that these studies might be added to the others, and taught at the same time. Surely, they who say so, have not given themselves time to reflect on the nature of these studies, or the state of our established mode of education; else they would see that what they expect is an absolute impossibility. Can any man communicate more knowledge than he is himself possessed of? Can any man teach an art which he never learned? Can any man instruct others in a language, in which he never was instructed? Can either any art or language be regularly taught without a well digested system of rules? And if no such system has hitherto been formed, either with respect to the English language, or the art of speaking it, how shall any man set about teaching them? It will be said, that it is a shame for a master to be ignorant of these. But why more a shame for him, than any other gentleman who has been trained exactly in the same way? or why is more expected from him? Because it would be of great benefit to his pupils. So it might, but if in his course of education, previous to his entering upon that employment, he has had no lights given him as to those points, is he likely to find much leisure in so laborious an office, to investigate the principles of an unpractised art, or the rules of an unstudied language? It is probable that he would make a greater progress in that way, than others of equal abilities, and equal advantages of education, who have dedicated whole lives of leisure to those studies, without ever arriving at the end proposed? But suppose he could teach them, how could he find time to do it? The low stipend which custom has established, as the pay to masters of grammar-schools, obliges most of them to take such numbers of scholars under their care, even to get a tolerable subsistence, that it is with the utmost difficulty they are at present able to prepare them for the university, in the usual time allotted for that purpose, by teaching only Greek and Latin; how is it then possible for them to think of introducing the study of new things, which would require nearly as much time and pains, as those which they are bound to teach, and which they cannot accomplish, without the utmost stretch of application? Though, indeed, considering the salaries paid by parents to masters of grammar-schools, that they are near half of what they pay their grooms, and that they are at least a full fourth, if not a third, of what they pay to the dancing master or fencing master, the music or riding master, the teacher of French or Italian, it must be allowed that they have a just right to expect that those two supernumerary studies should be thrown into the bargain. Nor would it be at all surprising, if some parents should also expect of the master of a grammar-school, that he should teach their sons to dance, because he has legs, and can walk; as well as that he should teach them the art of speaking, because he has a tongue, and can talk. If no attention has been given to these points in the previous part of education, what reason have we

to suppose that the evil can be remedied at the universities? The business of tutors and professors there, is to finish young gentlemen in such studies as they had begun at school, or to instruct them in such new arts and sciences, as they are obliged by their several establishments to teach. If the English language, and the art of speaking, be not in the number of those, what reason have we to expect that they should be taught? Whoever discharges his duty, in what he professes to teach, will find but little leisure to attend to any thing else; or if a few should attempt it, they would upon trial find, that they could make so little progress in instructing others without the help of rules or principles, and they would meet such obstacles in their way, on account of inveterate bad habits contracted through early neglect, as would soon make them give up the voluntary and fruitless labour.

The reason, therefore, that the belles lettres, and philosophy in all its branches, are the only things now taught in a course of liberal education, is obvious enough; because it is for those only that institutions and endowments have been made; by which means they have been reduced to systems, and are regularly taught; they who have been regularly instructed themselves, can teach others by the same rules; and they are induced to take upon them the office of instructing others, from the rewards and emoluments which attend it. From an opposite cause it is, that the English language and the art of speaking are not taught; because there are no institutions or establishments for the purpose; in consequence of which, they have not been reduced to systems, or taught by rule; and no one can regularly instruct another in what he has not regularly acquired himself; nor are there hitherto any rewards or emoluments annexed to such an office.

That there has been no encouragement given, to this day, for the establishment and cultivation of two such important articles to all British subjects, can be accounted for on no other principle, but that of custom, founded upon the strongest prejudice. From the first time that a Latin grammar is put into our hands, we are taught to believe, that a complete knowledge of Latin and Greek will of course give a complete knowledge of English; that reading the ancient writers upon oratory will furnish us with all the powers of elocution; that the same master who instructs pupils in the one, can also teach the other; and that, therefore, any particular establishments for those purposes would be unnecessary: and this prepossession has been so early in life, and with such force stamped upon us, that neither the experience of more than two centuries, nor daily demonstration to the contrary, are able to erase it. Nor need we wonder, that the prejudice has been so universal, when we reflect that some of the most eminent men that these countries have produced were strongly tinctured with it: nay, when we find, in the passage before quoted, that the clear-sighted and candid Mr. Locke was so blinded by it, as not to see that, in the very instance mentioned by him, with regard to the French, he had attributed our deficiency to a wrong cause. For though he has laid the whole blame of the want of culture and improvement in the English tongue, on the masters of grammar-schools, yet he shews clearly, that the culture and improvement of the French took their rise from another source; where he says, 'We see the polity of some of our neighbours hath not thought it beneath the "public care to promote and reward the improvement of their own language." Polishing and enriching their tongue is no small business amongst them; "it hath colleges and stipends appointed it;" and there is raised amongst them a great ambition and emulation of writing correctly.' Was it not, therefore, more natural to impute the low state of English amongst us to the want of such institutions and encouragement, than to the neglect of masters who do not profess to teach it? And was it not more rational to expect the improvement of our tongue from the same methods which brought forward the French; from public encouragement, from colleges and stipends appointed it, than from one which never was found to answer, nay, which, in its own nature, never can answer the end? In like manner, in speaking of elocution, he has imputed our general deficiency in that point also, to the neglect of the masters of grammar-schools; though, at the same time, he clearly points out the only means by which knowledge in that art can be acquired, in these-words: 'This (speaking of elocution), as all other things of practice, is to be learned not by a few, or a great many rules given, but by exercise and application, according to good rules, or rather patterns, till habits are got, and a facility of doing it well.' Now, if there be no such system of rules in being, with regard to English elocution, how can a master give his pupils practice according to good rules? Or what pattern can he afford them, but in himself? And is such a model likely to be a perfect one? Is it not probable, that masters of grammar-schools may have contracted bad habits in that respect, as well as any others trained in the same way? Will the profession itself inspire them with propriety of pronunciation, proper management of the voice, and graceful gesture and deportment? It is time to put an end to such gross prejudice. After waiting for more than two centuries, to no purpose, in hopes that things would mend in one way, it is more than time that another course should be tried. The only method which can be followed with success, is obvious enough. When Cicero gave a definition of elocution, he, at the same time, pointed out the means by which it is to be acquired. His words are these: "Pronunciatio est vocis, et vultus, et gestus moderatio, cum venustate. Hæc omnia tribus modis assequi poterimus, arte, imitatione, exercitatione"^[14]. Here we see that art is placed first; and, indeed, without that guide our labour would be either fruitless, or productive of error. Imitation alone can go no farther than to give us the manner of those whom we imitate; if that be bad, the imitation of it must be so too; but if it should be good upon the whole, and faulty only in part, it doth not follow that we shall acquire both in the same degree; on the contrary, it is generally the case, that the faulty part only, as being the most easily caught, is the consequence of imitation without art: and practice grounded upon such imitation, can only serve to confirm and rivet us in error.

[14] "Elocution is the proper and graceful management of the voice, the countenance and gesture in speaking. These we shall be able to acquire by three ways, art, imitation, practice."

Since, therefore, nothing can be done without art, and all art is founded upon principles, and should be taught by rules, the first necessary step is, to trace the principles of elocution. Those once discovered, to establish upon them a system of rules, peculiarly adapted to the genius of the English tongue, whereby the art of elocution may be as regularly acquired as any other art now is, and a knowledge of English, so far as regards elocution, methodically obtained. To shew that this is far from being impracticable, is one of the chief objects of the first course of lectures which I propose to give upon these subjects. In this course I shall endeavour to lay open the principles of elocution, and the peculiar constitution of the English language, with regard to the powers of sound and numbers, in a method, which should it prove to be as rational as it is new, will, I hope, give the author of these lectures no cause to repent of the time and pains which his researches into these abstruse subjects have cost him. He hopes also to see some good fruits immediately produced from this first course; and that not only the young, but the adult, who should not think these points below their attention, may, from the knowledge of those principles, and some general rules deduced from them, have sure lights to guide them in their future enquiries into those subjects, hitherto involved in the shades of darkness; or obscurely and falsely viewed through the mists of error.

Should his principles be allowed to be just, and his system so far meet with the sanction of men of learning and discernment, he will be encouraged to proceed from a general, to a more particular course; in which he hopes to give all necessary lights to assist, not only speculation, but practice; and by going up to the very first elements, point out a regular way by which children may be rightly trained in the art of speaking, and knowledge of their mother tongue, from the earliest rudiments; instead of being necessarily corrupted and led astray, by the false principles and rules which at present are laid down to them, from the moment the primer is put into their hands, and of the bad effects of which, few ever get the better during the remainder of their lives.

Should it be known in the world, that a design was set on foot at the universities, of introducing the study of the English language, and the art of speaking, upon a practicable plan, and in a systematic way, there would not be wanting all due encouragement to such an undertaking from many of their grateful offspring. What numbers of their illustrious sons, when they have entered into life, have had occasion to lament, that through the neglect of these necessary branches, the chief advantages of their education have been concealed from the world; and all their funds of knowledge, like the hoards of misers, shut up in their own breasts. How many well instructed minds, and honest hearts, furnished with the means, and most ardent inclination to serve their country, have sat still in silent indignation, where her interests were nearly concerned, for want of a practised tongue to disclose what passed in their minds? How many of our wisest members, in the great national council, has shame on that score, kept silent like Mr. Addison? And how many others, after a few attempts, have closed their lips for ever, from self-disappointment, in not finding their utterance correspond to their conceptions? The experience of what they have suffered on such occasions, will teach them to feel, and as far as in them lies, to prevent the sufferings of others in like circumstances.

Should, therefore, upon a candid examination, the proposed plan be judged practicable, there cannot be any doubt but that there would be many found sufficiently jealous of the honour of their country, to contribute to the support of such an establishment, as might wipe away that stain of barbarism which still rests upon this nation, of having left their language hitherto to the guidance of chance: and when it is considered, that no country ever produced so many instances of private benefactions for public service, particularly in the seminaries of learning, it is to be supposed, that, in case of future endowments, a due attention will be paid to that language which is now solely used on all public occasions throughout these realms, and whose improved state must add to the glory of the nation, as well as to that art, which, of all others, is most likely to contribute to the benefit and ornament of individuals, and of the state in general.

Here I cannot help observing, how necessary the introduction of these studies will be to the promoting, and rendering more effectual, the new institutions, which have been lately adopted by the wisdom of the university of Oxford. And first, as to the Vinerean endowment for the study of the law. It has been lately proved, by the strongest and clearest arguments, that not only they who intend to make that their profession, but that all gentlemen in general should acquire a competent knowledge in that branch; but more especially such as have reason to expect that they shall become members of the legislative body. Would it not be a strong inducement to such noblemen or gentlemen to apply more closely to such a study, if, at the same time, they were practised and perfected in an art, which alone could enable them to display to advantage their superior knowledge in the constitution and laws of their country, to their own honour and credit, and support of that constitution, and those laws? And, with respect to Lord Clarendon's benefaction for the introduction of the bodily exercises, that institution may not of itself be found a sufficient inducement to prolong the stay of young gentlemen at the university beyond the usual time, or put an end to the custom of going upon their travels at the most unfit and dangerous season of life (which has proved the chief bane of our British youth), inasmuch as those exercises can also be acquired abroad; and, from caprice or fashion, perhaps, it will be thought too in a more perfect way. But should a critical inquiry into the genius and powers of their own tongue succeed to their knowledge of Latin and Greek; should they be regularly instructed and practised in the art of elocution, in all its various branches; in that case, the most necessary and ornamental of all accomplishments to British subjects could be had only in this country, and would of course detain them from all foreign academies or masters. The very delight which would accompany both the speculative and practical part of those studies, would hold them by the

surest tie, that of inclination.

Should eloquence, that "regina rerum," establish her throne here, they would with pleasure pay her homage; they would listen to the voice of the charmer, far sweeter than the syren's song; nor would they quit the academic grove, till they were masters of the harmony which reigned there. Possessed of that, how greedily would they hoard up knowledge of all kinds, which they might then be enabled to draw forth at will, and display to the utmost advantage! They would not, in that case, think of going into life, till they were well qualified to discharge whatever office they should enter upon. Or such as chose to travel, might then do it with great benefit to themselves, and to their country. "We should not then need" (to make use of a passage in Milton) "the Monsieurs of Paris to take our hopeful youth into their slight and prodigal custodies, and send them over back again transformed into mimics, apes, and kickshaws. But if they desire to see other countries at two or three-and-twenty years of age, not to learn principles, but to enlarge experience, and make wise observation, they will, by that time, be such as shall deserve the regard and honour of all men where they pass, and the society and friendship of those in all places, who are best, and most eminent. And, perhaps, then other nations will be glad to visit us for their breeding, or else to imitate us in their own country. Or whether they be to speak in parliament or council, honour and attention would be waiting on their lips. There would then also appear in pulpits other visages, other gestures, and stuff otherwise wrought, than what we now sit under, oft-times to as great trial of our patience, as any other that they preach to us."

As the motives to the study of elocution will, probably, be allowed to be sufficiently strong, it would be no small inducement to set about the work with vigour, if there were reason to believe, that the speedy accomplishment of the point would follow the attempt; and that we have just grounds for such an opinion, we may easily see, by considering the state of that art in the only country where we can exactly trace its rise and progress. We know that in Rome, from the time that oratory was first regularly taught there as an art, it arrived to its maturity in a very short space; and if it can be shewn, that we enjoy great advantages over the Romans in all the material points necessary to the perfection of that art, it is but reasonable to conclude, that its progress here might be still more rapid.

As this matter has already been discussed in an essay, called,^[15] *British Education*, and as I shall have sufficient opportunities, in my course of lectures, to prove all that has been there advanced, it would be unnecessary, in this place, to expatiate upon this head.

And as I fear that I have already exhausted your patience, I shall hasten to close, with the same exhortation to the revival of the art of elocution, which Quintilian used to the Romans, to engage them in the support of it, when in its declining state.

After having invalidated several objections to the study of that art, he concludes thus:

"Ante omnia sufficit ad exhortationem studiorum, non cadere in rerum naturam, ut quicquid non est factum, ne fieri quidem possit: cum omnia quæ magna sunt atque admirabilia, tempus aliquod quo primum efficerentur, habuerint. Verum etiam si quis summa desperet (quod cur faciat, cui ingenium, valetudo, facultas, præceptor, non deerunt?) tamen est (ut Cicero ait) pulchrum in secundis tertiisque consistere. Adde quod magnos modica quoque eloquentia parit fructus: ac si quis hæc studia utilitate sola metiatur, pene illi perfectæ par est. Neque erat difficile, vel veteribus, vel novis exemplis palam facere; non aliunde majores honores, opes, amicitias, laudem præsentem, futuram, hominibus contigisse, si tamen dignum literis esset, ab opere pulcherrimo, (cujus tractatus, atque ipsa possessio, plenissimam studiis gratiam refert) hanc minorem exigere mercedem, more eorum qui à se non virtutes, sed voluptatem quæ fit ex virtutibus, peti dicunt. Ipsam igitur orandi majestatem, qua nihil Dii mortales melius homini dederunt, et qua remota muta sunt omnia, et luce præsentis et memoria posteritatis carent, toto animo petamus, nitamurque semper ad optima: quod facientes, aut evademus in summum, aut certe multos infra nos videbimus."

[15] Vide B. I. Ch. xv. B. II. Ch. ix.

FINIS.

NOTES TO THE TEXT

In the following notes, numbers refer to pages and lines in the present text. All translations from the Latin are from Loeb Classical Library editions.

6:1-8. Thomas Sheridan, *British Education* (London, 1756), p. 52.

6:24-7:7. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

12:4-6. *Aeneid*, V, 194. Trans. H. Ruston Fairclough. "No more do I seek the first place ... it were a shame to return last."

17:7-22. *British Education*, p. 85.

17:26-18:15. *Ibid.*, pp. 85-86.

19:24-20:5. *De Oratore*, III.xxxv.143. Trans. H. Rackham. "But if on the contrary we are trying to find the one thing that stands top of the whole list, the prize must go to the orator who possesses the learning. And if they allow him also to be a philosopher, that is the end of the dispute; but if

they keep the two separate, they will come off second best in this, that the consummate orator possesses all the knowledge of the philosophers, but the range of philosophers does not necessarily include eloquence."

37:22-24. *Brutus*, vi. 23.

38:11-12. Horace, *Epistles*, I.ii.43. Trans. H. Ruston Fairclough. "... waiting for the river to run out: yet on it glides, and on it will glide, rolling its flood forever."

38:20-23. Richard Steele, *Spectator*, 484, 15 September 1712.

38:25-39:3. George Berkeley, "The Querist," in *Works*, ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (London, 1948), IV, Query 203.

39:7-41:11. John Locke, "Some Thoughts Concerning Education," in *Works* (London, 1823), IX, 181-182.

47:10-19. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

48:9-15. *Ibid.*, p. 179. Sheridan indicates that Locke is discussing elocution, but his topic is writing and speaking.

49:9-13. *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, I.ii.3.

56:14-57:3. John Milton, "Of Education," *Works* (New York, 1931), IV, 290-291.

57:3-10. *Ibid.*, pp. 286-287.

58:17-59:23. *Institutio Oratoria*, XII.xi. 25-26, 29-30. Trans. H. E. Butler. "To which I reply that sufficient encouragement for study may be found in the fact, firstly, that nature does not forbid such achievement and it does not follow that, because a thing never has been done, it therefore never can be done, and secondly, that all great achievements have required time for their first accomplishment.... Finally, whatever is best in its own sphere must at some previous time have been nonexistent. But even if a man despair of reaching supreme excellence (and why should he despair, if he have talents, health, capacity and teachers to aid him?), it is none the less a fine achievement, as Cicero says, to win the rank of second or even third.... Add to this the further consideration that even moderate eloquence is often productive of great results and, if such studies are to be measured solely by their utility, is almost equal to the perfect eloquence for which we seek. Nor would it be difficult to produce either ancient or recent examples to show that there is no other source from which men have reaped such a harvest of wealth, honour, friendship and glory, both present and to come. But it would be a disgrace to learning to follow the fashion of those who say that they pursue not virtue, but only the pleasure derived from virtue, and to demand this meaner recompense from the noblest of all arts, whose practice and even whose possession is ample reward for all our labours. Wherefore let us seek with all our hearts that true majesty of oratory, the fairest gift of god to man, without which all things are stricken dumb and robbed alike of present glory and the immortal record of posterity; and let us press forward to whatsoever is best, since, if we do this, we shall either reach the summit or at least see many others far beneath us."

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