

attained to a high position in the councils of his country, purely on account of his distinction as a man of letters. Before the time of the eminent essayist, philosopher and wit, literature simply furnished a means of recreation for men during the intervals of leisure; but the revolution of 1688 increased the power of the press, and gave men of letters great influence in the state. With the extension of the power of Parliament it became indispensable to influence public opinion; and the only way that could be done was by the distribution of able pamphlets and essays, since there was then no daily press as now to send broadcast over the United Kingdom verbatim reports of the Parliamentary debates. Swift's talents as a satirist were constantly called into play, not only on the Whig, but also on the Tory side of politics; and, no doubt, if it had not been for the peculiar character of his profession, he would have attained a higher position than his friends were able to confer upon him. Addison's wit, however, was not caustic like that of the stern dean; and strong as were his political opinions, he never sullied his pen by diatribes calculated to wound the personal feelings of his opponents. His wit was of that genial cast which never excited the enmity even of those against whom it might be levelled.

Contemporary with the great English essayist was Lord Bolingbroke who, it is said, esteemed it an honour to be styled the Alcibiades of England. Bold, unscrupulous, reckless, possessed of unrivalled oratorical powers, he attained to the highest offices of the state; but his restlessness and love of intrigue led (as has been the case with so many other eminent statesmen) to his political downfall. His political writings attracted much attention in their day; but their interest has passed away with the events that called them forth: and now, like his works on mental philosophy, they are only known to the deep student, who may have occasion to look into the history of the times in which the great statesman lived. Wanting as his productions are in solidity and breadth of knowledge, yet their style is admirable for its clearness, fluency and liveliness, and had its effect in improving the public writing of his own as well as subsequent times.

Edmund Burke stands pre-eminent among a brilliant phalanx of orators and statesmen, who adorned parliament during the latter part of the eighteenth century. His literary productions attest the wide range of his philosophical mind; but none of them are so valuable as his public addresses, which are remarkable for their philosophical and constitutional wisdom, as well as for their richness of language. It was said of Burke that he often cleared the benches in his later days, by refining when "others thought of dining;" but the very elaboration of his oratorical efforts has rendered them more valuable to posterity than the comparatively superficial productions of his compeers. Among the great intellects who were contemporary with Burke was Sheridan, the statesman, orator, wit and dramatist. In Sheridan we see a remarkable illustration of the eccentricities of genius. His life was a continual struggle with bailiffs, and he died deserted by his friends. Yet after his death his countrymen, forgetting his weaknesses and only remembering his brilliant talents, gave him a place in that famous old Abbey where lie the remains of so many of England's illustrious dead.