

effective today. In the history of the United States there have been two periods in which the power of oratory was supremely felt; from 1760 to 1785, or during the time of the securing of the independence by the American colonies; and from 1825 or 1830 to 1860, when the questions of nullification, states rights and slavery were before the people. It is of the later period that I shall particularly speak; but in order to understand the later, we must refer to the earlier.

The conditions in the last half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries were peculiarly favorable to oratorical influence. We were then a homogeneous people; we were alike in impulse, language and education. A great majority of us were English-speaking Americans. The nations of continental Europe had not yet poured their millions upon us, who neither understand our language nor appreciate our institutions. We were a people dominated by strong moral convictions. The strong moral energy of the Pilgrims and other colonists who came to the New World to seek political and religious liberty was still potent among us.

The latter part of the eighteenth century had been richly fruited with enlarged civil and religious liberty. Mirabeau in France, Curran, Erskine, Chatham, Burke and Fox, in England; Patrick Henry, Adams, Jefferson and Hamilton, in America, had in the latter part of the eighteenth century given utterance to sentiments of liberty and patriotism that were declined by every school boy in the first half of the nineteenth. It was not then in bad form to show a little enthusiasm for our native land. The American flag was always hailed with a cheer. The Fourth of July was a great day. It was not then the fashion to be English. The men who now turn up their "trousers" because it rains in London, would then have been tarred and feathered. In the schools, patriotic speeches were learned by heart. There were not as many books in the homes, but the quality averaged better. A copy of Milton was in almost every farm-house. The light literature was not there, consequently no temptation to read it to the exclusion of the other. In the schools every Friday afternoon was given up to rhetorical culture. Choice extracts from ancient and modern classics were memorized and made a part of the very fiber of the young student's nature. A contempt for the classics and a craze for smattering of the sciences had not yet entered our colleges. Daniel Webster never spent a day dissecting the tail of a tadpole, and he probably did not know the difference between a gasteropod and a cephalopod, except that his knowledge of Latin and Greek would tell him at once that the one has its feet upon its stomach, and the other on its head.

The great orators of this and the last century were educated mainly in mathematics and classics, and more classics than mathematics. Pitt, from his earliest boyhood, had his powers of speech and expression trained by reciting daily choice passages from the best English authors, by rendering aloud passages of Greek and Roman orations in choice English. He familiarized himself thoroughly with Milton and Shakespeare, and learned page after page by heart. The same was true of Fox, Curran,

Erskine and Burke. Burke had Cicero's orations at his tongue's end, and Webster read and re-read the Greek, Roman and English classics, until they were a part of his very being, and his own thoughts took wing upon those vehicles of expression that will never cease to excite the wonder and admiration of those who study them.

Take a homogeneous people speaking the same language, all imbued with the spirit of patriotism, generally familiar with the speeches of great champions of liberty, ancient and modern, most of whom had heard from the lips of revolutionary patriots the story of Lexington, Bunker Hill and Valley Forge, let such an audience be addressed by a man of great moral and intellectual force, able to clothe his thoughts in choice language, and at the same time perfectly intelligible to his hearers, on an occasion when the liberties of the people and the safety of the nation is threatened, and you have conditions highly favorable to the effective influence of oratory. Such were the conditions in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The influence of the orator was not greatly felt in the first quarter. There were many heated discussions in Congress and upon the stump; but after the war of 1812, the questions were less of principle than of expediency. It was not until 1829, when treason and disunion appeared in the nullification sentiments of South Carolina, that the occasion was presented for great oratorical effort. In this period, Daniel Webster towers above his fellows like an oak above the underbrush.

Matthews says, "Doubtless Calhoun had a more acute and metaphysical mind; Clay had a more electric and magnetic nature, and showed a far keener sagacity in divining public sentiment, and in sweeping the strings of popular feeling, but in sheer intellectual might, in that comprehensiveness of vision which sees all sides of a subject, and judges it in all its relations, in that largeness and weight of utterance which gives the greatest impressiveness to everything one says, and in hard logic which links conclusion to conclusion like a chain of iron, neither Clay nor Calhoun, nor any other American was ever equal to Webster! On small subjects he was dull. As Grattan said of Flood, Put a distaff in his hand, and like Hercules he makes sad work of it; but give him a thunder bolt, and he has the arm of Jove."

It was, says the same writer, "On momentous occasions, when great public interests were at stake, that the full might of his intellect was visible. When feeblers were awed by the darkness of the political sky, fled for shelter from the tempest, he rushed forth exultingly to the elemental war, with all his faculties stimulated to their utmost. When the thunders of nullification muttered in the distance, he coolly watched the coming storm, and when it burst, he bared his head to the bolts, like the mammoth of tradition, shaking them off as they fell."

When Hayne concluded his speech, it was feared by the friends of the Constitution that he could not be answered; but Webster thoroughly and completely vanquished him. His speech was so widely read, and carried such conviction, and the entire North became so indoctrinated with his views of the structure of our government, that when his

bones lay mouldering at Marshfield, the North was ready to fight to a man against the heresy of secession.

I believe that every school-boy today should read and re-read and commit to memory the peroration of his speech in reply to Hayne, beginning:

"When my eyes shall be turned to behold, for the last time, the sun in heaven, may I not see him shining on the broken and dishonored fragments of a once glorious Union; on states severed, discordant, belligerent! on a land rent with civil feuds, or drenched, it may be, in fraternal blood! Let their last feeble and lingering glance rather behold the gorgeous ensign of the Republic, now known and honored throughout the earth, still full high advanced, its arms and trophies streaming in their original luster, not a stripe erased or polluted, not a single star obscured, bearing for its motto no such miserable interrogatory as 'What is all this worth?' Nor those other words of delusion and folly, 'Liberty first, and Union afterwards;' but everywhere, spread all over in characters of living light, blazing on all its ample folds, as they float over the sea and over the land, and in every wind under the whole heavens, that other sentiment, dear to every American heart, liberty and union, now and forever, one and inseparable."

Parker gives the period from 1830 to 1860 as the golden age of American oratory, and certain it is that all of the conditions most favorable to oratorical influence were present. Eloquence existed "in the subject, in the man and in the occasion." Since the Declaration of Independence and the adoption of the Constitution, no such critical period had been known.

An influence similar to that wielded by Webster in the North, was exercised by Calhoun and Hayne in the South. As Webster stemmed the tide of nullification flowing toward the North, and united the entire North in the support of the Constitution, so Calhoun filled the entire South with the spirit of secession and opposition to the Constitution.

During the period from 1830 until 1845, Webster was the reliance of the entire North in the support of the Constitution; and his power was undiminished until the slavery question became all important, and the odious compromise act of 1850 was passed. I wish the historian might have recorded that Webster took the same exalted stand upon the slavery question that he did in the defense of the Constitution. Had he done so, the world could not endure long enough to dim the lustre of his fame. An opportunity so grand the world had never seen; four million slaves in a nation whose boast was the liberty of its people! the slave power greedily extending its bounds until the whole North was threatened! Then, indeed, was the time when the matchless orator might have taken a stand that would truly have made his name immortal. But he favored the compromise act of 1850. As Secretary of State he took unnecessary ground in favor of slavery, and though James Russell Lowell says that at the meeting in Faneuil Hall in 1850, those who came as accusers remained his captives, the fact remains that he ceased to be the idol of the North. It was left for men of less intellectual power but with greater moral courage to combat the extension