## Ireland and Oratory

Oratory has played an importan part in the history of many nations. cursory glance over the history of the world since Greece was mistress of civilization, down to the present time, indicates that at crucial pe riods in the lives of great nations, oratory has flourished with mor than usual beauty and power. was a crucial period in the history of Greece when Demosthenes thun-dered against the Macedonian monarch; it was a time of impending changes, of civil strife and of internal disorder when the voice of Cicero filled with eloquence the Roman forum; it was a period of bitter struggle, and great national danger, when the halls of the British House of Parliament echoed the eloquence of Chatham, Burke and Fox; and in momentous issues were trembling in the balance when the voices of Patrick Henry, Webster and others rang out in clear and vigorous tones. So was it with Ire-

In perhaps the bitterest hour of her long night of wretchedness, eloquent sons of Ireland rose up and by their magnetic power dispelled for a time the gloom that had hung for centuries over their suffering country Ireland has long been the home of brilliant orators, but in the years from about the birth of Grattan, in 1746, to the death of O'Connell, in 1847, constitute the golden age Irish oratory. Within that period there appeared in the arena of Irish the ablest orators Ireland ever produced. The most eminent men of the period were orators, and the masterpieces of eloquence they have bequeathed to us deserve to rank with some of the noblest models of oratory. It is quite probable that had Ireland maintained the independence she gained in 1782, the works of her orators would now be more widely read and appreciated. Even as it is the speeches of Edmund Burke are to-day read by students of politics and lovers of eloquence the world over: and Grattan's works furnish an inviting field for those who are anxious to prove their minds by contact with noble and elevating sentiments; while the speeches of Curran, Flood, Sheridan and Sheil, the masterpiece of Robert Emmett, and the vast store of eloquence which O'Connell has bequeathed to Irishmen, will forever arouse within their hearts the reverence for God and the highest sen timents of love and devotion to native land. And it may be said that the oratory of no country has served both these grand ends so well as the oratory of Ire-

Whether Irishmen of the period under consideration were more easily swayed by the sound of the human voice, or whether leaven gave to Irish orators of the period an unusual measure of eloquence. it true, I believe, that in no other time did Irish oratory reach such a state of perfection; at no other time was it more powerful, and in no other age did it accomplish so much as it did from the birth of Grattan to the death of O'Connell. When we examine the varied styles of Irish oratory of this period-the stateliness, the richness, the word painting skill of Burke; the fervid and power ful eloquence of Flood; the polished, witty and electrifying language of Curran; the keen sarcasm, the biting invective, and concentrated power of Grattan; the humor and rhetoric of Sheridan and Shiel; the logic the grace, the wit, the pathos, and the almost incredible force of O'Connell-we are not surprised at the effects that Irish oratory produced.

turies-a wall of despotism had shut quickened the blood that suffering out from Ireland almost every hope of civil and religious liberty. This barrier had withstood the unceasing attacks of Irish patriots for many At its base many weary Irish heart had broken, and its awful shadow had darkened the dying hour of many an unselfish pa-Legion after legion of Irish statesmen and soldiers had been led against it, but each attack was merely a prelude to a new failure, so that about the time of the American Revolution the people of Ireland were in an appalling state of misery and To raise up the people, to kindle anew the fires of patriotism, to rouse again the true of the Irish race was the mission of the orators of this period. How they performed their task While Burke was let history attest. pouring out his mighty soul floods of fervid eloquence, in the British House of Parliament, the voices Grattan and Flood home combined to make Ireland a

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this great victory due. By his impassioned eloquence he lifted the question of Irish freedom to a higher level than his predecessors had done. His voice stirred the nation to its profoundest depths and sounding across the waters of the Irish Sea imperious tones demanded the King and Parliament to right His wrongs of his countrymen. speech on the question in the Irish Parliament has perhaps never been surpassed by any modern orator. In that speech, with the skill of a master, he sketched a bold design Irish liberty, and from "the storehouse of his impassioned fancy drew the colors to adorn it." By eloquence Grattan, whom Fox styled the "Demosthenes of Ireland," held his country for nearly twenty years in the domain of British politics almost an equal of England. But in 1800 Pitt brought about the despised union, and Ireland once more sank back into the depths of misery; the temporary breech which Irish eloquence had made in that hated wall of despotism was closed up, and the awful barrier was as formidable as

Yet, a great deal had been accom-The enthusiasm which plished. Burke, Sheridan, Curran, Flood and Grattan had aroused by the magic spell of oratory, gave to one mighty intellect a hint of the most effective weapon to be employed in Ireland's With keen sympathy young statesman searched the hearts of the Irish people; he saw their miseries, their sufferings and their almost lifeless hopes. With a passionate love for his country; with a heart that had absorbed the richest treasures of Catholic culture; a mind filled with holy and noble purpose, and a tongue that would require another tongue equally as eloquent to do justice to its wonderful power, Daniel O'Connell resolved to lift up his down-trodden countrymen, and to do it by the power of that quence which God nad given him.

With regal courage he strode up to that wall which had withstood the attacks of so many of his patriots. He examined it with the eye of a skilled and dauntless gene-Then he turned to the millions of Irishmen who lay prostrate, weary and almost totally discouraged-for the weight of centuries of persecution was upon them. He decided upon a plan of action, and at once set to work to mold with his marvelous tongue that disunited and disheartened race into a hopeful united people. With the magic wand of his oratory he raised them For many years—aye, even for cen- from the depths of despondency; he had rendered sluggish; he aroused

the hopes which many a failure had almost utterly destroyed; he renewed the courage made nearly lifeless by despotism; then with a peaceful army

of millions of Irishmen united in heart with him, and held spellbound by his wonderful tongue, O'Connell once more turned to that mighty wall of injustice. Its foundations were deep down in centuries of persecution, its battlements enshrouded in lowering clouds of national misery. But the lightning flash of his genius played about its entire surface. Then the thunder of his eloquence was directed against it. Again and again the lightning flashed again and again the thunder pealed, while the sound of tumult echoed and re-echoed o'er the green hills and verdent vales of Ireland. upon flash, peal upon peal, followed each other until at last that wall that had withstood the storms at centuries shook from base to battlehome combined to make Ireland a powerful factor in British politics.

So effective was their eloquence that, in 1782, England was compelled to concede to Ireland the right to make her own laws. To Grattan more than the restriction of the terms of a conservation of the restriction of the terms of a conservation of the restriction of the terms of a conservation of the restriction of the restr ore than to any other orator, was queror ! This victory restored

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the Catholics of Ireland the right to practice their religion, the privilege of taking part in the affairs of the country, and made the Irish party in the British House of Parliament a factor to be reckoned with on every important question. contributed greatly in obtaining for the citizens of the British Empire a large measure of constitutional berty than they had hitherto enjoy-

I mention these circumstances merely to show what Irish eloquence accomplished. Perhaps nowhere in the history of Grecian or Roman oratory, and certainly not in that of modern times, is there anything to surpass the marvelous spectacle presented by O'Connell ruling four millions of people for thirty years with no scepter save his eloquence. genius alone would have entitled Irish oratory to an honorable place in history. But Irish oratory does not depend alone on O'Connell. Burke's eloquence had the copiousness, the stateliness and art of Cicero's; Grattan had strength, power and energy almost equal to Demos These here with Sheridan might be placed together in the front rank of Irish oratory. Their master pieces are supplemented by the varied and masterly efforts of Curran, Flood, Shiel, as well as by the unhappy Emmett's speech from

When we weigh the combined merits of all the Irish orators and the results accomplished by Trish oratory, one may be pardoned for believing that after the two great schools of Grecian and Roman eloquence, the oratory of Ireland may rank with that of any nation. In vehemence and strength, grace and lignity it may be excelled by the oratory of Greece and Rome.

But Irish oratory possesses some qualities not found even in Grecian or Roman eloquence. When we'read Demosthenes we forget the orator and think only of his theme; we read Cicero we perceive his art and though the material grandeur of Rome fills our minds, the orator also occupies our thoughts; when we read Chatham and Webster we are charmed by their eloquence and feel of their master minds. the power But when we read the Irish orators we feel the beating of the Trish heart, filled as it always has been and ever will be, with generous and noble impulses. And responding to the soul-moving music of Irish we are bound in closer union with God, with Ireland and her inspiring history.-George Gannon, in The Catholic Sun.

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