

acted in the open assemblies and courts of the citizens, and by the people themselves—each Athenian citizen being both a statesman and judge by his prerogative of birth—and although the laws had been reduced to a code, neither advocate nor judge confined himself very scrupulously to the letter of the text, it being customary for the former not to restrict his remarks merely to the matter directly in issue, but to launch out into extraneous circumstances and to make reflections on the character of the opposite party, but remotely connected with the question at issue, in a manner which would never be permitted in a modern court of law. The Athenians, being specially susceptible to the charms of eloquence, they delighted in the intellectual contests of the rival orators, and gleefully bestowed their plaudits at the various sallies of wit or abuse, as is told in the Acts of the Apostles when St. Paul was brought by the Epicureans and Stoics to the Areopagus, to hear what he had to say—"For all the Athenians and strangers who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear something new," and it may be easily imagined to what a height any popular demagogue could carry his power in a like state of society, and so sensible, indeed, were the Athenians of the danger that they hit upon the system of ostracism, by which anyone who was becoming obnoxious by gaining too great popular power might be quietly banished from the State.

The oratory of Athens was not altogether of home growth, but we have no evidence that its culture ever reached such a degree of perfection as it did amongst the inhabitants of that democratic city. The first professors of the art—for it must be remembered that it was zealously studied, and schools were opened where the art of speaking was the chief subject of instruction—were Protagoras of Abdera, in the 5th century B.C., Gorgias, Lippias, Isocrates, and others; but the most interesting and brilliant period of its history is that of the age of the rivals Æschines and Demosthenes, for it was about this time, B.C. 340, that the profession of public speaking became separated from that of the statesman and soldier, with which it had formerly been usually blended.

Demosthenes, the greatest orator of a people who esteemed the art of eloquence above all others, was born not only with a body so frail and sickly as to prevent him from undergoing the fatigue of the ordinary gymnastic exercises in which the youth of the city were trained, but was also hampered by a weak voice and a difficulty of utterance almost amounting to stammering; he, however, at a very early age applied himself to the task of speaking in public, his first speech being directed against his guardians, who had defrauded him of a great portion of his patrimony, and being partially successful in this, he was emboldened to try his hand at speaking before the public assembly, in which, however, he met with but poor success, and was even greeted with jeers and hoots, and was only prevented from giving way to despair by several friends who were present, and who thought they had detected some sparks of latent genius, and being induced by their words of encouragement to make a further effort, he began by setting

himself resolutely to work to overcome his natural disadvantages; he withdrew from the world, and devoted himself with unwearied energy to the study of the art, and it was only by his indomitable perseverance and continued application that he overcame the defects of an unkind nature. He studied all the works procurable on the theory of eloquence, and such as furnished him with hints and rules for its cultivation; it is said that he copied out the history of Thucydides no less than eight times, and could almost repeat it from memory, and besides this, was continually exercising himself in writing essays on such subjects as were suggested by passing events. It is related also that, in order to cure himself of stammering, he practised speaking with pebbles in his mouth, and to strengthen his voice repeated verses of the poets while running up hill; that he was in the habit also of declaiming on the sea-shore in stormy weather, in order to accustom himself to the din and uproar of the public assembly, and to avoid interruption while writing out and studying the history of Thucydides, he lived for months in a cave, cut off from intercourse with the world. Of his orations, some "1, on political and judicial subjects, have come down to us, and all show evidence of great care and labour in their preparation; in fact, he hardly ever came before the public without previously writing out his speech, having attributed in great measure his first ill-success to the lack of preparation and the want of confidence arising therefrom. While in literature and art the premier places are in dispute between the critics, almost all agree to award to Demosthenes the palm of first excellence in matters of eloquence—the Roman testimonies of Cicero and Quintilian range side by side with the patriotic eulogies of Dionysius and Longinus, and in our age Lord Brougham vouches that at the head of all! "the mighty masters of speech, the adoration of ages has consecrated his place, and the loss of the noble instrument with which he forged and launched his thunders is sure to maintain it unapproachable for ever." And his great rival and bitter personal enemy, Æschines, who was banished from Greece, and set up a school of oratory at Rhodes, where, having one day read to his pupils his own speech against Ctesiphon, was met with expressions of their surprise that he should have been defeated after such an oration, says, "You would cease to wonder if you had heard Demosthenes."

His style of composition was sublime, but simple, redundant, yet concise, marked by great purity, with clear and logical arrangement, an entire freedom from captions, alliteration, or meretricious decoration, and of so highly wrought a texture that a critic bestows a whole page on a sentence of a dozen words to show the delicacy of its structure, and the disorder which would follow the slightest alteration or transposition of any of its parts; but yet his speeches are of one such harmonious whole that any attempt to give the effect of an oration by a selection, or the merit of the whole by splendid passages, would be as hopeless as to endeavour to produce an adequate idea of the statue of Appollo by the production of a finger or an ear.