

## ARTICLE VI.

EDMUND BURKE.

BY THE LATE GEORGE SHEPARD, D.D., PROFESSOR IN BANGOR THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

I PROPOSE as the subject of this lecture Edmund Burke. I shall present so much of his history as will illustrate the growth of his power as an orator, and discuss the excellences and defects of his oratory, turning the whole, so far as may be, to present practical account.

Edmund Burke, the son of a respectable Irish barrister, was born in Dublin, January 1st, 1730, o.s. In early childhood his constitution was very delicate, and threatened to give way utterly under the influence of a passion for reading, which, even then, he indulged without restriction. In order to check the consumptive tendencies lurking in his system, he was sent to reside with his grandfather in a region remarkable for its wild and romantic beauty. The spot which fed the imagination of the author of "The Faerie Queen" also nourished that of the most splendid of orators. At the age of twelve Burke was placed under the care of Abraham Shackleton, a quaker of considerable talents and reputation, who conducted a classical school at Ballitore, about thirty miles from Dublin. Referring to this period in a debate in 1780, he says: "I have been educated as a Protestant of the Church of England, by a dissenter who was an honor to his sect, though that sect has ever been considered as one of the purest. Under his eye I read the Bible morning, noon, and night, and have ever since been a happier and better man for such reading." In 1743, at the age of thirteen, Burke became a member of Trinity College in Dublin University. Here he remained six years, acquiring no particular distinction, for, though he was not indolent, he would not study in the pre-

scribed line any farther than was made necessary by the rules of the college. His delight was in desultory reading; reading just as inclination took him. Burke's studies, at this period, were the classics, history, philosophy, general literature. A little later, he gave himself to logic and metaphysics. He seems to have been a diligent student of human nature, and took strongly to those works which laid open the springs of human motive and action. Bacon's *Essays* he read again and again, with ever increasing admiration, pronouncing them "the greatest works of that great man." Shakespeare, Addison, LeSage, Smollett, and Fielding, were decided favorites. Of Milton, for his splendor of diction, his boundless learning, and classic allusions, and for "the scriptural grandeur of his conceptions," he never grew weary. Young's *Night Thoughts*, characterized at once by an epigrammatic smartness and a sombre grandeur, he committed largely to memory. Some of the leading theological treatises, written during the last century, with so signal ability, he read with great care. In the study Demosthenes was his favorite orator, though in the forum he followed Cicero. The "Lives" of Plutarch he regarded as the most captivating reading in the whole range of memoirs. The Greek historians he preferred to the Latin; but the Latin poets to the Greek. That he should be charmed with Horace is altogether in good taste; but that he should prefer the *Aeneid* to the *Iliad* is very remarkable, since he thus placed himself in opposition to the concurrent verdict of the criticism of ages.

In 1750 Burke went to London to pursue his studies for the bar at the Middle Temple. Though never interested in the law, he saw enough of it to convince him that it was "one of the first and noblest of sciences, a science which does more to quicken and invigorate the understanding than all other kinds of learning put together." His tastes did not lead him with any great enthusiasm in this line; as he felt that, "except in persons very happily born, it was not apt to open and liberalize the mind in the same proportion." It is manifest that at this period he was wholly unsettled as to his future

course in life ; for in 1753, when on a journey into Scotland, he learned that the chair of logic in the University of Glasgow, then vacant, would be awarded to the successful competitor in a public disputation, he at once offered himself as a candidate. But learning, on inquiry, that local influences precluded the possibility of his election, Burke withdrew his application ; and the place was given to a Mr. James Clow, who afterward proved himself as successful in achieving oblivion as Burke in achieving a world-wide fame.

From 1751 onward about ten years Mr. Burke seems to have had no settled outward aim. But every moment was devoted to intense labor, or conversation on the topics of his study. He now acquired the habit of thinking, working out trains of thought, thoroughly digesting his multifarious reading, and systematizing his views on all the subjects he considered. These habits were maintained during nearly fifty years, to the time of his death. During this period Burke not only read, but wrote, a vast deal, — letters, essays, pamphlets. His first appearance before the public was in a pamphlet of one hundred and six pages, entitled, *A Vindication of Natural Society*, written in imitation of the style of Lord Bolingbroke, in order to exhibit the fallacy of Bolingbroke's argument against religion, by showing that it went equally to the overthrow of all civil government.

The next performance of Burke was his *Treatise on the Sublime and Beautiful*, published in 1756. By the power of philosophical analysis herein displayed, the radiance shed into regions of metaphysical obscurity by a fine imagination, and by the singular graces and harmonies of the style, this work at once seized the public attention, and rose suddenly to an extraordinary popularity. And, while all were looking for the author among veterans in science and literature, great was the general astonishment when it was announced that the work was the production of an obscure student of twenty-six.

Its author was everywhere greeted with applause, and his acquaintance sought by the most distinguished literary men

and patrons of learning. In 1757 Mr. Burke married the accomplished daughter of Dr. Nugent of Bath, at whose house he had been staying for medical treatment, and settled upon literature as a profession. During this year he prepared, perhaps with the co-operation of his two brothers, a work in two octavo volumes, entitled, *An Account of the European Settlement of America*. These labors, incidentally undertaken, had no small influence in determining his subsequent course as a statesman. Another of his literary achievements was the founding of the *Annual Register*, which has so long survived its originator. At first he prepared the entire volume, then for several years superintended its preparation. His labor upon this work, whose plan embraced a "succinct statement of debates in Parliament" for the year, a historical sketch of all current events connected with European politics, and a review of literary and scientific progress, with brief notices of recent important works, was eminently fitted to train him as a practical statesman.

In 1761 Burke went to Ireland, in company with, and as an assistant to, the man celebrated as "single-speech" Hamilton, who had been selected by Lord Halifax on his appointment as Lord Lieutenant, as principal Secretary of State, and thus acting minister. In this connection Burke continued until the expiration of the secretaryship, about two years, and then rejecting Hamilton's proposal to prolong the relation, as an "intolerable demand, amounting to no less than a claim of servitude during the whole of my [his] life," quitted it as uncongenial and, we may add, unnatural; for it was the lion waiting on the jackall. Two years more elapsed, we find Burke coming into his proper place. The Marquis of Rockingham, in his first premiership, being desirous of availing himself of Burke's splendid abilities, invited him to become his confidential adviser, with the office of private secretary; and by the influence of Lord Verney he was brought into Parliament, as member for Wendover, in Buckinghamshire. Burke entered Parliament in 1766, and in January, at the opening of the session, made his first speech on American affairs. It

was a grand opening ; the argument, the eloquence, the information displayed, astonished the House, and called forth the praise of Chatham, who ordinarily spoke not to encourage, but to intimidate and crush. Burke's success on the floor of the Commons was not the result of caprice or accident. He had a mind fitted to succeed, and he had prepared that mind for the conflict he knew he must sustain. He had stored information on the topics he knew would come up ; particularly the details of the commercial system. He had profoundly meditated politics. He went as a spectator into the Commons, and observed and studied the kinds of speaking there called for. He went into the debating clubs, and practised in that art, and struggled for the needed facility. He took lessons also of the great actor of that age, Garrick, in the management of the voice and the proprieties of action.

Mr. Burke was undoubtedly of great service in the Rockingham administration. His counsels were followed in all American affairs. But this ministry went out in July 1776, and soon after was vigorously defended, if not triumphantly vindicated, by Mr. Burke in his "Short Account of a Short Administration." Lord Chatham succeeded in power, at the head of the "dovetailed" Cabinet, so graphically and satirically described by Mr. Burke in his speech on the repeal of the tea duty. Upon this followed the Grafton administration, short, almost, as the preceding ; and Burke being re-elected for Wendover, became the principal orator of the opposition.

But it was during the period of Lord North's premiership, extending from 1770 to 1780, that Burke appeared in all his mastery and in all his glory. Throughout this period he stood forth as the champion of justice and liberty, at the head of one of the most formidable oppositions which ever rose in the British Parliament. In 1782 the North ministry went out, and the opposition came into their place ; the Marquis of Rockingham being again premier, and Burke paymaster of the forces. In a few months the Marquis died, and Lord Shelburne, who headed a branch of the Whigs, came into his place. Burke and his friends withdrew, and stood in the opposition. Then followed

the famous coalition between Fox and Lord North, which Mr. Burke was persuaded to join, and which resulted in the overthrow of the Shelburne ministry, and the placing of these men again in power; Burke being once more invested with the lucrative office of paymaster. This incumbency again was of very short continuance. The ministry was overthrown in 1784, in the attempted passage of the celebrated East India Bill, which, if not framed by Burke, was sustained and advocated by him in one of his most masterly speeches. Upon this overthrow Pitt came into power, at the age of twenty-four, and, with one short interval, held the reins of government until his death, in 1806,—a ministerial service of peculiar and terrible responsibility during twenty years of the most difficult period in all the English annals.

With the administration of Pitt, commenced another grand division of Burke's parliamentary life. It began with the second long period of whig opposition. Mr. Fox, not Burke, was now the leader. We find the latter now and then assailing the minister with great asperity, as in the debate on the commercial treaty with France, in January 1787, and on the occasion of the king's indisposition in 1788, at which time the regency question arose; Burke taking the ground that irreparable incapacity in the sovereign caused a demise of the crown.

The quiet dignity with which Burke yielded the place of precedence to Fox and devoted his pre-eminent abilities to his support, is almost without parallel in the history of politics, and should be duly considered in forming a judgment in regard to his subsequent separation from his rash friend, and his steady refusal, even on his death-bed, to listen to any terms of reconciliation. "It had cost him," he replied to the kindly message of Mr. Fox, "the most heartfelt pain to obey the stern voice of duty in rending asunder a long friendship; that his principles continued the same, and *could be enforced only by a general persuasion of his sincerity.*"

In this ministry began one of the greatest labors of Mr. Burke's life,—his seven years' toil in the impeachment of

Warren Hastings. On the 16th of June, 1785, Hastings landed in England, and within four days Burke gave notice that, if no one else came forward, he should move for an inquiry into his conduct as Governor General of India, with a view to his impeachment. Only a man of the highest courage could have undertaken this prosecution. Hastings was secure on every side. He was a personal favorite of the king, had gained the confidence of the Board of Control, and the warm support of the East India Company, and the friendship of British residents in India, while his supporters and friends in England were of the highest rank and power. In the face of such opposition, added to that of the ministry, failure seemed inevitable. But as Lord Macaulay says: "Oppression in Bengal was to him the same thing as oppression in the streets of London," and he did not rest till he had put before the eyes of England the atrocities and corruptions of British rule in India. Mr. Burke drew the articles of impeachment, and delivered them to the House of Commons, April 25th. On the 10th of May, 1787, attended by the members of the Commons, he went to the bar of the House of Lords, and formally impeached Hastings of high crimes and misdemeanors. The trial began on the 13th of February, 1788, in Westminster Hall. Mr. Burke's opening speech occupying four days. This speech astonished even those who knew best his vast resources and powers, and has been characterized as "the greatest intellectual effort ever made before the Parliament of Great Britain." During the delivery of portions of it his auditors were most profoundly affected; their "bosoms became convulsed with passion, and those of more delicate organs, or a weakened frame, swooned away." Even Mr. Hastings said: "For half an hour I looked up at the orator in a revery of wonder, and actually felt myself to be the most culpable man on earth." The trial occupied one hundred and forty-seven days, through a stretch of seven years, Mr. Burke making his closing speech during the darkest days of the French Revolution. To this he refers in these words of his peroration:

“My lords, your house yet stands; it stands; it stands, a great edifice; but, let me say, it stands in the midst of ruins — in the midst of ruins that have been made by the greatest moral earthquake that ever convulsed and shattered this globe of ours. My lords, it has pleased Providence to place us in such a state, that we appear every moment to be on the verge of some great mutation. There is one thing, and one thing only, that defies mutation — that which existed before the world itself. I mean *justice*; that justice which, emanating from the Divinity, has a place in the breast of every one of us, given us for our guide with regard to ourselves, and with regard to others; and which will stand after this globe is burned to ashes, our advocate or our accuser before the great Judge, when he comes to call upon us for the tenor of a well-spent life. My lords, the commons will share in every fate with your lordships. There is nothing sinister which can happen to you, in which we are not involved. And if it should so happen that your lordships, stripped of all the decorous distinctions of human society, should, by hands at once base and cruel, be led to those scaffolds and machines of murder upon which great kings and glorious queens have shed their blood, amid the prelates, the nobles, the magistrates who supported their thrones, may you in those moments feel that consolation which I am persuaded they felt in the critical moments of their dreadful agony! . . . . My lords, if you must fall, may you so fall! But if you stand — and stand I trust you will, together with the fortunes of this ancient monarchy; together with the ancient laws and liberties of this great and illustrious kingdom — may you stand as unimpeached in honor as in power! May you stand, not as a substitute for virtue; may you stand, and long stand, the terror of tyrants; may you stand, the refuge of afflicted nations; may you stand, a sacred temple for the perpetual residence of inviolable *justice*!”

This Revolution was the great event in which, for the remainder of his days, Burke seemed, intellectually, morally, and politically to live and move and have his being. Its coming was, for the most part, at first, hailed with joy. But in the general acclamation one voice was wanting. From the beginning, Mr. Burke had no sympathy with the movement. He looked on with suspicion, and he soon saw principles and developments which called out the masterly exertions of his pen. There was no other such pen in Europe. For the attractive splendor and the argumentative power of its productions, it stood unrivalled. He devoted, henceforward, his great capacities to what he deemed the cause of religion, order, and good government in Europe,

taking his stand against Jacobin ferocity and the impiety of the atheists.

He soon fell off from the whig party ; and in 1794, largely through the exertions and influence of Mr. Burke, the junction of the old whigs with the ministry was effected.

The latter part of his life was given more to writing than to speaking ; he having withdrawn from Parliament in 1794. The leading works he sent forth at this period were his "Reflections on the Revolution in France," his "Letter to a Noble Lord," and his "Thoughts on the Prospect of a Regicide Peace." What is remarkable about these productions of his declining life is, that in freshness, in fervor, in brilliancy of imagination and adornments of style, they even surpass the efforts of his earlier years. The two first named — his "Letter to a Noble Lord," and his "Reflections on the Revolution" — are, perhaps, his greatest performances ; the Reflections his unquestioned master-piece. This was more carefully written and more elaborated than any other production of his pen. Indeed, it was retained and worked over, large portions of it recomposed and revised, until his printer lost all patience, and hotly remonstrated with him. But, though the people thus waited for it, they most greedily caught it when it came. The demand was, indeed, unexampled ; nineteen thousand copies being sold in England the first year of its appearance, and thirteen thousand in France in the same time. This work was issued in 1790, the "Letter to a Noble Lord" in 1794, the "Thoughts on the Prospect of a Regicide Peace" in 1796.

Burke's death took place, July 8th, 1797. He may be said to have endured two deaths. The first, and the more fatal, on the demise of his son, in 1794. This event crushed him, wasted him, destroyed him. He could hardly be said to live after that. He lingered ; he suffered ; still he performed some great intellectual feats ; his mind poured out its riches, and his imagination blazed with all its early glory. But his great heart was incurably smitten. And the bodily organ was stilled, at length, through the literal enlargement caused by the tumultuous swellings of his grief.

In person Mr. Burke was five feet ten inches high, erect, well formed, but never robust. His countenance was by no means remarkable for intellectual expression,—far from this, if we may form a judgment from the prints we now see of him. In his ordinary dress he is represented as having been somewhat peculiar, and even negligent. In his later years he was distinguishable by a tight brown coat, which seemed to impede all freedom of motion, and a little bob-wig, with curls, which, in addition to his spectacles, made him recognizable, by those who had never seen him, the moment he rose in the House of Commons.

In his moral character Mr. Burke stood wholly unimpeached. Gambling, drinking, and kindred vices found no patronage in his example. He was a firm believer in the institutions and doctrines of Christianity. To these he fled as a refuge in the season of his trouble; and in the support and comfort of these he desired to die, trusting to obtain the divine mercy through the intercession of a blessed Redeemer, whom, in his own words, he “had long sought with unfeigned humiliation, and to whom he looked with a trembling hope.”

The domestic character and habits of Burke were admirable. His family affections were singularly strong. When wounded in these, the pain, the writhings of his agony were almost without a parallel in the records of bereavements. The chapter which describes the death-scene of his only son, who was called from him at the age of thirty-six, — his hope and his pride, — is fearful in its exhibitions of the paroxysms of his grief. “His bursts of affliction,” says the account, “were of terrific force; so overwhelming, indeed, as to frighten, and almost to paralyze, those who were around him. For a moment he would be calm; but it was the calm of unutterable despair; then, a sudden whirlwind of agony coming across him, he would burst from all control, rush into the chamber where his dead son was laid, and violently dash himself, as it happened, on the bed, or on the lifeless body, or on the floor; calling, in the most affecting exclamations, for the hope of his age, the stay of his life, the only

comfort of his declining and now joyless years." This scene is altogether characteristic. Burke, throughout, was a man of uncontrollable passion; now tender in the gentle flow, and again terrible in the heaving storm and the thundering and dashing fury of his great emotion. His chief weakness lay in the violence, the overmastering, sometimes tornado strength, of his passions. This, indeed, produced much lofty and heated, flashing and scathing eloquence, but it impelled often to imprudences, which brought upon his cause utter prostration and defeat.

The imagination, in Burke, was the ascendant and kingly faculty—kingly, we may call it, for it made all beings and all scenes and all realms, the heights and the depths, pay tribute, and send in the material for his gorgeous structures and fine adornments. Burke's imagination was remarkable for the variety, as well as the splendor, of the forms which it worked up; for the vividness and the grand profusion of its sketchings; remarkable for the frequent boldness of its adventure; remarkable, also, for his mastery of it in its most perilous careering—one moment appearing on the outer limit of propriety, "trembling on the brink of absurdity, and anon, like some skilful charioteer who has been driving on the edge of the precipice, he suddenly turns the glowing wheels of his fancy, and is once more in a secure and beaten track."

The knowledge of Burke seemed to be almost without limits. In power of acquisition he was a perfect prodigy; and through life he was always and earnestly at it. With him it was knowledge in its vastest and most stupendous comprehension, and in its humblest and minutest details. He passed nothing, was at home in every region. "Enter upon what subject you will," said Johnson, "and Burke is ready to meet you." All his knowledge was at command. It was his strength and his wealth, taken in by what one terms that "vivid mental seizure" which made it at once "a member, a very part of his mind."

Mr. Burke's mind was evidently of the philosophic cast and habit; a mind which from the specific instance would

deduce the universal truth, and which was ever generalizing the most transient and trifling incidents into lessons of permanent wisdom. He has had almost unequalled credit for foresight and sagacity. Though he dealt a great deal in bold and sheer prediction it was rare that the event did not verify the oracle. All through his public career Burke took the side of right, of order, of constitutional freedom against oppression, and every form of violence and injustice. Tyranny of one, or of the multitude, met his soul's intensest abhorrence and resistance.

Burke is remarkable for being both a writer and a speaker. Very few have held both these great gifts in supremacy; and, perhaps, no one has ever equalled Burke in the wielding of the two. Certainly no one has surpassed him. As a writer his qualities are indisputably transcendent. From him dates a new era in English style and in the development of the powers of the English tongue. His was a new style; nothing like it had been seen. There had preceded, the Addisonian ease, delicacy, flexibility, naturalness; and the Johnsonian pomp, stateliness, and stiffness. Burke, as it were, steered between, and made the excellences of both surrender their secrets and peculiar attractions to him. The result is, a style having a great variety and range of properties; a style made by the exhaustion into it of the broadest and wealthiest vocabulary ever lodged in one human mind. The style is like the man, — the style of Edmund Burke, — the fitting outlet of such fountains. It would not be thus fitting had it not breadth, fulness, majesty, — a flow now smooth and sweet, now dashing and roaring in its swollen and fretful impetuosity. There is never monotony in it; no harmony prolonged till wearisome; or gaudy excess of ornament; no luscious, surfeiting sweetness. All is wholesome, stirring. It keeps up expectation. It bears you forward, refreshed and invigorated with your continued advance. But his style may be as fitly considered in what we say of him as an orator, for it has been justly said of his pamphlets and orations, that "These are written speeches, or those are spoken disserta-

tions, according as one is over studious of method and closeness in a book, or of ease and nature in an oration."

Burke may be said to have introduced a new era in oratory as well as in writing. Previous to his day there had been but little accomplished and effective speaking in the British Senate. There went before, the towering reputation of Bolingbroke and William Pitt; there were great powers on the stage with him. It is truly and eloquently said of this period that, "The mere muscular force of the human mind never exhibited more prodigious feats than in the political contests of the days of Chatham, Holland, Pitt, and Fox. The whole period, from the fall of the Walpole ministry to the death of Pitt, was an unrelaxed struggle of the most practised, expert, and vivid ability. But it was the struggle of the arena, a great rivalry for the prize of the people, the fierce and temporary effort of great intellectual gladiators." Among the orators of that period it would not be correct to say Burke was the greatest, the most effective; for in the single matter of present, stringent effectiveness there were greater than he. His eloquence wrought as a fascination, and woke the most enthusiastic wonder. The greater occasions of its display were those which grew out of the American struggle, and the East Indian affairs and oppressions. The first speech of his which took any unusual attention was that on the tea-tax, delivered April 1774, in reply to a vehement one on the ministerial side. Whatever may have been true as to some of Mr. Burke's later and more diffuse efforts scattering his audiences, this speech had no such effect. "When it was told," says a contemporary, "that Burke was on his legs, public expectation was excited; but it was only when he had thoroughly entered on his subject that the reports of his extraordinary brilliancy on that night suddenly crowded the house. The hearers in the galleries could scarcely be restrained from bursting into loud applause. At one of those hidden and powerful turns with which the speech abounded, Lord John Townsend, who had been familiar with all the leaders of debate, broke out: 'Good heavens, what a man

is this! Where could he have found such transcendent abilities?'” That exclamation of the noble Lord reveals the precise nature of the effect Burke’s eloquence was fitted to produce,—admiration of the powers and exploits of the man,—not a driving into you the cause he advocated, compelling you to think, and feel, and go with him. Such was the structure of Burke’s sentences and paragraphs; such the harmony, splendor, finish of the speech which he poured from his lips, that it was supposed he had written it all out beforehand, and that the speaking was from memory. But it was not the case, even when it seemed impossible that it could be otherwise. His practice, we are told, was to prepare the outline, the material of illustrations, and then trust wholly to the inspirations of the moment for the filling up. This was done with a perfection that equalled that of the careful elaboration of his pen. Mr. Burke seems not to have been one who reached a part of the effort, and sometimes the greater part, by significance of manner. He was earnest always, often impassioned, sometimes almost frantic; but, though he took lessons of Garrick, he never exhibited any thing approaching grace, or speaking force of manner.

The commendable and masterly features of Burke’s oratory were many; his powers, as we have seen, transcendent; his fame great; there were often thrilling effects at the time of his speaking; and yet the result, as appearing in the votes and actions of those addressed, commonly fell far short of the promise of the performance. In looking into the works of Burke, analyzing and studying them, we might profitably ask, not wherein did his strength consist, but in what did his weakness lie. What was it that embarrassed and restricted these prodigious abilities,—for prodigious they were,—the very gifts and traits the orator must have for his greatest achievements? Let me name a few of these. Edmund Burke had the knowledge, the material, for any service or any structure in this line,—material from all parts of the world, if not from all the worlds of immensity. The power of method, logic, argument were by no means wanting. Let

any one look into the effort on the conciliation of America, and he will see the *lucidus ordo*, the skilful and obvious method, the great steps and strides of a noble argument, artistically arranged. Burke, in speaking, seemed a perfect master of all the styles the orator ever needs for his purposes. He was most at home when rioting in his boundless affluence of thought and imagery and language; when dealing in a lavish grandeur and poetic magnificence; when constructing sentences which embodied the wealth, and moved with the charm and magic of his lofty genius,—sentences and paragraphs which will stand as models of classic taste and authority so long as the language shall live. Burke could step down into a lower and more homely region, the orators region, and use language the closest and most stringent and penetrating. There are passages of this sort the great Grecian master never surpassed. For example, in his speech on American taxation, he says: “Do you mean to tax America, and draw a productive revenue from her. If you do, speak out, name, fix this revenue, settle its quantity, define its object, provide for its collection, and then fight when you have something to fight for. If you murder, rob; if you kill, take possession; and do not appear in the character of madmen as well as assassins, vindictive, bloody, tyrannical without an object.” Burke’s range of language was astonishing. He was as familiar with the homely, pointed Saxon as with the sounding and adorning classical element. He was terrible as well as offensive in the coarseness of his epithets; would come down upon his adversary, and stab him through with a rough, rusty blade which he picked up for the purpose out of the filth of the gutter. For power in the command and smiting force of epithets, it sometimes seems as if Mr. Burke had no superior.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I should like to give some specimens of this range in Burke’s vocabulary, from the vulgar, rude, offensive, to the most elevated, ornate, and classical. We find expressions and phrases like these: “the stench of their arrogance,” “their mental blotches and running sores,” “snorting away the fumes of indigested blood,” “six great chopping bastards,” “pelted a volcano with pebble-stones.” Speaking of that queer dovetailed administration which the elder Pitt con-

Another gift he had which belongs to the orator, the power over facts, a perfect ascendancy in commanding, calling up, and using them. Taking the dryest mass of details, a mass which should look as forbidding as a heap of bones, and as confused and unmeaning, Burke would make them at once instinct with life and motion — would construct them into forms of symmetry, clothe, color, and marshal them into argumentative array, and you are astonished that the dead, unseemly things you looked upon are now before you living, attractive creations. Mr. Burke's oratory was throughout singularly life-like; very rarely stale, prosing, dull. There was within feeling, a fountain of it not often exhausted; a fire which never went out, and which sometimes worked and heaved with a volcanic depth and strength. Mighty passion, we have seen, lodged in the soul of the man, an impassioned vehemence was everywhere characteristic of his eloquence. This fire of the mind, when up, set the wheels of imagination in motion in a fervid, onward career. No eloquence in the world was ever richer or more splendid, vivid, or flashing than that of Burke. It abounded in the most graphic sketchings; in the most truthful pictures, — pictures that would startle and arrest with the palpable force of reality. In this connection there rises up to the reader of Burke, as an instance, that blood-curdling picture of the carnage and desolation wrought in the Carnatic by Hyder Ali. Sometimes his picture is elaborately and broadly drawn; sometimes it is the result of a single stroke of the pencil. Of this last, a scene at a stroke, which is the rarer and greater power, Burke is clearly possessor. Thus, at the close of his speech

structed, he says: "Persons had a single office divided between them, who had never spoke to each other in their lives, until they found themselves, they knew not how, pigging together, heads and points, in the same truckle bed." Take now another sort, — a sentence from the celebrated passage on the Queen of France. "And surely, never lighted on this orb, which she hardly seemed to touch, a more delightful vision. I saw her, just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she had just begun to move in, — glittering like the Morning Star, full of life and splendor and joy. I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look which threatened her with insult.

on the impeachment of Hastings, he asks: "Do you want a criminal? Here you have one; and you need look for no successor from that quarter. Warren Hastings has not left substance enough in India to nourish such another delinquent." Quickly and most graphically done; an instance absolutely perfect in its kind of the electric power in eloquence.

We may go through the speeches of Burke in the exercise of the severest analysis and we shall find enough to satisfy us that he possessed all the great gifts, qualities, and powers of the orator; such as weight and wealth of thought; power of logical arrangement and argument, power to call out the whole sweep and expressiveness of language; mastery of all varieties of style, the beautiful and the homely, the smooth, the balanced, or the rude and ragged, the soaring and amplifying, or the close-pointed and sharply-assailing; the power of passion and the power of the pencil, of whatever can attract the eye, or enter the mind, or move the heart; *all* these in a respectable, and some of them in the highest, degree met in Burke, and yet our doctrine, indeed the verdict of the world, is, that he was not in the highest sense an orator. On the whole his career as an orator may be set down as coming at the time somewhere in the vicinity of a failure. While in some respects it was crowned with marked success, in others, in the essential consideration, it came notoriously short. It has been as truly, as admirably said; "that he overwhelmed dull men with imagery which would have lapped a poet in Elysium; he flashed wit upon purblind eyes; he drew up the treasures of philosophy from their deepest depths, and poured them out before men of the counting-house; he called 'spirits from the vasty deep,' and displayed all the creations and lustres of a mind master of the whole magic of eloquence before a crowd of people who thought only of their suppers and the division."

The point is here. Burke had that in him, and in his discourses, which was competent to the largest results; but the effect was broken, sometimes nullified, by the gorgeous and

overloading excesses of the performance. Burke would have wielded almost unequalled oratorical power, if the effective elements in him could have stood out by themselves, could have gone forth, worked, and smitten, unembarrassed by these other things. Burke, then, would have been perfected as an orator, not by adding something, but by taking much away. These detracting and defeating excesses came, in part, from the continual indulgence of his strong propensity to philosophize, amplify, and generalize. He is described as "amplifying and expanding the most meagre materials into brief, but comprehensive dissertations on political science, incrusting, so to speak, the nucleus of the most significant fact with the most sparkling crystallization of truth." In his argument, also, there was the fault of too vast a sweep, the giving to dry, compressed logic, plumage and wings, and pushing her out on the widest excursions—the fault of tracing remote analogies, and of making multiplied and nice distinctions. But the great offender and burdener was that imagination we have described, bringing in all conceivable wealth of imagery; accumulating figures and extending illustrations till they became a dazzling and bewildering veil of light, hiding the process, progress, the very gist of the argument. The great fault, in his case, came along because the orator was not kept uppermost. The business to be done, the object to be reached, was not set right before the mind, the mind braced up, concentrated intensely upon it, and held most rigorously to it. It was Edmund Burke the man, pouring out his exorbitant fulness, indulging in all his huge prodigality; not Edmund Burke the orator, thinking only of the people before him, and how he should enter them and carry them,—now transfer himself to them, now implant the great thought and purpose of his own soul in their souls,—himself ready to be, to sacrifice, anything in order to secure the highest effectiveness. The fault, burdening and embarrassing, came from not considering the people before him, and his business with them. Had he done this, there would have been adaptation, everything said

reaching the end; and whatever would not reach the end, and make a mark, would have been left aside, by no means brought in. Thus we see how, by taking from Burke his exuberances, stripping him in a measure of his plumes, and dimming his splendors, there would be left in him all the qualities of the highest effectiveness. I know not but beneath, buried under that opulent profusion, we might find both the soul and the sinews of a veritable Demosthenes.

I would remark here, that, while Burke was not the most effective on being heard, he is, and ever will be, most admirable on being read. The very qualities which stand in the way of his powerfully entering the ear and the heart of his auditor are those which now fascinate the eye and the soul of the reader. We here get this doctrine, which I believe is true and valid: That the same style and structure cannot be highly adapted to both these ends, acceptable and achieving in both these fields. It was the significant inquiry of Fox, respecting a certain speech, "Does it read well? Depend upon it, it was not a good speech, if it reads well." Burke reads well; and we may add, it is well to read him. If any one wishes to learn the amazing compass and wealth of our language, or witness instances of the most "brilliant dexterity," and most astonishing feats in the use of it, let him read Edmund Burke. He cannot read, and continue to read, and love to read these wonderful performances, without being advanced in all the manly and pregnant qualities of style. Then there is no danger of injury from the closest and most fervid intimacy. Whilst there are the most marked peculiarities in his style, they are such as are not easily transferable, and the faults, the diseases, of it are far from being contagious. A stately, strutting mannerism, like that of Dr. Johnson, or a smart and balanced antithesis, like that of Macaulay, is rather easily caught, and, before we think, we have fallen into a slavish, echoing imitation. Let me add, one cannot read Burke without being enriched in the stores of thought and in the great maxims of wisdom. He has, indeed, been a fountain from which later speakers have

largely drawn their supplies; and not a few, were they as blunt and honest as the old Bristol merchant, Mr. Congor, might say as he did on the occasion of his running for Parliament against Mr. Burke. Mounting the hustings immediately after Mr. Burke had finished, and finding that the stream of his eloquence would not flow, he betook himself to the language of the counting-house, and exclaimed: "I say ditto to Mr. Burke; I say ditto to Mr. Burke,"—then rushed from the hustings, amid a general roar of laughter and applause. How much of the world's lofty and lauded eloquence has been very little more than saying ditto to Mr. Burke.

Burke's career teaches that there is no swaying and carrying the people, except by coming down to them, and even among them. He attempted nothing in this line; not a single handful of the demagogue's seed did he ever deign to cast among the multitude, and not a sheaf of rabble-popularity ever came into his garner. When Danton, that reeking Jacobin, was asked his reason for an atrocious measure, his reply was: "My answer is in the street." Burke's answer was never there; but always came from his own great, independent soul. Even to Bristol dictation his erect, his consciously right and stately bearing refused to bend or swerve a hair's breadth. Therefore Bristol discarded him from her service, and, but for "the rotten boroughs," as they were called, Burke, with his splendid powers and far-reaching statesmanship, would never again have found a seat in the councils of his country.

It is profitable and inciting to contemplate Mr. Burke, as an instance of a man who struggled, and beat his own path to fame, without any favor from the high or the low. An instance this of the vast capabilities of the human mind, its range of acquisition and achievement; an instance of progress and enlargement, of all the glow of passion and all the freshness of fancy, even to the end. It was Burke who worked and struggled and wrestled and did it. "I was not like his grace, swaddled and dandled and rocked into a

legislator. *Nitor in adversum* is the motto for a man like me. At every step of my progress in life, and at every turnpike I met, I was forced to show my passport." This Letter to a Noble Lord, though written but two years before his death, surpasses any previous production in withering intensity, in sustained force of thought, and unrivalled splendor of diction. It is a comfort to people getting old to know that the fires and all the salient springs and energies of intellect and of life may keep up their fulness and prolong their intensity, even beneath the snowy covering of years.

It is a remark forced upon us by this instance, and by the whole history of eloquence, that the greatest occasions and the greatest triumphs of it have been connected with the vindication of the rights, the moral and political redemption of men. Burke's intensest and most magnificent efforts were for the freedom, the deliverance, the redress of outraged humanity. This the furnace fire in which not only he, but Demosthenes, Chatham, Fox, Adams, and Henry forged all their heaviest and hottest bolts.

But I close abruptly. I have not read altogether uselessly if I send any one before me, who is struggling for the writer's or speaker's capabilities, fervidly to commune with the pages of Edmund Burke.