



*Best Manners
while Speaking in
a Group or on a
Stage*

There is a story of a politician who had acquired a mannerism of fingering a button on his coat while talking to an audience. On one occasion some friends surreptitiously cut the particular button off, and the result was that the speaker when he stood up to address the audience lost the thread of his discourse.

Gladstone had a mannerism of striking the palm of his left hand with the clenched fist of his other hand, so that often the emphatic word was lost in the noise of percussion.

A common habit of the distinguished statesman was to reach out his right hand at full arm's length, and then to bend it back at the elbow and lightly scratch the top of his head with his thumb-nail.

Balfour, while speaking, used to take hold of the lapels of his coat by both hands as if he were in mortal fear of running away before he had finished.

Goshen, at the beginning of a speech, would sound his chest and sides with his hands, and apparently finding that his ribs were in good order, would proceed to wash his hands with invisible soap.

The strange thing about mannerisms is that the speakers are usually unconscious of them, and would be the first to condemn them in others.

The remedy for such defects lies in thorough and severe self-examination and self-criticism. However eminent a speaker may be with objectionable mannerisms, he would be still greater without them.

Every public speaker has certain characteristics of voice and manner that distinguish him from other men. In so far as this individuality gives increased power and effectiveness to the speaking style, it is desirable and should be encouraged.

When, however, it is carried to excess, or in any sense offends good taste, it is merely mannerism, and should be discouraged.

There is an objectionable mannerism of the voice, known as "pulpit tone," that has come to be associated with some preachers. It takes various forms, such as an unduly elevated key, a drawling monotone, a sudden transition from one extreme of pitch to another, or a tone of condescension.

It is also heard in a plaintive minor inflection, imparting a quality of extreme sadness to a speaker's style. These are all departures from the natural, earnest, sincere, and direct delivery that belongs to the high office of preaching.

Still another undesirable mannerism of the voice is that of giving a rising inflection at the close of successive sentences that are obviously complete.

Here the speaker's thought is left suspended in the air, the hearer feels a sense of disappointment or doubt, and possibly the entire meaning is perverted.

Thoughts delivered in such a manner, unless they distinctly require a rising inflection, lack the emphasis and force of persuasive speaking.

Artificiality, affectation, pomposity, mouthing, undue vehemence, monotony, intoning, and everything that detracts from the simplicity and genuine fervor of the speech should be avoided.

Too much emphasis may drive a thought beyond the mark, and a conscious determination to make a "great speech" may keep the speaker in a state of anxiety throughout its entire delivery.

A clear and correct enunciation is essential, but it should not be pedantic, nor should it attract attention to itself. "What you are prevents me from hearing what you say," might also be applied to the manner of the speaker.

Exaggerated opening of the mouth, audible smacking of the lips, holding tenaciously to final consonants, prolonged hissing of sibilants, are all to be condemned.

Hesitation, stumbling over difficult combinations, obscuring final syllables, coalescing the last sound of one word with the first sound of the following word, are inexcusable in a trained speaker.

When the same modulation of the voice is repeated too often, it becomes a mannerism, a kind of monotony of variety. It reminds one of a street-piano set to but one tune, and is quite as distressing to a sensitive ear. This is not the style that is expected from a public man.

What should the speaker do with his hands? Do nothing with them unless they are specifically needed for the more complete expression of a thought. Let them drop at the sides in their natural relaxed position, ready for instant use.

To press the fist in the hollow of the back in order to "support" the speaker, to clutch the lapels of the coat, to slap the hands audibly together, to place the hands on the hips in the attitude of "vulgar ease," to put the hands into the pockets, to wring the hands as if "washing them with invisible soap," or to violently pound the pulpit—these belong to the list of undesirable mannerisms.

At the beginning of a speech it may give the appearance of ease to place the hands behind the back, but this position lacks force and action and should not be long sustained.

To cross the arms upon the desk is to put them out of commission for the time being. Leaning or lounging of any kind, bending at the knee, or other evidence of weakness or weariness, may belong to the repose of the easy chair, but are hardly appropriate in a wide-awake speaker seeking to convince men.

Rocking the body to and fro, rising on the toes to emphasize, crouching, stamping the foot, springing from

side to side, over-acting and impersonation, and violence and extravagance of every description may well be omitted in public speaking.

Beware of extremes. Avoid a statue-like attitude on the one hand and a constant restlessness on the other. Dignity is desirable, but one should not forget the words of the Reverend Sam Jones, "There is nothing more dignified than a corpse!"

Gestures that are too frequent and alike soon lose their significance. If they are attempted at all they should be varied and complete, suggesting freedom and spontaneity.

When only half made they are likely to call attention to the discrepancy, and to this extent will obscure rather than help the thought. The continuous use of gesture is displeasing to the eye, and gives the impression of lack of poise.

The young speaker particularly should be warned not to imitate the speaking style of others. What is perfectly natural to one may appear ridiculous in another.

Cardinal Newman spoke with extreme deliberateness, enunciating every syllable with care and precision; Phillips Brooks sent forth an avalanche of words at the rate of two hundred a minute; but it would be dangerous for the average speaker to emulate either of these examples.

There is a peculiarity in a certain type of speaking, which, while not strictly a mannerism, is detrimental to the highest effect. It manifests itself in physical weakness. The speaker is uniformly tired, and his speaking has a half-hearted tone.

The lifelessness in voice and manner communicates itself to the audience, and prevents all possibility of deep and enduring impression. Joseph Parker said that when Sunday came he felt like a racehorse, and could hardly

wait for the time to come for him to go into the pulpit.

He longed to speak.

The well-equipped speaker is one who has a superior culture of voice and body. All the instruments of expression must be made his obedient servants, but as master of them he should see to it that they perform their work naturally and spontaneously.

He should be able while speaking to abandon himself wholly to his subject, confident that as a result of conscientious training his delivery may be left largely to take care of itself.