

The Province of Expression: A search for principles underlying adequate methods of developing Dramatic and Oratoric Delivery. By S. S. Curry, Ph.D., Dean, School of Expression; Instructor of Elocution, Harvard College, etc. Boston: School of Expression. 1891.

THE name Elocution, which, even with our own early writers, was nearly equivalent to eloquence, having been subsequently transferred to the subsidiary art of delivery, is at last degraded by Dr. Curry to designate an offensive display of technique without soul or real art. This leaves him no better word than "expression" by which to designate the art usually termed elocution. In this essay, which it is certainly not too much to call thoughtful and refined, although it might be found disappointing to a reader who were to expect the profound philosophy to which the adepts of this art nowadays make pretensions, four different schools of delivery are recognized as traditional--the imitative, the mechanical (that of Rush), the impulsive, and the speculative (that of Delsarte). These are all more or less criticised, although not always with entirely convincing arguments. Especially Rush's method is condemned, partly on the ground that it is mainly based upon observations, not of a natural and universal style of expression, but only of a conventional and peculiar style--an allegation far too lightly supported--and partly on the ground that the mechanical application of its rules is found to produce results very odious. But there is a confusion here between the question of the truth and utility of the rules and of the value of a stupid, unrefined, and tasteless application of them. Elocution, in this, may be compared to the art of writing, the usual rules for which are universally acknowledged as sound, so that they cannot be violated with impunity. But let them be applied with never so much technical skill, yet in a soulless, perfunctory, and indiscriminating manner, and the result will be called an academical or rhetorical style. Precisely the same effect is too often produced by elocutionists of the school of Rush. But in the one case, as in the other, it is not the rules that are at fault, but the inartistic use of them.

Now is it fair to expect that an elocutionist should be a great artist or orator; Mr. Mackaye himself, to whom Dr. Curry seems to assign a pre-eminent position among teachers, is not that. The truth is, that the attitude of mind in studying principles is so opposed to its attitude in applying them, that excessive devotion to the theory of any art is somewhat unfavorable to its practice. It is so in some measure even in that principal art to which rhetoric and elocution--if not, indeed, all other arts--are subsidiary, namely, the art of thinking and of feeling aright. And the more an art is of a subsidiary character, the more theory and practice are, or seem to be, at war.

When we inquire what Dr. Curry would propose in place of the four rejected methods, we do not find a very definite reply in this volume. He insists strongly upon training, but that is a matter of course; the whole question is what the method of the training shall be. He thinks it highly important to say that the art of delivery shall be made chiefly a manifestative, and only in small degree a representative, art. But this again seems to be too far back among first principles to escape vagueness. We are promised, however, nine succeeding volumes by Dr. Curry upon his art, so that we cannot expect that the first should contain anything more than generalities.

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