

HINTS TO WRITERS AND SPEAKERS.

The true use of language is to express, and not, as Talleyrand said, to conceal, our thoughts; and he is the best writer and speaker who can convey his meaning in the fewest and choicest words. It is a great mistake to suppose that many words make a good style, or that sounding words give power to speech; they for the most part do but weaken it. I compare the noisy speaker, who culls all the flowers of rhetoric wherewith to garnish his discourse, and whose sentences are rounded with the pomp of an inflated oratory, to a shallow and babbling brook, the stony bottom whereof can be discerned through the musical gloss of its waters. Deep streams make no noise, but are self-sustained, concentrated, and irresistible in their strength; and so the great speaker will manifest his superiority by the grandeur of his thoughts rather than the grandiloquence of his language. This is eloquence, and there is none other.

Uneducated men are very apt to be cheated by sound, and carried away by the manner of a speaker. But it is one thing to tickle the ears of an audience, and another to reach their understandings. I require of a man who professes to teach, that he shall say something wise and memorable, and not talk for an hour and say nothing—a fashion which, of late years, has become very prevalent. It is the matter of a speaker, and not the manner and form of his speech, which really concerns an audience. Declamation is for boys to use, it is their rightful plaything; but men will avoid it. Let a speaker see that he gets something affirmed, and that it be worthy of wise men to consider. It is a degrading thing to pander to an audience; and as the speaker for the time being is the king of his audience, let him take care that he do not disgrace his functions by any mean descents. Speak always through the head to the heart: for this is the true method; and, depend upon it, the heart can only be reached to any enduring purpose by appeals which are founded in truth and justice. Enthusiastic screams may for a moment carry an audience in the whirlwind which they raise; but reflection returns, and there is an end of such influence. I do not, however, proscribe enthusiasm: on the contrary, I regard it as a grand auxiliary to successful eloquence; for enthusiasm is winged earnestness; but I would have the wings cut a little, so as to keep them within bound. All excesses are evil, and without apology. That is the true enthusiasm, when a man, kindling with his subject, speaks the words which his thoughts naturally suggest; for in well-disciplined minds the intellect is ever active and vigilant—even in the stormy tempests of passion and debate—and restrains within the limits of judicious speech the fiery ebullitions which are prompted by enthusiasm. Be earnest in discourse—so that it may be felt that *you* feel—but not over much; and do not strive to be eloquent, but leave the spirit to its own deliverance; for the mind often kindles itself, and at such times failure is certain and inevitable. Eloquence will come of its own free accord, or not at all. It is at once comical and sorrowful to observe some speakers—how they struggle to produce effect by