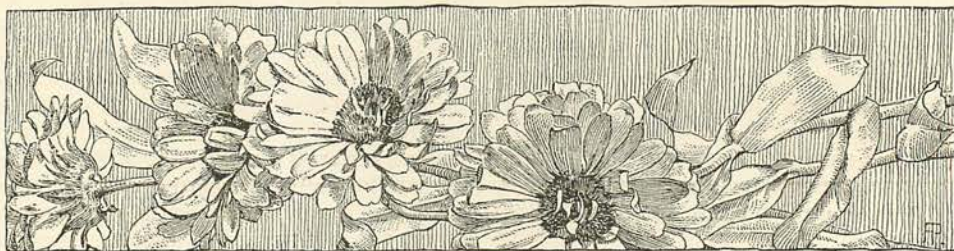


which signs and wonders were the most natural things in the world.

Acting in accordance with his views of duty, Pobedonostzeff has, of course, aroused bitter enmities. Personages of great influence and of every belief have for years labored to discredit him with the Emperor, and to bring about his downfall. At various times during my stay reports came that these efforts had been successful, that he had been treated with coolness at the Winter Palace, and that his sway was ending. But in every case these reports were soon seen to embody hope rather than fact; and on one of these occasions, when the report of his downfall was even more circumstantial than usual, one of his most bitter enemies, a lady moving in the highest court circles, said to me: "Look out now for some new monstrosity in the shape of persecution. I have always noted that a report of his disgrace is only the prelude to some new and ingenious form of

outrage against his religious or political opponents."

Such is the man who, during the reign of Alexander III, exercised vast power throughout the Russian Empire, the statesman who stood nearest the throne then, and who apparently stands nearest the throne now. He is indeed a study. The descriptive epithet which seems to cling to him, "the Torquemada of the nineteenth century," he once discussed with me in no unkindly spirit—indeed, in as gentle a spirit as can well be conceived. His life furnishes a most interesting study in churchmanship, in statesmanship, and in human nature, and shows how some of the men most severely condemned by modern historians—great persecutors, inquisitors, and the like—may have based their actions on theories the world has little understood, and may have had as little innate ferocity as their more tolerant neighbors.



## AFTER-DINNER ORATORY.

BY BRANDER MATTHEWS.



**A** FRIEND of mine considers it to be a most curious coincidence that the rise of after-dinner oratory in New York was almost simultaneous with the decline of negro minstrelsy. He is ready enough to admit that the banquet-hall is not the fit arena for the perfervid magniloquence of Patrick Henry, but he holds also that it should not be a mere circus-ring for the idle capering of Joe Miller. He tells me that even at the reunions of the alumni of his college, where those present may be supposed to be every one a gentleman and a scholar, he is annoyed to discover that not a few of the speakers vie with one another in stringing together cheap anecdotes wholly unrelated to the topic in hand; and he declares that this is no better than the competitive grinning through a horse-collar which used to be an attraction in the country fairs of Merry England. He

wishes absolutely to banish the anecdote from the festive board, on the ground that the man who is invited to address him has no right to substitute for the expected speech the recital of a leaf from an old jest-book.

And here it seems to me that my justly irritated friend goes too far. Like many reformers, he urges total abstinence where all that is needed is moderation in use. The anecdote should be ancillary always; it is a handmaiden to be summoned only when wanted. The comic story is a good servant, but a bad master. Only too true is it that some postprandial addresses are so thin in theme, and so thick with jokes, that they resemble the peanut candy, where you cannot see the candy for the peanuts, or (to put it only a little differently) where you cannot catch the thought for the chestnuts. The man who habitually makes a speech of this sort is wont to think of himself as a wit; but, as *Olivia* says in Wycherley's play: "He a

Wit! hang him; he's only an Adopter of straggling Jests and fatherless Lampoons: by the Credit of which he eats at good Tables, and so, like the barren Beggar-woman, lives by borrowed Children!"

But in its proper place the anecdote is excellent. Indeed, I once heard Lowell, that most expert and easy of speakers, declare that a good after-dinner speech ought to contain a platitude, a quotation, and an anecdote. He slyly admitted that no speaker need put himself out in seeking for a platitude, as, in all probability, that could be achieved without taking thought. Dr. Edward Everett Hale, with his customary ingenuity, has shown us how any one who has equipped himself with one apt and adequate quotation is thrice armed, and ready for any cause. The author of the "Ingham Papers" suggested the carrying about in the memory of a line or two of resonant Latin verse; and he explained how this could be fitted to half a dozen different occasions by artfully varied translations. Perhaps a scrap of verse in the vernacular, a couplet in our native tongue, might be made to serve as well, so long as it were doubtfully vague and loftily sonorous.

Effective as the quotation may be when sustained and relieved by its accompanying platitude, its force is less than that of the anecdote adroitly chosen, unexpected in its unfolding, and having concealed in it a pungent pertinence revealing itself only at the very end. A single story, and one only, can thus affect the listeners; to add another would be to spoil this. Every parlor magician knows how disastrous it is to attempt the same trick twice. Unity of purpose lends weight to the words of the speaker who is willing to compact his thought. We are told that the five-minute speeches with which Judge Hoar has year after year delighted the Harvard chapter of the Phi Beta Kappa contain "but one original idea, clearly stated, and but one fresh story, well told."

This is indeed a model to be admired of all men; yet how few of us will take the trouble of copying it! Concision is not a free gift; it is to be won only by strenuous effort and resolute self-conquest. To ramble and amble along for half an hour, saying nothing in particular, is so much easier for most of us than it is to deliver a pregnant message in five or ten minutes. And if we have no message—why, then there is no need for us to stand and deliver. Utterly without excuse is he who, having nothing to say, insists on saying it at great length. We have all suffered helplessly under a speech that is

three quarters of an hour passing a given point. Even the vanity of those guilty of these things ought not to blind them to the inattention of their hearers, the restlessness, the weariness. We Americans are too good-natured at times, too tolerant, else would a tedious speech meet with a swift and condign punishment. The British are less courteous. They interrupt promptly; they badger and they catcall. We sit silent, and writhe without shrieking, and at worst we steal away without protest; but this is a last resort. He was obviously a novice who declared how it was that he knew his maiden lecture to be successful—"because more stayed in than went out."

Wearisome as this rapid dribble of words can be, it is not so offensive to some of us as the equally empty speech which is merely a mosaic of stories supposed to be laughter-provoking. Judge Hoar made his point, and drove it home, because he had one thought and one anecdote; but what wonder is it that they make no impression who have twenty anecdotes and no thought? A hodgepodge of jests of all ages and of all countries, illustrating no theme, thrown together fortuitously, with the infelicity of a chance page of the patent-medicine almanac—what is this but the crackling of thorns under a pot? Yet more than one man of genuine ability has of late descended thus to play the clown, going about from dinner to dinner, ready to exchange reputation for notoriety if only he can "set the table in a roar." It was a fit punishment that befell one of them, a winter or two ago, who came late to a banquet, and was grieved to find that every jest of his fell flat. When he had made an end of speaking, he sorrowfully asked the man next to him what the matter might be, and whether his stories were not good stories. "Ye-es," was the answer; "they were good enough, I suppose; but then, you see, the earlier speakers had told them all."

The speaker who rambles and ambles along, saying nothing, and his fellow, the speaker who links jest to jest, saying little more, are both of them unabashed in the presence of an audience. They are devoid of all shyness. They are well aware that they have "the gift of the gab"; they rejoice in its possession; they lie in wait for occasions to display it. They have helped to give foreigners the impression that every American is an oratorical revolver, ready with a few remarks whenever any chairman may choose to pull the trigger. And yet there are Americans not a few to whom the making

of an after-dinner speech is a most painful ordeal. When the public dinner was given to Charles Dickens in New York, on his first visit to America, Washington Irving was obviously the predestined presiding officer. Curtis tells us that Irving went about muttering: "I shall certainly break down; I know I shall break down." When the dinner was eaten, and Irving arose to propose the health of Dickens, he began pleasantly and smoothly in two or three sentences; then hesitated, stammered, smiled, and stopped; tried in vain to begin again; then gracefully gave it up, announced the toast, "Charles Dickens, the guest of the nation," and sank into his chair amid immense applause, whispering to his neighbor: "There! I told you I should break down, and I've done it."

When Thackeray came, later, Irving "consented to preside at a dinner, if speeches were absolutely forbidden; the condition was faithfully observed" (so Curtis records), "but it was the most extraordinary instance of American self-command on record." Thackeray himself had no fondness for after-dinner speaking, nor any great skill in the art. He used to complain humorously that he never could remember all the good things he had thought of in the cab; and in "Philip" he went so far as to express a hope that "a day will soon arrive (but I own, mind you, that I do not carve well) when we shall have the speeches done by a skilled waiter at a side-table, as we now have the carving."

Hawthorne was as uncomfortable on his feet as were Thackeray and Irving; but his resolute will steeled him for the trial. When he dined with the Mayor of Liverpool, he was called upon after the toast of the United States. "Being at bay, and with no alternative, I got upon my legs and made a response," he wrote in his note-book, appending this comment: "Anybody may make an after-dinner speech who will be content to talk onward without saying anything. My speech was not more than two or three inches long; . . . but, being once started, I felt no embarrassment, and went through it as coolly as if I were going to be hanged."

He also notes that his little speech was quite successful, "considering that I did not know a soul there, except the Mayor himself, and that I am wholly unpractised in all sorts of oratory, and that I had nothing to say." To each of these three considerations of Hawthorne's it would be instructive to add a comment, for he spoke under a triple dis-

advantage. A speech cannot really be successful when the speaker has nothing to say. It is rarely successful unless he knows the tastes and the temper of those he is addressing. It can be successful only casually unless he has had some practice in the simpler sort of oratory.

As to this last, Hawthorne himself records that he had difficulty in fitting his voice to the size of the room. Perhaps no American consul should be allowed to go to England until he had passed a non-competitive examination in public speaking, since that is likely to be one of his chief tasks. Ambassadors are no longer sent abroad to lie for the benefit of their country, but to make speeches; and consuls do their part also. Some sort of training-school might be attached to the State Department to impart instruction in this art; and the government should issue its credentials to no one who had not mastered the rudiments, even if the full course were not taken. A well-known British novelist told me once, in London, that his youngsters had recently come back from dancing-school in great excitement, since several of the Queen's grandchildren had just entered. "The little royalties take everything," it was explained; "not merely dancing, and deportment, and how to enter a room—but how to lay a corner-stone, and how to turn round and bow to the people!"

Our ambassadors to the court of St. James should take everything; but the consuls might be let off if they qualified simply as after-dinner speakers. At least they ought to have imparted to them the final secret of after-dinner speaking—a secret to be divined, indeed, from an analysis of the triple drawback of which Hawthorne declared himself to be aware. Assuming that the man who is called to his feet after dinner can so control his voice as to be heard and understood, the secret of certain success lies in his having something to say which he wants to say to that audience, and which that audience wants to hear from him.

If the speaker has something to say that he really wants to say, then his interest in the subject will prove contagious. If he also has the tact to say this simply, briefly, brightly, unaffectedly, and to stop promptly when he has said it, then he cannot fail. If, further, what he has to say happens to be something that his hearers are anxious to be told, then his success is assured. If, at last, with all these advantages he has the added good fortune of hitting the temper of the audience, then what awaits him is little

less than a triumph. There is an electrical contact instantly; the circuit of sympathy is complete; and they laugh at his lightest jest, and thrill at his hint of an appeal to their higher feelings.

Here is where popularity is profitable; for any gathering is glad to see a well-known man, and eager to listen to him. When Lowell made a speech in England, every one wanted to hear him, and he had always something he wanted to say—something that should bring out the kinship of England and America, while at the same time emphasizing the independence, the equality, and the dignity of the United States. For example, when the Incorporated Society of Authors gave a dinner to him and to the other American men of letters then in London, he took care to explain that the bitterness against the British which Tocqueville had perceived in the United States in 1828, and which had been referred to by Mr. Bryce (who presided), was due to the impressment of American seamen, some fifteen hundred of whom were serving on board English ships when at last they were delivered. "These things should be remembered, not with resentment, but for enlightenment," said Lowell. "There may still be difficulties between the two countries that are serious, although none, I think, that good sense and good feeling cannot settle. I have been told often enough to remember that my countrymen are apt to think that they are always in the right—that they are apt to look at their own side of the question only. Now, this characteristic conduces certainly to peace of mind and imperturbability of judgment, whatever other merits it may have." Then he paused a moment, and dryly added: "I am sure I don't know where we got it—do you?" And in a moment the laughing applause proved to him that the shaft had gone home—a most felicitous example, also, of the value of adroit understatement. It was an illustration, furthermore, of the truth that, useful as humor may be, good humor is even more useful.

The pleasant impression which a public dinner should leave in the memories of those who have attended it will be due in part, no doubt, to the wit and the eloquence of the several speakers; but I think it is even more dependent upon the judgment of the committee in charge, and upon the decision of character possessed by the presiding officer. It matters little how good the speeches are, if they are too many and too long. At a dinner in New York, a year or

two ago, a senator of the United States spoke for two hours. At another dinner in New York, a little later, there were fourteen toasts announced; and the inexperienced chairman rashly allowed two unexpected guests of distinction to talk each for half an hour.

Five toasts, or six at the most—this is the limit of enjoyment; and every one who is asked to respond to a toast should be requested not to exceed fifteen minutes—with a leaning on the side of mercy. A program like this makes possible an intercalary address from a distinguished man discovered at one of the tables. If there are six speakers, and each takes the full limit of time allotted to him, and the presiding officer has risen sharply at nine o'clock, then the party can break up at eleven, amused and enlightened, it may be, but certainly not bored beyond bearing.

While Irving and Thackeray and Hawthorne were among those who dreaded the public dinner, Scott enjoyed such feasts, and made a good figure at them, not as a speaker only, but in the more exalted and arduous position of presiding officer. It was at a theatrical dinner which was given in Edinburgh in 1827, and over which he presided, that he first formally acknowledged the authorship of the *Waverley Novels*. In his "Journal" Scott records his agreement to act as chairman at this banquet, and he adds that to preside was

a situation in which I have been rather felicitous, not by much superiority of art or wisdom, far less of eloquence; but by two or three simple rules:

*1st.* Always hurry the bottle round for five or six rounds, without prosing yourself or permitting others to prose. . . .

*2nd.* Push on, keep moving, as Young Rapid says. Do not think of saying fine things. . . . You will find people satisfied with wonderfully indifferent jokes, if you can but hit the taste of the company, which depends much on its character. . . .

*3rdly.* When you have drunk a few glasses to play the good-fellow and banish modesty (if you are unlucky enough to have such a troublesome companion), then beware of the cup too much. . . .

*Lastly.* Always speak short. . . .

For the more sober taste of to-day Scott's rules are a little too redolent of the rollicking conviviality of "t is seventy years since"; but they are otherwise as sound as when he set them down, and they bear witness still to the shrewd common sense which was ever one of his most marked characteristics. Be brief yourself, and lively, and see

to it that the others are at least brief—here is the whole duty of the presiding officer. Strictly to limit the number of the speakers, and to choose them judiciously, that their several styles of speaking may contrast agreeably—this is the part of the committee. If the speakers, one and all, happen also to possess the real secret of after-dinner speaking, as hereinbefore set forth,—if they have

each something they want to say, which the diners wish to hear,—then, and then only, will the feast linger in the memories of all present as a complete and satisfying work of art. The precepts to be followed before this consummate result can be achieved may be trifles, each of them; but, as Michelangelo said, "Trifles make perfection—and perfection is not a trifle."

## CLUB AND SALON. I.

BY AMELIA GERE MASON,  
Author of "Women of the French Salons."

IT is not too much to say that the entire present generation of women is going to school. Infancy cultivates its mind in the kindergarten, while the woman of threescore seeks consolation and diversion in clubs or a university course, instead of resigning herself to seclusion and prayers, or the chimney-corner and knitting, after the manner of her ancestors. Even our amusements carry instruction in solution. Childhood takes in knowledge through its toys and games; the débutante discusses Plato or Henry Irving in the intervals of the waltz; youth and maturity alike find their pleasure in papers, talks, plays, music, and recitations. In these social menus everything is included, from a Greek drama or an Oriental faith to Wagner and the latest theory of economics. We have Browning at breakfast, Ibsen or Maeterlinck at luncheon, and the new Utopia at dinner; while Homer classes and Dante classes alternate with lectures on the Impressionists or the Decadents. In this rage for knowledge, science and philosophy are not forgotten. Fashion ranges the field from occultism to agnosticism, from the qualities of a microbe to the origin of man. To-day it searches the problems of this world, to-morrow the mysteries of the next. There is nothing too large or too abstruse for the eager, questioning spirit that seeks to know all things, or at least to skim the surface of all things.

Nor is this energetic pursuit of intelligence confined to towns or cities. Go into the remote village or hamlet, and you will find the inevitable club, where the merits of the last novel, the love-affairs of Swift, the political situation, the silver question, the Armenian

troubles, and the state of the universe generally, are canvassed by a circle of women as freely, and with as keen a zest, as the virtues and shortcomings of their neighbors were talked over by their grandmothers—possibly may be still by a few of their benighted contemporaries.

In its extent this mania for things of the intellect is phenomenal. One might imagine that we were rapidly becoming a generation of pedants. Perhaps we are saved from it by the perpetual change that gives nothing time to crystallize. The central points of all this movement are the women's clubs of which the social element is a conspicuous feature, and we take our learning so comfortably diluted and pleasantly varied that it ceases to be formidable, though on the side of learning it may leave much to be desired.

But it is notably in this mingling of literature and life that women have always found their greatest intellectual influence, and the club is not likely to prove an exception. The rapidity of its growth is equaled only by the extent of its range. Of women's clubs there is literally no end, and they are yet in their vigorous youth. We have literary clubs, and art clubs, and musical clubs; clubs for science, and clubs for philanthropy; parliamentary clubs, and suffrage clubs, and anti-suffrage clubs—clubs of every variety and every grade, from the luncheon club, with its dilettante menu, and the more pretentious chartered club, that aims at mastering a scheme of the world, to the simple working-girls' club, which is content with something less: and all in the sacred name of culture. They multiply, federate, hold conventions,