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Notes on Gesture.

In an analysis of gesture, oratorical and dramatic, we consider the divers attitudes and movements of the body, which give significance to our sentiments; — mainly the postures of the feet, arms, and hands.

The speaker ordinarily occupies a circle, about a yard in diameter, and seldom passes beyond its limits.

I. Feet:

The feet moderately apart, are angularly placed with alternate heel to heel. The right or left foot, when the adjacent hand is used, sustains the body firmly. In shifting the position from right foot to left, or vice versa, the great toe serves as a pivot.

2.

1. Posture: The right foot in poise. It treads lightly and is ready to move, whilst the left foot supports the body.

2. " : The right foot in advance. It bears the chief weight of the body, whilst the left foot slightly lifted at the heel serves to maintain the balance.

3. " : The right foot in lateral movement, under conditions of number 2.

4. " : The right foot in retreat, under conditions of number 2.

The same rule governs the gesture of the left foot.

II. Legs.

The legs neither crooked nor unnaturally stiff, press with strength and dignity on the feet, and readily move with them.

III. Body.

The body is held modestly upright, (unless the sentiment require a deflection corresponding with the movements of the limbs); the chest is prominent; the shoulders are thrown back.

In sign of civility or submission, the upper half of the body is bowed simultaneously with the head.

IV. Arms.

The arms hang unconstrainedly by the side.

In use, they are stretched out almost in a straight line, and revolve from the shoulders. They neither ascend nor descend from different plains of action, abruptly and with velocity.

V. Hands.

For the hands, the wrists are the centres of motion. The thumb is kept outside of the open palm; the forefinger is extended; the other fingers are separated and slightly curved.

The hands are supine or prone: seldom vertical. If the index is needed, the forefinger points; the other fingers partially close on the palm; the thumb lies against the middle finger. If the hands are clasped; 1° the palms cross each other and the ends of the fingers overlap: 2° the fingers and thumbs interlace. If the hands are clinched, the fingers shut tightly on the palms, and the thumbs on the fingers.

The hands move in three plains of semi-circumference extent; - the high, at an elevation of the crown of the head; - the horizontal, on a range with the shoulders; - the low, about 45° from the body. In passing from these respective plains, or in moving in the same plain, the hands with a graceful curve weave together the beginning and the end of the nearest gestures.

The hands are upheld till the emphatic word requires the quick, short demonstrative waive or jerk; and fall gradually to their first position by the side, when the sentence or the action is completed.

The right hand takes five positions in any plain;

viz., one direct, at right angles with the breast; two oblique, at the right and left of the direct; one lateral, on a line with the breast; one retrograde, with the hand thrown back of the lateral. The left hand is occasionally substituted for the right, to note position, antithesis, variety.

If both hands be used, they generally act in concert and in the same plain.

It requires tact to bring one hand from its place of rest and make it auxiliary to the other already employed.

VI. Head.

The head is quietly and gracefully erect. The face confronts the audience; unless attention be directed to oblique points. The features act in unison; and the eyes following the hand in its gesticulation fix their look on objects a little above it, till the gesture is completed.

Significance and application

of

Oratorical Gesture.

I. Feet.

1. Posture: indicates collectedness, pause, deliberation, &c.
- 2&3. " : express ardor, energy, appeals to thought and feeling, &c..
4. " : shows resolution, courage, self reliance, resistance, &c..

II. Arms.

1. Low signifies an inferior condition or object, phys-

sically or morally.

2. Horizontal signify impulse, appeals, affirmation, &c.
3. High signify enthusiasm, aspiration, prayer, adoration; awe, wonder, grief, joy, &c — elevation in a natural or figurative sense.
4. Both arms show a wider space — a multitude — a variety — a more general feeling or appeal; — welcome, thanksgiving, supplication, &c.

III. Hands.

The hands separately or together indicate persons or things, limits or expansion, thoughts and sensibilities; suspend or enforce the meaning of the speaker: sometimes calmly and slowly, sometimes rapidly and vehemently.

1. Open and supine, the hands address in general the mind and heart with argument, petition, kindness, offering, &c.
2. Open and prone, they mark a soothing, calming, commanding influence.
3. The index hand is argumentative, or it numbers, or points to some idea, fact, sensible object.
4. The clinched hand evinces vigor, determination, threat, passion, &c.
5. The clasped hand is expressive of strong emotions.

Significance of dramatic gesture.

This class of gestures denotes greater excitement of the passions, greater rapidity and variety of the move-

ments of the body; less allowable in prose and more, in impassioned poetry. In an essay, or lecture, or doctrinal discourse addressed mainly to the understanding, fewer and more temperate gestures are needed. The right hand direct is generally used. In moral discourses, a wider field of action is assumed.

The feet advance or retire or move sideways in a wider circle. They stride, recoil, stamp.

The hands are

1. Applied (the palms pressed together).
2. Crossed (one overlaid the other, on the breast.)
3. Clasped (in the manner already mentioned).

The head (according to the sentiment) is erect, inclined, forward, averted, fixed, turned, shaken, tossed, &c.

1. The face upraised, the hands clasped, the feet advanced or retired, express hope, joy, rapture, &c.
2. The face bowed, the hands clasped, the feet as above, express grief, remorse, despair, &c.
3. The body bent and shrinking, the hands repellent, the arms bent, one inward, the other outward, express fear, terror, horror, &c.
4. The face averted, the body drawn back, the hands repellent, one arm flexed close to the breast, the other advanced fully, express antipathy, disgust, &c..
5. The hand open or clinched placed gently or forcibly on the breast, expresses sentiments of honor, rectitude, sympathy, affection, &c..

The hand placed on the eyes, expresses shame and grief; on the lips, silence and discretion; on the forehead, (the

head inclined) pain, distress, profound thought, &c: on the chin, deliberation, &c:—

The arms folded on the chest mark pride, defiance, self-possession, reflection, contemplation, &c. This gesture is often used in soliloquy, argumentation, expectation of a reply, &c.

The arms akimbo mark courage, challenge, bravado, arrogance, insolence, &c.

Qualities of Gesture.

1. Natural: 2. moderate: 3. graceful: 4. varied: 5. suitable: b. definite and complete.

Hence some faults to be shunned.

1. Affected airs and apparent study.
2. Gesticulation in the exordium, in the application of scriptural texts (except in rare instances), and excessive movements of the hands and head throughout the discourse.
3. Ungainly attitudes and carriage of the head; contortions of the face; angular, abrupt, embarrassed postures of the limbs, shutting the eyes, or directing them to the ceiling, floor, sides of the room.
4. Repetition of one or two gestures only; viz., the direct, oblique or lateral horizontal: or frequent use of both hands.
5. Forgetfulness of the analogy between the word and the action; in using the lateral for the direct horizontal, the horizontal for the high, or a vertical for a

matic gesture: placing the hand on the breast when the language does not require it, or when the sentiment exists in the hearts of others, not in ours.

b. Raising the hand often above the head - pointing constantly to physical objects, - alternating with the right and the left hand in rapid succession for the sake of variety Sc.

Notation.

r.h - r.hor - r.lw. (right high, right horizontal, right ^{low})

l.h - l.hor - l.lw. (left " , left " , left ")

b.h - b.hor - b.lw. (both " , both " , both ")

r.swe. Sc.. r.sp. Sc.. br. - ind - (right sweep, right spring, breast, index.)

r.f. - r.e. - cl. - cl. - (right forehead, right ear, clinched, clasped.)

fld - k - r.h.p. - r.hor.s. - (fold, kimbo, right high prone, and right horizontal supine).

r.d.hor.cl. (right direct, horizontal, clinched).

r.lat.hor.ind. (right lateral, horizontal index).