MASTERPIECES OF

MODERN ORATORY

EDITED BY

EDWIN DuBOIS SHURTER

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF PUBLIC SPEAKING IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS

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PREFACE

The fifteen orations in this volume are intended to furnish models for students of Oratory, Argumentation, and Debate. For the most part the orations are given without abridgment. In making the selection the aim has been to include only orations that (1) deal with subjects of either contemporary or historical interest, (2) were delivered by men eminent as orators, and (3) are of inherent literary value. There are of course many orators and orations in modern times that fulfill these tests, but it is believed that the orations selected are fairly representative. A further aim has been to secure such variety in the selections as to cover in a single volume the fields of deliberative, forensic, pulpit, and demonstrative oratory, and so to meet the needs of classes both in argumentation and oratorical composition.

If we give relatively less attention nowadays to the art side of oratory, — the manner of delivery, — there is all the more need of studying the matter, — the invention, organization, and expression of the thought. The young men in our schools and colleges, who in a small or large way are bound to be called upon to speak in public, should be taught how to compose for a hearer as distinguished from a reader — how to construct an oration as distinguished from an essay. To this end oratorical models should be critically studied in order that the student may learn and appreciate how masters have wielded the language for the purposes of conviction and persuasion. And this should be made an intensive rather than an extensive process. To become thoroughly acquainted with one great oration is better than a cursory reading of many

orations, and especially better than reading the extracts contained in books of "choice selections."

With a view of such intensive study each oration in this volume is preceded by an introduction, and bibliographies and notes are given on pages 339 to 369 inclusive. In the notes, which are here and there in the form of suggestive questions, the editor has tried to incorporate only such comments as will illuminate the text for the average student, and has tried to avoid explanation of the familiar or obvious. To avoid confusion to the general reader, the notes are put by themselves in the back part of the book; and even for the special student, each oration should first be read independently of the notes, whatever use may subsequently be made of them.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to Little, Brown & Co. for permission to use the text of Webster's speech as contained in the volume, *Webster's Great Speeches and Orations;* to the O. S. Hubbell Company, publishers of *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*, for the text of Lincoln's speech; to Lee & Shepard, publishers of the *Speeches, Lectures, and Letters of Wendell Phillips*, for the oration by Phillips; to Harper & Brothers, publishers of the *Orations and Addresses of George William Curtis*, for the oration by Curtis; to Fox, Duffield & Co., publishers of Watterson's *Compromises of Life*, for the speech by Watterson; to Honorable W. Bourke Cockran, for the use of his oration on Marshall; to Callaghan & Co., publishers of Dillon's *John Marshall*, which contains Mr. Cockran's oration; to Bishop J. L. Spalding for permission to use his address on "Opportunity," contained in a volume entitled *Opportunity, and Other Essays and Addresses*, published by A. C. McClurg & Co.; and to the Reverend Dr. Henry van Dyke for the use of his baccalaureate sermon on "Salt."

E. D. S.

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INTRODUCTION

Edmund Burke, statesman, orator, and man of letters, was born in Dublin, Ireland, January 12, 1729. His father, a Protestant, was a lawyer with a good practice. His mother was of Irish descent and a Catholic. In 1741 he was sent to school at Ballitore, under the tutorship of one Abraham Shackleton, a Quaker from Yorkshire. In 1743 he entered Trinity College, Dublin. During the five years spent there Burke did not distinguish himself as a student, but he spent much time in reading widely in history, politics, literature, and philosophy, — a habit that was continued throughout his life. Burke's father intended that his son should be a lawyer, and in 1750 Burke was sent to London to pursue his legal studies. Except for the circumstance of his marriage in 1756, his life during the nine years following his removal to London is enveloped in almost complete obscurity. He was entered at the Middle Temple, but was never admitted to practice. General reading doubtless claimed his attention more than the law. He had a strong literary bent, and we find him passing his summers in retired country villages, reading and writing with desultory industry. Having displeased his father by failing to enter the legal profession, Burke found his allowance withdrawn, and was forced to depend chiefly on his pen for a living. In 1765 he became private secretary to Lord Rockingham, the head of the new Whig ministry. Soon after he was returned to Parliament as a member from Wendover, and later from Bristol. He took his

seat in time to participate in the debates which preceded the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766, and was continuously in Parliament from this time until 1794. He died in 1797.

Some one has said that a passion for order and a passion for justice were the master motives of Burke's life and thought. It is interesting to see how these master passions expressed themselves in dealing with the three great problems in government which arose during his career, — the problems of America, of India, and of France.

In dealing with America Burke was unquestionably at his best. His highly developed sense of justice led him to protest against the paternal policy and high-handed methods of George the Third and his Tory supporters. Burke felt that these methods threatened liberty not only in the colonies, but also in England; hence his plea for justice to the colonists comported with his passion for order. His plan would not violate the principles of the English constitution, while it would insure order and tranquillity in the colonies. Burke was not, however, a thoroughgoing reformer in the modern sense. He has been called the Great Conservative. The basis of his plea for conciliation with the American colonies fell far short of the principles enunciated in the Declaration of Independence. When the Stamp Act was repealed the radical wing of the Whig party, led by Pitt and Fox, would have gone farther and acknowledged the absolute injustice of taxation without representation. Not so with Burke; the declaration of this principle would have been to him a too violent breaking with the traditions of the English constitution, as he conceived them. He therefore warmly supported the Declaratory Act coupled with the repeal of the Stamp Act, which asserted "the supreme authority of Parliament over the colonies, in all cases whatsoever." In both of his speeches on America Burke refuses to discuss the question of taxation without representation. That, he said, was not the main issue. And yet that was the issue which the colonists raised, and the issue which divided the English Whigs. Burke based his arguments solely on expediency, so that, as Goldwin Smith has pointed out, "you cannot extract from him any definite theory of the colonial relation." His conservative attitude, springing from his passion for order, as we have seen, was a strong influence in the disruption of the Whig party, thus preventing a solid front in the opposition to the policy of George the Third.

When the American colonies were forever lost Burke turned his attention to India. For many years he had studied the history and the workings of English rule in India, and when, in 1786, he began a nine years' fight against the injustice and corruption in the government of that country, he was unquestionably the best informed man in England on Indian affairs. In this contest, as in the case of America, Burke's passion for order and for justice did not conflict; and although his efforts to impeach Hastings technically failed, the result was a moral victory, for his masterful array of facts and splendid oratory led to government reforms on a large scale in India.

In 1789 came the crash of the French Revolution. In dealing with the questions thereby involved, Burke's natural conservatism became yet more predominant, for he was growing old. His passion for order prevented a calm consideration of justice as between oppressor and oppressed. He believed the Revolution to be the work of atheists and theorists, who were waging war upon the institutions which preserve order in society, — upon king, nobles, and clergy. So when in 1790 his "Reflections on the Revolution in France" appeared, the Tories and King George, whom Burke had stoutly opposed in the American policy, now hailed him as their shield and defender. As the Revolution developed its worst features, Burke's hatred of it grew, and his non-judicial attitude, violence of temper, and fierce invective, mark a decline of those powers of reasoning and persuasion which appear at their best in the speech on "Conciliation."

The leading characteristics, then, of Burke's political philosophy are opposed to much that is fundamental in modern systems. He belonged to both the old order and the new, — planting himself on the old and prophesying the new. All in all, his title to fame as a statesman lies not so much in his immediate accomplishment as in his influence, — his persistent and eloquent advocacy of those high and noble principles which find justification by their adoption in modern times. Burke brought to politics a terror of crime, a deep humanity, and a keen sensibility. "No one," says Morley, "has ever come so close to the details of practical politics, and at the same time remembered that these can only be understood and dealt with by the aid of the broad conceptions of political philosophy." "He was," says Buckle,[1] "Bacon alone excepted, the

[1] *Civilization in England*, chap. vii.

greatest political thinker who ever devoted himself to the practice of English politics."

As an orator, Burke did not excel in delivery, though often very effective. "The heavy, Quaker-like figure, the scratch wig, the round spectacles, the cumbrous roll of paper which loaded Burke's pocket,"[1] were not prepossessing. He was tall though not robust, angular in his movements, with a somewhat harsh voice that never lost a strong Irish accent, and a temper which, when aroused by opposition or criticism, often weakened the effect of what he said. On the other hand, he possessed many qualities, both natural and acquired, which fitted him for his career as an orator. His Protestant-Catholic parentage, together with the early association with his Quaker tutor, conduced to broad-mindedness and toleration in an age of intense religious bigotry, and gave him sympathy with struggles for liberty and hatred of all forms of oppression. Readiness in thinking on his feet was aided by early practice in a private debating club, and later in the Robin Hood Club in London. Withal, the impress of his native genius was powerfully aided by his unflagging industry, — his thoroughness in getting up his cases. All his great speeches reveal a marvelous mastery of the facts, — a detailed and comprehensive knowledge which make them, as he himself said of the utterances of Alfred the Great, "both minute and sublime."

As to the immediate influence of Burke's oratory, there is much conflicting testimony among his contemporaries. Prior, in his *Life of Burke*, quotes Mr. Curran to the effect that "as an orator Burke surpassed all his contemporaries, and was perhaps never exceeded." And Grattan says: "Burke is unquestionably the first orator among the Commons of England; boundless in knowledge, instantaneous in his apprehensions, and abundant in his language. He speaks with profound attention and acknowledged superiority, notwithstanding the want of energy, grace, and elegance in his manner." Erskine said to Mr. Rush, the American minister: "I was in the House when Burke made his great speech on American Conciliation, — the greatest he ever made. He drove everybody away. When I read it, I read it over and over again; I could hardly think of anything else."

Erskine's testimony furnishes the key to a just estimate of Burke's oratory. Judged by its ultimate influence, he was unquestionably

[1] Green, *Short History of the English People*, p. 770.

the greatest orator England has ever produced. And yet it must be admitted that his speeches were generally unsuited to the needs of the House of Commons. Burke was an orator rather than a debater, a statesman rather than a politician, the champion of a principle rather than the legislative manipulator. His speeches are largely political lectures; hence his title of Philosopher-Statesman. Unlike Fox, Burke was not content to seize upon the strong points of a case and cast aside intermediate thoughts. His exuberant fancy and wide knowledge led him to adduce details, illustrations, repetitions, maxims, and figures, which were so interwoven with his main arguments that his speeches were apt to weary men who cared for nothing, and could not be expected to care for anything, but the question before the House and the most expeditious way to settle it.

> Though fraught with all learning, yet straining his throat
> To persuade Tommy Townshend to lend him a vote;
> Who, too deep for his hearers, still went on refining,
> And thought of convincing, while they thought of dining.[1]

Johnson says that Burke's early speeches "filled the town with wonder," but adds that "he spoke too often and too long." Not that his speeches always went wide of the mark in delivery, for they were sometimes remarkably effective; but Burke frequently combined his thoughts and knowledge in propositions so weighty and strong that the minds of ordinary hearers were not on the instant prepared for them. Boswell once asked him why he took so much pains with his speeches, knowing that not one vote would be gained by them. Burke replied that his reputation was at stake, and further, that although the House might not grant his whole contention, a law was frequently so modified as to be less oppressive. "Aye, sir," Johnson broke in, "and there is a gratification of pride. Though we cannot outvote them, we will outargue them." "Outarguing," says Morley, "is not the right word. Burke surrenders himself wholly to the matter, and follows up, though with a strong and close tread, all the excursions to which it may give rise in an elastic intelligence." Yet always the "strong and close tread." Take the speech on Conciliation, for example. Whatever may be the intricacies of its details, and although the solidity

[1] From Goldsmith's *Retaliation.*

of the structure may be hidden by flowers, yet, like a great cathedral, throughout the whole there is a massive unity of design.

It is the literary quality of Burke's speeches, then, that renders them of interest to-day and is chiefly responsible for the perpetuity of his fame as an orator. The leading characteristics of his subject-matter and style (already incidentally referred to) are:

1. *Thoroughness of treatment.* This manifests itself in a broad comprehensiveness joined to an amplitude of detail, — in generalization coupled with exhaustiveness. Burke has been called "myriad-minded." Both depth and breadth are shown in the treatment of every subject he discussed.

2. *Rhetorical excellence.* This was secured by much practice in writing. His principal speeches were carefully prepared in advance, though not always rigidly adhered to in delivery; hence an excellence in form and finish which could not have been attained in extemporaneous efforts. He always wrote, however, with an audience in mind. Like Macaulay, his prevailing style suggests the speaker. As we have seen, the finished elaborateness of his speeches were a drawback in delivery, and occasionally the reader nowadays feels the justice of Johnson's stricture, that "he sometimes talked partly from ostentation"; or of Hazlitt's criticism, that he seemed to be "perpetually calling the Speaker out to dance a minuet with him before he begins." But while there are passages here and there that may warrant such censure, — evident self-consciousness and a lack of ease and delicacy, — yet the dominant quality of his style contradicts the idea of the mere rhetorician dealing in fine phrases, but rather reveals the master wielding language to subserve a controlling purpose.

3. *Figurative language.* Burke's fertility of imagery, comparisons, analogies, and illustrations, enabled him to exhaust a subject without tediousness, so that we have much reiteration and reënforcement without mere repetition. His idea of a truly fine sentence, as once stated to a friend, consists in a "union of thought, feeling, and imagery, — of a striking truth and a corresponding sentiment, rendered doubly striking by the force and beauty of figurative language." In such sentences Burke's speeches and writings abound. He is no doubt excessively ornate at times, his figures being placed in such bold relief or dwelt upon so long that the primary idea is lost sight of in the image. We find great extremes of imagery, from his much-admired picture of the queen

of France, as he 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," or of friendship as "the soft green of the soul, on which the eye loves to repose," to Lord Chatham's administration "pigging together in the same truckle-bed," — and other comparisons yet more vulgar. While a master of the decorative style, Burke does not always escape the faults that usually accompany an abundance of figures. His imagination seemed to need the restraining and chastening influence of a critical situation, such as was afforded in the efforts for "conciliation" with America.

4. *Command of words.* In his deliberative speeches Burke's tendency, as we have seen, was to overload his main arguments with too many collateral topics. Likewise his sentences frequently contain secondary thoughts — qualifying and modifying clauses — which tend to weaken the blow by dividing it. This method of exhaustiveness in treatment required the use of many words; but though copious in language, he is rarely verbose. Though he usually develops every phase of his subject, he always illuminates it. His multifarious ideas always find fitting expression. By the introduction of a fresher and more natural diction Burke gave a lasting stimulus to English prose literature, his writings and speeches — notably the speech in this volume — being studied as models in present-day English.

5. *Passion.* It was his passion for order and justice, previously mentioned, that inspired his commanding and noble passages and colored the words in which they were expressed; so that we are made to feel that the more magnificent passages must have been written in moments of absolute abandonment to feeling. It was his passion, after all, that produced his style — the amplitude, the weightiness, the high flight, and the grandeur that comported with his imperial themes — and makes his productions now worth while.

To summarize: As an orator, Burke was outclassed by Pitt, Fox, and Sheridan in immediate influence upon the House of Commons, but he far surpassed them all in his ultimate influence. "He had not the impetuous and splendid eloquence of Chatham, nor the remarkable skill in debate of Fox, but in learning, in the power of clothing great thoughts in the most appropriate words, and of producing speeches which were even more interesting when read than when they were delivered, he far surpassed them both."

Macaulay speaks of him as "superior, in aptitude of comprehension and richness of imagination, to every orator, ancient or modern."

As a man, all that we know of Burke is of good repute. Some of his contemporary political opponents attempted to impeach his honesty because of his extravagances, and later critics have essayed to cast a shadow over his early life in London, concerning which Burke always maintained a dignified silence; but there is no evidence to substantiate these charges. There is no reason for doubting that the noble thoughts and high principles which Burke enunciated, emanated from an earnest mind and a sound character. He has therefore wielded an influence that has not yet by any means spent its force. The consensus of opinion points to Burke as an abiding name in history. Wordsworth believed him to be "by far the greatest man of his age," and Macaulay considered him "the greatest man since Milton." "He is not only the first man in the House of Commons," said Johnson, his political opponent, "he is the first man everywhere." "A gentleman," said Sheridan, "whose abilities, happily for the glory of the age in which we live, are not entrusted to the perishable eloquence of the day, but shall live to be the admiration of that hour when all of us shall be mute, and most of us forgotten."

It is a mark of Burke's singular and varied genius that hardly any two people agree precisely as to which of his productions should be considered the masterpiece. Each great essay or speech that he composed is the rival of every other. But his speech on Conciliation has perhaps been most universally admired, — "the wisest in its temper, the most closely logical in its reasoning, the amplest in appropriate topics, the most generous and conciliatory in the substance of its appeals."

When this speech was delivered in the House of Commons, events in the colonies were fast hastening toward the Declaration of Independence. The first Continental Congress had met, and within a month the battles of Concord and Lexington were fought. On February 20, 1775, Lord North, then Prime Minister, brought forward so-called "Propositions for Conciliating the Differences with America." Burke seized the opportunity to propose a method of conciliation that might be really effective; for, as he shows in the speech following (paragraphs 63–76), Lord North's plan was

a scheme to divide and conquer. Burke proposed that instead of *imposing* taxes the colonies be granted the opportunity of taxing themselves, and trust the result to the natural loyalty of a kindred people. He waived all discussion of the *right* of taxation, but based his argument solely on expediency. But it is not Burke's particular plan — for that may have been impracticable — that chiefly interests and holds us now; it is rather the high and noble principles underlying such plan, and the wise political maxims with which the speech abounds, — maxims which have no doubt been quoted by succeeding statesmen more fully and frequently than in the case of any other speech in oratorical literature.

1. I hope, Sir, that notwithstanding the austerity of the Chair, your good nature will incline you to some degree of indulgence towards human frailty. You will not think it unnatural that those who have an object depending, which strongly engages their hopes and fears, should be somewhat inclined to superstition. As I came into the House full of anxiety about the event of my motion, I found, to my infinite surprise, that the grand penal bill, by which we had passed sentence on the trade and sustenance of America, is to be returned to us from the other House. I do confess I could not help looking on this event as a fortunate omen. I look upon it as a sort of providential favor, by which we are put once more in possession of our deliberative capacity upon a business so very questionable in its nature, so very uncertain in its issue. By the return of this bill, which seemed to have taken its flight forever, we are at this very instant nearly as free to choose a plan for our American Government as we were on the first day of the session. If, Sir, we incline to the side of conciliation, we are not at all embarrassed (unless we please to make ourselves so) by any incongruous mixture of coercion and restraint. We are therefore called upon, as it were by a superior warning voice, again to attend to America; to attend to the whole of it together; and to review the subject with an unusual degree of care and calmness.