Understanding Public Speaking

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Science and Art

Speaker: Thomas Henry Huxley

Introductory Notes *Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895) was an English biologist, educator, essayist, and leading supporter of Darwinism. Adding to his great contribution to pure science, Huxley is best known to common readers by his efforts on the popularization of natural science. His writings of exposition and controversial debates are always excellently adapted to his purposes: clear, telling, and memorable. As an educator, he made singularly forcible appeals for the role of natural science in general education. The following speech was delivered by Huxley at the annual banquet of the Royal Academy in London on May 5, 1883.*

Sir FREDERIC LEIGHTON, your royal highnesses, my lords and gentlemen:— I beg leave to thank you for the extremely kind and appreciative manner in which you have received the toast of Science. It is the more grateful to me to hear that toast proposed in an assembly of this kind, because I have noticed of late years a great and growing tendency among those who were once jestingly said to have been born in a pre-scientific age to look upon science as an invading and aggressive force, which if it had its own way would oust from the universe all other pursuits. I think there are many persons who look upon this new birth of our times as a sort of monster rising out of the sea of modern thought with the purpose of devouring the Andromeda of art. And now and then a Perseus, equipped with the shoes of swiftness of the ready writer, with the cap of invisibility of the editorial article, and it may be with the Medusa-head of vituperation, shows himself ready to try conclusions with the scientific dragon. Sir, I hope that Perseus will think better of it [laughter]; first, for his own sake, because the creature is hard of head, strong of jaw, and for some time past has shown a great capacity for going over and through whatever come in his way; and secondly, for the sake of justice, for I assure you, of my own personal knowledge that if left alone, the creature is a very debonair and gentle monster. [Laughter.] As for the Andromeda of art, he has the tenderest respect for that lady, and desires nothing more than to see her happily settled and annually producing a flock of such charming children as those we see about us. [Cheers.]

But putting parables aside, I am unable to understand how any one with a knowledge of mankind can imagine that the growth of science can threaten the development of art in any of its forms. If I understand the matter at all, science and art are the obverse and reverse of Nature's medal, the one expressing the eternal order of things, in terms of feeling, the other in terms of thought. When men no longer love nor hate; when suffering causes no pity, and the tale of great deeds ceases to thrill, when the lily of the field shall seem no longer more beautifully arrayed than Solomon in all his glory, and the awe has vanished from the snow-capped peak and deep ravine, then indeed science may have the world to itself, but it will not be because the monster has devoured art, but because one side of human nature is dead, and because men have lost the half of their ancient and present attributes. [Cheers.]

The Funeral Oration

Speaker: Pericles
Source: *History of the Peloponnesian War* written by Thucydides, translated by Charles Forster Smith

Introductory Notes *The Athenian leader Pericles has left the classic description of the culture of his city during its great Golden Age. He gave this famous account during his funeral oration commemorating the Athenian soldiers who had fallen in battle against Sparta in 431 B.C.E. The following paragraphs are taken from Thucydides' book History of the Peloponnesian War, which include an introduction to the funeral where Pericles spoke and the very beginning of his speech.*

In the course of the same winter the Athenians, following the custom of their fathers, celebrated at the public expense the funeral rites of the first who had fallen in this war. The ceremony is as follows. The bones of the departed lie in state for the space of three days in a tent erected for that purpose, and each one brings to his own dead any offering he desires. On the day of the funeral coffins of cypress wood are borne on wagons, one for each tribe, and the bones of each are in the coffin of his tribe. One empty bier, covered with a pall, is carried in the procession for the missing whose bodies could not be found for burial. Any one who wishes, whether citizen or stranger, may take part in the funeral procession, and the women who are related to the deceased are present at the burial and make lamentation. The coffins are laid in the public sepulchre, which is situated in the most beautiful suburb of the city; there they always bury those fallen in war, except indeed those who fell at Marathon; for their valour the Athenians judged to be preeminent and they buried them on the spot where they fell. But when the remains have been laid away in the earth, a man chosen by the state, who is regarded as best endowed with wisdom and is foremost in public esteem, delivers over them an appropriate eulogy. After this the people depart. In this manner they bury; and throughout the war, whenever occasion arose, they observed this custom. Now over these, the first victims of the war, Pericles son of Xanthippus was chosen to speak. And when the proper time came, he advanced from the sepulchre and took his stand upon a platform which had been built high in order that his voice might reach as far as possible in the throng, and spoke as follows:

Most of those who have spoken here in the past have commended the law-giver who added this oration to our ceremony, feeling that it is meet and right that it should be spoken at their burial over those who have fallen in war. To me, however, it would have seemed sufficient, when men have proved themselves brave by valiant acts, by act only to make manifest the honours we render them — such honours as today you have witnessed in connection with these funeral ceremonies solemnized by the state — and not that the valour of many men should be hazarded on one man to be believed or not according as he spoke well or ill. For it is a hard matter to speak in just measure on an occasion where it is with difficulty that belief in the speaker's accuracy is established. For the hearer who is cognizant of the facts and partial to the dead will perhaps think that scant justice has been done in comparison with his own wishes and his own knowledge, while he who is not so informed, whenever he hears of an exploit which goes beyond his own capacity, will be led by envy to think there is some exaggeration. And indeed eulogies of other men are tolerable only in so far as each hearer thinks that he too has the ability to perform any of the exploits of which he hears; but whatever goes beyond that at once excites envy and unbelief. However, since our forefathers approved of this practice as right and proper, I also, rendering obedience to the law, must endeavour to the best of my ability to satisfy the wishes and beliefs of each of you.