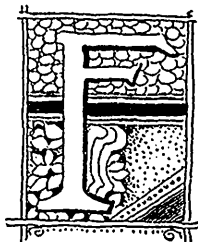


A PIONEER OF ENGLISH ORATORY.



EW men of any age, engaged in the same sphere of action, have won for themselves such a proud place in the appreciation of succeeding generations as that which has justly been accorded to Edmund Burke. Oratory was his field; and though in our language this department of intellectual labor, up to his time, had very little to present, to serve as a model, his grand and noble efforts were crowned with success. Our language, after his race was run, could no longer be said to be unfavorable to eloquence. In this department of the fine arts, the French had long previously excelled, particularly in that portion of it known as the eloquence of the pulpit. But that particular portion of oratory, which had to deal with public assemblies, had almost disappeared since the last days of the Roman Commonwealth.

The idea that oratory can flourish, only in democratic states, seems to find a powerful argument in this fact. Even when all the beneficent influences of Christianity had spread throughout Europe, oratory did not appear in such glorious apparel as it was formerly wont to do, until the French Revolution—the first vigorous revival of republican ideas in modern times. And Burke was one of the foremost men to unsheathe again this weapon, so effective for human liberty. Not at all do I mean to say that Burke adopted the revolutionary ideas of this period. Far from it, he fought to the last for the ancient institutions.

Like many others who have since displayed wonderful power, eloquence, and statesmanship, in that historic chamber, the British House of Commons, Edmund Burke was a native of Ireland. He was born in Dublin in 1730, and received his early education at Ballitore, Co. Kildare, from a Quaker named Abraham Shackleton. He always spoke of his old master as of a most highly esteemed friend. In

after days, when he enjoyed a world-wide reputation, he used to entertain a son of this old gentleman at his home as one of his most favored guests.

Burke's father was, in religion, a member of one of the Protestant denominations of that time, and was an attorney by profession; his mother, however, was a Catholic. Young Edmund was brought up in the faith of his father, but always proved to be a friend and benefactor of his mother's co-religionists. This difference of religious belief between his parents, instead of being a bane to him, is said by some, to have given rise in him, to those broad views which he ever held with regard to religious toleration. At the age of thirteen he entered Old Trinity, Dublin. Here he gained no particular distinction that might be said to have been indicative of his lofty flights in after life. He became a thorough master of neither Greek nor Latin, nor did he ever give much attention to critical niceties. We are told he read a great deal while he was yet a youthful student, and limited himself to no particular branch. He would devote himself to poetry for a while, and then suddenly turn his attention to history, mathematics or metaphysics. This peculiar feature of his early days may, to a great extent, account for the fact that he never exhibited more than ordinary abilities during his college career, but it had, no doubt, a good effect in preparing him for the great labors of later years. At the age of eighteen he took his degree of Bachelor of Arts, and left the university.

Two years later he went to London to take up the study of law at Middle Temple. This new course he soon found to be anything but congenial to his taste. He took time to make frequent visits to the House of Commons, to listen to the debates, and at last entirely abandoned his preparation for the legal profession. Then he set to work to write for periodicals. His health failed him while he was thus engaged, and his physician, Dr. Nugent, advised him to take rest. During the short interval of inactivity that followed, he became strongly