

## MISCELLANEOUS.

Written for this Paper.

## ORATORY.

The following address was delivered before a recent meeting of the Monday Night Club, by Frank B. Stephens, Esq.:

I have been asked by your committee to read a paper upon the influence of oratory in the nineteenth century. I shall confine myself to its influence in the United States, as that affords a field far too broad to be covered in the limits allotted to this paper.

Emerson says, "Eloquence is the power to translate a truth into language perfectly intelligible to those to whom you speak." A French philosopher says of eloquence, "That the prodigies which it often works in the hands of a single man upon an entire nation, are, perhaps, the most shining testimony of the superiority of one man over another." Emerson also expresses a similar opinion when he says that eloquence is the appropriate organ of the highest personal energy, and in his essay on eloquence he says that "Courage is an indispensable attribute of the orator. There is no true orator who is not a hero. His attitude on the platform requires that he counterbalance his auditory. He is a challenger, and must answer all comers. The orator must ever stand with forward foot, in the attitude of advancing. His speech must be just ahead of the assembly, ahead of the whole human race, or it is superfluous. His speech is not to be distinguished from action; it is the electricity of action. It is action as the general's word of command or chart of battle is action."

The definition of eloquence familiar to every school boy given by Daniel Webster in his oration upon Jefferson and Adams, probably expresses more completely than any other that has ever been given, the attributes of the orator, but is too familiar to need question here.

Matthews says that "Oratory, like satire, is fed by the misfortunes of society. Its element is the whirlwind and the storm, when society is upheaved to its foundation, when the moral and political darkness is thickest, it shines forth with the greatest splendor. As the science of medicine would be useless among a people free from disease, so if there were a Utopia in the world free from crimes and disturbances, there would be no demand for oratory."

Athenian oratory was at its height when the Athenian empire was at its lowest point of degradation. Not at the time when Greece was achieving her glorious victories, but when she was ruled by foreign despot, did Demosthenes herald the dawn of an eloquence never since surpassed. It was when the Roman people were under a terrible oppression that Brutus, waving the bloody knife of Lucretia, burst forth into the terrible denunciations that aroused the populace to drive the Tarquins from Rome, and establish the republic. It was a father's cries and prayers for vengeance, as he rushed from the dead body of Virginia, appealing to his countrymen, that aroused the legions of the Tusculan camp to seize upon the

sacred mount, and achieve another freedom.

So it was when the spirits of the colonists were galled by the unjust laws of George III, that Patrick Henry gave utterance to that speech never to be forgotten in the history of our country which so influenced his hearers, that they rushed forth from the hall re-echoing his cry of "To arms, to arms!"

So it was again, in 1830, when Calhoun and Hayne were stabbing at the very life of the nation with their speeches of nullification and secession, that Webster delivered his memorable effort in the senate of the United States, in reply to Hayne, universally conceded by dispassionate historians as having a greater effect than any other upon the destiny of this nation. When dire necessity arises, Providence furnishes the remedy to meet it.

It is, however, believed by many, that oratory as a force in the destiny of nations, or to influence the actions of men for the time being, is a thing of the past. It is believed by many that in the pulpit, on the platform, before the court, or in legislative halls, oratory has lost its power to thrill the audience, sway the jury, or influence the passage of legislative enactments. To a great extent, this is no doubt true. The present generation is eminently a commercial one. The people of today are devoting their energies to money-getting. Most men now would rather be an Edison with a million than a Webster in debt.

In this latter part of the nineteenth century, the patentee of a quick-selling invention stands a better chance to win success, measured by our standard, than does the student who stores his mind with the grandest utterances of the greatest speakers, and seeks to inspire his fellow-men with patriotic fervor. Shrewd manipulation gains the point—seeing the right man at the right time; keen foresight and shrewd tact is making arrangements with the leaders of various factions—does more towards getting the bill through Congress or the legislature, than any impassioned utterance of the political orator. The question now is, how will the bill, if passed, affect our pockets, or the votes of our constituents? not, how will it affect our liberties or what moral effect will it have?

Eloquence addressed to minds and hearts glowing with patriotic or religious enthusiasm is sublime; eloquence addressed to the pocket-book is ridiculous.

Following the civil war and reconstruction of the southern states, came a long era of commercial prosperity, which, with the exception of occasional depressions like the present, is likely to continue for years to come. Facts and figures now occupy the attention of those who must work; and those who are so rich that they are not compelled to work, are either in pursuit of pleasure or devoted to the arts and belles lettres.

But do not misunderstand me. I do not mean to say that in this last quarter of the century public speakers have no influence. They have; but it is the brief business-like speech, teeming with facts, and not the winged thunderbolt of

retorical metaphor, hurled by the impassioned orator, that carries the point.

The people of today are so generally well informed upon all current questions, and take such pride in making up their own minds, that they are not easily swayed by the magnetic speeches of men who, had they lived in the time of Wirt, Clay and Calhoun, would unquestionably have risen to the occasion and ranked with them. Up to very recently, party spirit has steered the minds of voters against the influence of the speaker. The issues arising out of the slavery question, and the war of the Rebellion, intensified party spirit to a degree never before known. Since 1860 it has been impossible for a Republican to believe that any good can come out of the Nazareth of Democracy, and it is still very hard for a Democrat to vote for a Republican. This party spirit and fear of the party lash, in the speaker himself, has been potent against his power as an orator. The orator, if he would influence men, must be bold, manly and fearless. He must strike for what, in his heart of hearts, he believes to be right, let the blows fall where they will, or his utterances will be a sham. The fear of how his speech may be taken by the church members in one part of his district, or the whisky men in another part, cripples the influence of men who otherwise might speak in tones of thunder and with the effect of lightning.

There is another reason why at the present time men do not become more famous as orators. We unquestionably have men of great oratorical power, but the great commercial enterprises of the day, the great corporations, seize upon these men as soon as they show what is in them, and no man can become a splendid orator in the service of enterprises and corporations that too often compel him to take the side against the rights of the people.

John M. Thurston, general solicitor of the Union Pacific railway, will probably end his days in its service, without leaving a lasting impression behind him as a public speaker, but I think he is, without exception, the most eloquent man I have ever listened to.

Robert G. Ingersoll, in his nomination of James G. Blaine, where he described him as "The plumed knight," carried the convention by storm. In the days of Burke, Chatham and Sheridan he would, I believe, have outranked any of them as an orator. Had it not been for his unfortunate attacks upon the Bible and Christianity, at a time when infidelity fed him with flattery, he would undoubtedly be the greatest American orator of today. In personal magnetism and in the power to express beautiful sentiments in the most touching language, he has no equal. There are many other men in the United States who possess the natural qualifications of great orators and should there be a national crisis would no doubt become famous, but whose names for reasons before stated are not likely to pass into history as those of great speakers.

Let us, however, turn back to the second quarter of the nineteenth century, when historians concede that oratorical power was potent in our destiny, and a study of its influence at this time and of the conditions that rendered it possible may give us another answer to the question of why it is not more