

SUMNER.

TWENTY years have gone by since Charles Sumner died. The time has been crowded with great events. New figures have come upon the stage. Reputations have grown up, and have perished. The questions with which he dealt have been—some of them—settled. Some of them, which never will be settled until they are settled rightly, have been thrust aside for a time, only to reappear again in the near future, with more menacing aspect. But the fame of Charles Sumner grows greater, and his place in the admiration and affection of the American people grows larger, with the lapse of time.

The prediction which I made in January, 1878, in reviewing the first two volumes of Mr. Pierce's "Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner," I desire to recall and repeat now:

"Surely that is the greatest and most practical statesmanship whose power is most enduring. This is a figure which will grow with added years. When the men, not yet grown old, are gone, who shared the studies, the hopes, the joys, of that youth of richest promise; when no man lives who remembers the form of manly beauty and manly strength, and the tones of the mellow and far-sounding voice which arraigned the giant crime of all ages, or set forth for the imitation of the youth of the University, in exquisite eulogy, the four ideals which he kept ever before his own gaze; when no survivor is left of the fifteen years of strife, and labor, and anxiety, and danger, and victory, which began with the passage of the Fugitive-Slave Law and ended with the surrender at Appomattox and the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment; when the feet are dust that were wont to cross the threshold of that hospitable home, rich with its treasures of art and literature; when the eloquent voices of eulogy from orator, and poet, and pulpit, are a tradition and not a memory,—the character and career of Charles Sumner will still be efficient forces in history, and will have a still higher place than now in the gratitude of mankind."

Mr. Pierce's four volumes tell the story of the life of the greatest American statesman since the Revolutionary time. There have been greater orators, although Mr. Sumner was a very great orator. There have been better constitutional lawyers, although Mr. Sumner was a good constitutional lawyer. There have been men much more skilful in framing statutes. There have been men who contributed to the public questions of their day a larger force of original argument. There have been Senators readier in debate, of more influence

with their associates, and fitter to frame complicated measures and conduct them to success. Mr. Sumner was unpopular with the majority of the American people, and disliked by many of his associates in the Senate, even those of his own political party, during the larger part of his career. But it was reserved for him, as for no other man, to arouse the conscience of his countrymen, and to make the aroused conscience of his countrymen an efficient and prevailing force in determining the issues of his time. If the influence of Mr. Sumner had been wanting, the result of the contest between slavery and freedom for the possession of the Territories west of the Mississippi, the legal and constitutional place of the Negro race in our body politic after the war was over, the determination of the question of freedom or slavery itself, would not have been what they are now.

I think, therefore, that Mr. Pierce has occupied none too much space in the record of Mr. Sumner's life. His volumes will be authority—very likely the chief authority other than the original records themselves—for the history of the political revolution in which Charles Sumner was a leader. He has done his work with admirable industry and fidelity. He has carefully sifted and subjected to every possible test that most dangerous and misleading class of evidence, the recollections of men—even good and true men—of the transactions in which they had been personal actors. He is a lover and dear friend of the subject of his biography. But he has preserved his judgment from being swayed by friendship, as he preserved his personal independence on some important occasions while his friend was living.

Mr. Pierce's third volume begins with a description that it is hard for any person not a dweller in Boston to read with a grave face. I should be the last person in the world to speak disrespectfully, or even lightly, of the noble old city. I was born and bred almost within the sound of her bells. My heart is full of her stirring and wonderful story. Among the dearest friends of my youth and of my age have been Boston men and women. But I suppose no one of them can perceive the infinite comedy which attaches to a Boston martyrdom as it appears to the outside barbarian. It is what Mr. Sumner speaks of as "social ostracism,"—words of which no person not a Bostonian can appreciate the exact and awful meaning. The phrase is connected in some vague way with the oyster, and means that the object of Boston displeasure gets the shell while the patrician is eating the fish. Let us preserve our gravity and

speaking with due seriousness. There is nothing more dreadful than Boston martyrdom. There have been martyrs, and sufferings for righteousness, in all ages. Daniel was thrown into the lions' den because he turned his face to Jerusalem and prayed to God in his closet. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were cast into the fiery furnace. St. Peter was crucified with his head downward. The early Christians hid in catacombs, and died on beds of living coals, or starved in their subterranean caverns. The first Protestants were burned at the stake at Smithfield and Oxford and Gloucester. The Pilgrim Fathers came to New England with their households, to land on a bleak, desolate coast in midwinter. Half of them died before spring. And yet not one of the original company went back. Sumner himself encountered for years a storm of hate and rage from his own countrymen—hot and severe as a blast from hell. His mail, night and morning, was crowded with letters full of reviling and scorn, threats of violence and assassination. He was stricken down in the Senate chamber. In his desire to recover, to speak one more word for Freedom, he submitted himself to the moxa, torture which his surgeon declared terrible as ever was inflicted on man on beast. Twelve times the pitiless fire was kindled upon his spine,—the very source and origin of agony—and he did not flinch. But all these things are as nothing to the sufferings of those Boston martyrs whom a gentleman who had made a book of Spanish Extracts refused to invite to dinner. The biographies of Mr. Dana and of Mr. Sumner freeze our blood and harrow our nerves with the details of this horror.

Mr. Sumner was not without compensation. From the time of his first public appearance until his death, there was scarcely a person in Europe whose name stood high in letters or social life, whose gates would not have been opened to him as to a most welcome guest. At home, in the midst of the bitterest conflicts, all of his generation whose names anybody cares to remember now were among his friends. He returned to Massachusetts at the end of the sessions or the Senate to receive the plaudits of the people of Massachusetts; to hear the weighty "Well done" of Charles Allen; to get an affectionate letter from Whittier, or to be crowned with imperishable laurels by his Muse, which ever uttered the voice of New England; and to enjoy the loving companionship of Longfellow. But what availed all this, if the author of a book of Spanish Extracts still declined to invite him to dinner?

Do not let it be supposed that Mr. Pierce is not warranted in

treating this matter gravely. Mr. Sumner himself treated it seriously, as does Wendell Phillips in his sketch of Sumner in Johnson's Cyclopaedia. Mr. Adams does the same in his life of Dana. Mr. Dana did so himself. Undoubtedly the social influence, whether of Little Pedlington or of a metropolis like Boston, is not to be despised as a political force. Disraeli makes one of his characters, who is an aged and powerful statesman, advise a young friend who is rising in life never to despise the political power of the dandies. They not only are useful as *claqueurs*, but unhappily they often set the fashion which prevails and penetrates a great way. The political opinion of a fashionable society is sometimes copied pretty widely, like the dresses of its women or the parting of the hair of its youth. But the man must have a weak spot in him, however sensible in general, to whom it is a matter of personal concern.

Was Charles Sumner a great statesman? Was he a great orator? Was he a great man, attaining our ideal of a well-rounded and perfect manhood? These are questions which have been debated by friends as well as foes, and among men who loved him and whom he loved, as well as among those who hated him.

We may concede to those denying to Charles Sumner the highest qualities of statesmanship that he had no special gift for framing the mechanism of a complicated statute. I do not think he would have drawn a bankruptcy bill, or a tariff bill, as well as some of the eminent gentlemen who have of late rendered such services to the country. I am not sure that he could have framed the Judiciary Act, which of itself was enough to give to the name of Oliver Ellsworth a deserved immortality. It may be doubtful whether, if he had been a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, he would have been among the foremost. He did not achieve any special prominence as a member of the Constitutional Convention of Massachusetts in 1853. But he determined the currents of his country's history in great emergencies and when great issues were at stake. It was his personal influence that held back the country from a fatal strife with England and France throughout the rebellion. He prevented privateering. To him was due the adoption of the policy of arming the blacks. He caused the principle of Negro suffrage to be established in the Constitution. But for him, I believe we should have compromised with slavery before the war. But for him, I believe we should have compromised with slavery

during the war. He dealt always with the largest things in the largest way. He was a principal leader in the struggle which made slaves freedmen, and which made freedmen citizens and voters. "When he entered the Senate, free speech could not be said to exist there. To him as much as to any man was due the breaking of the chain." As we look back upon that period of history we find nothing in Charles Sumner, so far as he dealt with these great matters, either in principle or in policy, that we wish to alter.

Highly as we respect Garrison, we must admit that, if he had had his way, there would have been a great slave empire on the North American continent at this moment. We may have been stirred by the eloquence of Phillips, but if he had had his way, Lincoln would have been driven from power in the middle of the rebellion, and the South would have been permitted to go in peace. With Seward's policies, we should have had three wars on our hands at once. There is no statesman of his time whom we can compare with Charles Sumner for unerring instinct, save Lincoln alone,—and Lincoln owed much to his counsels. He did what he could best do. He did the things most needed to be done,—the things which no other man did or could do; and he left to others to do only what hundreds of others could do well enough. He contributed largely to the government of his country in the most trying period of her history, its motive and its direction. That is a pretty practical contribution to the voyage which furnishes the steamship with its engine and its compass, and selects the port for which it shall make. He was a leader and not a follower. He never studied the direction of the popular breeze. He did not gather other men's opinions before he formed or uttered his own. He was courageous, and absolutely without regard to personal consequences when great principles were involved. He knew how to bring the people to his support. The man who, in Massachusetts, attacked the Know-Nothing party, in its very delirium of triumph, when it had just swept the State as with a hurricane, electing the entire State government save the representatives of a single town, in the autumn of 1854; the man who offered in the Senate the battle-flag resolution,—was the man who was reëlected again and again by the legislature of his State, almost without opposition. If we judge him by the soundness of his principles, by the wisdom of his measures, by his power to command the support of the people, by the great public results he accomplished, there is no statesman of his time to be named in the same breath with him, save Abraham Lincoln.

Was Charles Sumner a great orator? The answer to this question, to every man's mind, must depend upon his own conception of the meaning of the term. It is quite as hard to define oratory as it is to define poetry. There are many musical and rhythmical utterances which have stirred the heart of mankind, which, to use Mr. Lowell's felicitous sentence, "do not merely nestle in the ear by virtue of their music, but in the soul and life, by virtue of their meaning," to which criticism denies the right to be called poetry. Matthew Arnold thinks that the test of a good translation of Homer is that it should make upon the reader the impression which the original makes upon great scholars like Jowett or Hawtrey. There is an oratory which, while it moves and persuades auditor and reader, fulfils few conditions of eloquence which would be laid down by any competent authority. It palls on the jaded senses of the scholar, shocks the fastidious taste of the critic, and has for the artist no sensation of pleasure or satisfaction. If the test of oratory be the fulfilment of the highest conditions, not much of the production of the famous orators of any generation will stand the requirement. Indeed, it is all pretty hard reading. Nobody to-day reads Henry Clay or Charles James Fox or William Pitt or much of Sheridan. A very few pages will contain all of Wendell Phillips that will remain long in men's memory. History has thrown away the speeches of Bolingbroke, and they will never be recovered. The bulk even of Webster's best speeches is read now for the weight of its profound meaning, and not for its oratoric or literary grace. Indeed, for eloquence to meet the demand and the test above stated, we must look to the great poets and to the Scriptures for nearly all our examples, and not to the orators.

To be a perfect and consummate orator is to possess the highest faculty given to man. Such an orator must be a great artist, and more—must be a great poet, and more—must be a master of the great things that interest mankind. What he says must have as permanent a place in literature as the highest poetry. He must be able to play at will on that mighty organ—his audience—of which human souls are the keys. He must have knowledge, wit, wisdom, fancy, imagination, courage, nobleness, grace, a heart of fire. He must himself respond to every emotion as an æolian harp to the breeze. He must have

"An eye that tears can on a sudden fill,
And lips that smile before the tears are gone."

He must have a noble personal presence. He must have the eye and the voice which are the only and natural avenues by which one human soul can enter into and subdue another. His speech must be filled with music, and possess its miraculous charm and spell,

"Which the posting winds recall
And suspend the river's fall."

He must have the quality which Burke manifested when Warren Hastings said, "I felt, as I listened to him, as if I were the most culpable being on earth," and which made Philip say of Demosthenes, "Had I been there he would have persuaded me to take up arms against myself." But while a rule so lofty and exacting may perhaps be justly applied to the poet, it is out of place when applied to the orator. He has a present, practical purpose to accomplish. If he fail in that, he fails utterly and altogether. That object is to convince the understanding, to persuade the will, to set aflame the heart of his audience or those who read what he says. He is speaking for a present occasion. Eloquence is but the feather which tips his arrow. If the orator miss the mark he is a failure, although his sentences may survive everything else in the permanent literature of the language in which he speaks.

We may well admit that Charles Sumner was not an orator of this standard. We should search our own history in vain for such an example. Daniel Webster's lucid statements made his hearers see the truth so clearly that he was worthless as an advocate of the wrong side. Wendell Phillips's beautiful diction and graceful action were delightful to the listener. But he made converts rarely, and seldom stirred in his auditors a strong moral emotion which without him they would not feel. He was reckless and unscrupulous in his assertions. His statements of a fact, his estimate of the character of a contemporary, his expression of an opinion as to public policies, had no effect on the majority of his auditors—who went to hear him out of curiosity, or to gratify a taste for good speaking—except to make them say to themselves, "I wonder if there is any truth in that." He seemed to delight in invective and in the use of his stinging weapon, as a gladiator might delight in his exhibition. Charles Sumner would have disdained to use such a gift if he had possessed it. But he stirred and convinced great masses of men. Vast audiences hung for hours, delighted, upon his lips, and went away persuaded to do his bidding. He induced them to accept

beliefs or motives which decided their action on vital occasions. In this power he ranks among the very foremost, if he be not the foremost person, in American political history.

If to be able to do this is to be a great orator, then the speeches of Charles Sumner, with very few exceptions indeed, are among the very greatest achievements of the orators who have spoken the English tongue. Patrick Henry's speech in the old court-house at Richmond, Fisher Ames's on the British Treaty, John Marshall's in the case of Robbins, Webster's reply to Hayne, Wendell Phillips's first speech in Faneuil Hall, and perhaps one or two others, are all that can be compared with them. Each of Charles Sumner's great speeches, as has been well said, was in itself an important historic event. His speeches in the Senate did more than convince—they compelled the Senate to his desire. Millions upon millions of his countrymen read them, and they determined and changed the currents of history. Wendell Phillips says of him:

"His eloquence belongs to the school of Burke, whom he liked to be thought to resemble, as indeed he did in features. His speeches had more learning than Burke cared to show, but in wealth of illustration, gorgeous rhetoric, lofty tone, and a 'gigantic morality which treads all sophistry under foot,' the resemblance was close. His real power lay in the sincerity and fiery enthusiasm of the speaker, whose whole soul freighted his words, and in the fact that there was 'always a man behind the speech.' The massive grandeur of his presence and the dignity of his bearing added largely to his speech."

Was Charles Sumner a great man, rising to the full stature of a complete and lofty manhood? If he were a great statesman, measured by the achievements we have recited; if he were a great orator, reaching even the limitations we have set down,—he must have large defects indeed to be denied the attribute of greatness, judged by whatever measure or definition. But to these he added, by the confession of all men, disinterestedness, love of country, love of humanity, inflexible integrity, and stainless purity. It has been charged that he was vain, quarrelsome, intolerable, and impractical; that he disregarded constitutional restraints and imputed to the Declaration of Independence a higher authority than to the Constitution; that he was so lacking in the sense of humor as almost to exhibit a mental deformity in this respect; that he so insisted upon his own opinion that it was impossible for him to act with other men as with equals.

I knew Charles Sumner very well indeed. I had as good an opportunity to study him as I ever had to study any human being.

My relation to him made him and his character and conduct objects of special study while he was living, as they have been since. If we understand by vanity a disposition to dwell on things light and trivial, or a disposition to dwell on one's self and to force light or trivial matters connected with one's self on the attention of other people, or an undue and overweening estimate of one's self in regard either to things light or trivial or not light or trivial, or—to use a phrase lately applied to him by a very sensible writer—"being full of one's self," I do not think Charles Sumner was a vain person. He was affectionate; he craved the sympathy of his friends and the approbation of those persons who agreed with him on the great questions with which he dealt. He craved this the more eagerly because of the storm of hate and denunciation that he encountered, and which he encountered without flinching. Undoubtedly, when he had a great responsibility or a great duty, he liked the evidence that it had been well discharged, and liked to have the public, which he served, know it. I do not believe that this was more true of him than of the average of men in public life. The desire for such sympathy or approbation never caused him to swerve one hair's breadth from the line of duty. I do not think he had an inordinate love of praise. It seems to me it was the love of sympathy. He felt quite as keenly the scorn and hate which were poured out upon his head as upon no other man of his day, as the most sensitive and delicate person I ever knew would have felt them. It was because of his sublime faith and his sublime fortitude that he encountered them. But he craved, for that reason all the more, every human sympathy. The martyr who is undergoing torture may be pardoned if he welcome a little soothing balm. It is quite natural that a man dealing with most important transactions, honestly, wisely, with a single desire to do his duty and to promote the public welfare, should desire, when he goes home, that some other explanation and account of his conduct should reach the ears of his friends than that which they read in the newspapers.

I have scarcely ever known a man in public life to whom the phrase that he seemed "to be full of himself" would be, in my judgment, less applicable. How much less ought a man to think of himself than he deserves in order to escape the imputation of vanity? Charles Sumner was a man whose individual force sometimes outweighed that of hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens. As has been said, he determined the course of the history of his country

on several very grave occasions. If you had subtracted him from the side of which he was a leader, the decision of the people, in regard to some of the greatest issues of his time, would have been, in my opinion, the other way.

To form a just estimate of Charles Sumner it is necessary to settle the questions: first, whether there be in this world such a thing as wickedness; and, second, whether human slavery be such a thing. These are questions about which many more people are in doubt than are ready to admit it. It is true that Mr. Sumner adopted as a fundamental and controlling maxim in the construction of the Constitution of the United States, that the idea was not to be entertained that its framers meant to incorporate in it a mandate to commit a crime against the moral law. He sought to carry that principle of construction to its legitimate results regardless of contemporaneous exposition. I wonder what an archangel would have done or said if he had been sent into this world with a commission to lead and inspire a movement for the overthrow of slavery in the United States, a commission which would have been entirely worthy of such an ambassador. I think we should not have been astonished if such a being had adopted an interpretation something like that of Charles Sumner.

I am not certain that joking, or the capacity for joking, is the accompaniment, or ought to be the accompaniment, of the great and severe transactions of human life; that men who are on trial for their lives, or who are framing constitutions or bills of rights or denouncing great public crimes, are moved to take humorous views of the situation; or that there is any record that the Saviour or the Apostles or the Prophets, or either of them, had much humor.

I think, too, the Saviour, or an archangel, or an Apostle, or a Prophet would have seemed sometimes a little impractical. He might not have shown much of the kind of sagacity which was manifested by Mr. William H. Seward. All I have to say of Mr. Seward's sagacity is that it would have brought the cause of freedom—and the Union itself—to wreck on twenty occasions, if he had had his way. Mr. Sumner's policies were as surely the pathway of success and safety as they were the pathway of duty. I believe him to have been incapable of a permanent anger. He was wholly devoted to Freedom, Righteousness, Justice. The paths which lead to them seemed to him clear as noonday. And so his righteous indignation blazed forth upon friend or foe who seemed to him at any time to be an obstacle.

But there was nothing personal in it. He was placable when the present occasion had passed by. He had but one quarrel—that with Grant and Fish—which was left unreconciled when he died. If he had lived till Grant vetoed the Inflation Bill, that difference would have been forgotten.

Let us hope that these volumes will always be a text-book for Americans. Let successive generations be brought up on the story of the noble life of Charles Sumner. Let the American youth think of these things. They are things true, honest, just, lovely, and of good report. There is virtue in them and praise, if there be any virtue and if there be any praise. They do not belong to fiction, but to history. It is no Grecian or Roman or English heroism that the youth is invited to study. Charles Sumner belongs to us. His youth was spent under a humble American roof. His training was in an American school and college. He sleeps in American soil. He is ours, wholly and altogether. His figure will abide in History like that of St. Michael in Art, an emblem of celestial purity, of celestial zeal, of celestial courage. It will go down to immortality with its foot upon the dragon of Slavery, and with the sword of the spirit in its hand, but with a tender light in its eye, and a human love in its smile. Guido and Raphael conceived their "invulnerable saint,

Invulnerable, impenetrably armed;
Such high advantages his innocence
Gave him above his foe; not to have sinned,
Not to have disobeyed; in fight he stood
Unwearied, unobnoxious to be pained
By wounds."

The Michael of the painters, as a critic of genius akin to their own has pointed out, rests upon his prostrate foe light as a morning cloud, no muscle strained, with unhacked sword and unruffled wings, his bright tunic and shining armor without a rent or stain. Not so with our human champion. He had to bear the bitterness and agony of a long and doubtful struggle, with common weapons and against terrible odds. He came out of it with soiled garments and with a mortal wound, but without a regret and without a memory of hate.

GEO. F. HOAR.

HAS IMMIGRATION DRIED UP OUR LITERATURE?

By the word literature I mean here of course literature of power and genius, and not mere literature of information, as it is called, which includes encyclopædias and newspapers. There is no doubt that at one time literature of genius was produced in this country, nearly all of it in one State, Massachusetts; and that the men who produced it—now all dead but one—have left no successors. Longfellow, Whittier, Bryant, Hawthorne, Poe, Emerson, Irving, Prescott, Motley, Lowell, and a few others were unquestionably men of genius and were recognized as such the world over. Holmes is now the sole survivor. All these men, including Channing and Bayard Taylor, were born between the years 1780 and 1825. Most of them had passed through the impressionable years of life before the year 1825. But since 1825 no man has been born who can for one moment be compared to them in point of literary genius, although in England at least a dozen men have been born since 1825 who are recognized as men of genius, and who continue the line of English literature. If we follow English literature backward, we find that the production of literary men of high order was steady and continuous for several hundred years, every decade producing several of them. Indeed the regularity with which they appeared is quite remarkable.

During the forty-five years in which our great literary men were produced they appeared with the same regularity. Our literature of that time had all the characteristics of a national literature. It was complete in all the departments of poetry, romance, oratory, philosophy, history, and theology. A full national literature is always of this sort. It is the expression of the highest and subtlest feeling of the people in all their avenues of life. But now our literature contains few if any men of genius and shows no varied power. Our two or three literary men that are in any way remarkable are confined to one class.

How does it happen that our literature is a mere isolated patch? Why were we able to produce men of genius during the forty-five