

seem utterly extravagant, but which appears peculiarly suitable to the great event respecting which it was delivered. The orator felt that the occasion was no ordinary one—that his audience was not confined to the inhabitants of Attica, but embraced the scholars and votaries of freedom in every age, as he burst out into that magnificent passage in which he disowns the narrow limits that confined the mighty sleepers of Marathon—"the whole earth," says he, "is the sepulchre of illustrious men;" the whole earth has claimed the dead as its own; and in every land where liberty is endangered, and where brave men are called upon to lay down their lives for their country, they remember the far famed field of Marathon, and burn to revive in their own lives and deaths the glorious examples of the illustrious and undying dead.

Who is there who would venture to criticize that king of orators, the great Demosthenes, though his speeches smelt of oil, as his envious contemporaries insinuated? Yet the House of Commons would undoubtedly sneer at him if he were now to appear before them, and would consider him far too rhetorical for so matter-of-fact an assembly. His orations prepared in the historic cave, as we are told, would be ridiculed there, as all productions elaborately prepared before delivery invariably are; yet leave him in his own age, struggling to revive his countrymen to a sense of their danger, and his eloquence is beyond the reach of criticism. He is in an atmosphere more congenial with rhetoric than our own, and his orations are read by scholars and politicians with equal wonder and admiration.

The same peculiar rhetorical turn is even more observable in the history of the military achievements of ancient nations, and constitutes a striking contrast with the spirit of the present age. The Orations delivered by Greek and Roman generals, if attempted by a modern soldier, would soon consign him to half pay; yet even to us, when reading the history of classical antiquity, they seem to have been then quite adapted to the genius and spirit of those ages. No one, for instance, would designate as bombast that eloquent oration of the Scottish hero, in which he nerves his gallant followers to make a last effort for what he prophetically describes as the last asylum of liberty.*

Nor is the change in the taste of the present age from that of classical antiquity less evident in poetical and dramatic literature. Imagine the ancient Greek chorus, with its magnificent appeals, invocations or laments, transferred to the modern stage! The

* Tacitus Agric. c. 30.

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