

ORATORY IN "JULIUS CÆSAR."

IT has been frequently remarked by close students of Shakespeare's plays that, had he not been the world's greatest poet he might have become its most celebrated orator. Even the greatest orators of the English-speaking world—Gladstone, Daniel Webster, John Bright and Edmund Burke—have felt themselves highly honored in having so illustrious a preceptor in their art as Shakespeare, and indeed gratefully acknowledged the inestimable help received by them from a perusal of his plays.

The matter is easily understood. There is not one of Shakespeare's dramas but affords ample matter for oratorical study. This however is, in an especial manner, true of his tragedy Julius Cæsar.

The other plays—allow me to make the distinction—receive or necessitate the presence of oratory as the natural result of relevant circumstances, as for instance, Macbeth's soliloquy before the murder of Duncan, or Portia's plea for mercy in the court-house of Venice, while, on the contrary, in Julius Cæsar oratory is not merely a secondary or subsidiary element, but in reality governs and directs the very plot of the play. It is not, like others of the great dramatist's productions, a sparse seeding, but rises up like blooming wheat on a rich and fertile soil, in all its splendour and magnificence.

The perusal of this play would in itself be sufficient to enable one to define oratory. All the constituent parts of a regular oration,—the ingratiating and prejudice-dispelling

introduction, the arguments or address to the understanding and the persuasive element including the appeal to the passions and sentiments—all these are highly exemplified in "Julius Cæsar." All the requisites of a good orator—that sound judgment and keen foresight which enable him to arrange his arguments in the best possible order, and that intuitive knowledge of man as to what may be attempted with him, which empower him to convince the intellect, to affect the heart and to influence the will, shine forth preeminently in the orators of Shakespeare's Julius Cæsar.

Indeed, from the very outset of the play to well nigh its denouement we have one continuous series of brilliant orations, which range from the vehement and indignant remonstrance of Marullus the honest tribune, through the bitter, biting irony and sarcasm of envious Cassius and the sophistical musings of Brutus, to Mark Antony's magnificent panegyric of his murdered friend.

The utterances of Marullus, though brief, are so many specimens of oratory. In this we must admire the genius of Shakespeare, to see how, in such few sentences he condenses a perfect oration with exordium body and peroration. Note with what emphatic energy he addresses their nicer feelings :

"You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things!
O you hard hearts, you cruel men of Rome,
Knew you not Pompey?"