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An Anniversary Oration: Patronage of the Arts and Sciences, 1848 February 22

William Baker Bennet

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Patronage of the arts and sciences

Hope has ever been the comfort and support of man. Whilst all around him was happiness and peace he stood in no need of hope but when the dark clouds of disappointment and sorrow began to hover upon the horizon then he turned with anxious gaze towards his guiding star the star of hope. As its brightness has increased so man has risen. We behold him struggling against adversity and surmounting difficulties until he rises from obscurity to the highest pinnacle of fame. Whilst hope is in the ascent man has yielded to no opposition. But when darkness surrounds him so that no cheering ray of hope appears to enlighten his way he sinks without a struggle into insignificance. The most powerful intellect fails to accomplish any thing worthy of admiration the most aspiring genius sinks unknown into oblivion. Ye when hope is gone man loses the great man springs to action. His desires may arouse him for a moment but his efforts become paralyzed under the influence of despair. Ambition might point him to the lofty peaks from whence he might catch the world's admiring gaze but without hope the rugged steep to fame are too difficult to tempt ambitious glory. Unless beautified by hope numerous simple possesses no charm and the

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arts and sciences lose their attractions
 Hence science and the arts have advanced
 as hope has brightened their sky. When
 ever public patronage has given them its
 fostering care they in their turn have
 reflected glory honor and fame upon
 their protectors. Let science and the arts
 be made the highways to wealth power
 or renown and abured by hope thou-
 sands of aspiring souls will be found
 eager to embrace their offers.

In glancing at the history of the world
 great and important differences are con-
 tinually presented to our view. We see
 a nation enjoying all the splendor and
 power of civilized life. The fame of its
 magnificence has reached the end of the
 earth. The wisdom of its philosophers has
 become the oracles of adjacent empires. Great
 in arts and in arms it is the wonder of the
 world. While at a little distance we be-
 hold another enjoying the same advan-
 tages of soil climate and situation
 whose name is hardly known beyond its
 proper bounds. Yet even upon the same
 spot knowledge and ignorance alternate
 by rule. Once Egypt was the great em-
 porium of literature and in that na-
 tion was embodied every thing that was
 wise and great. Egypt still remains
 but the fertilizing Nile no longer wa-
 ters the luxuriant fields of a powerful
 Kingdom. Babylon once astonished
 the world by her magnificence but
 Babylon has fallen and as the anti-
 quary ascends the majestic Euphrates

He sees not even a land mark to tell where that proud city stood. It is not my intention however to search into the great political causes which have wrought these mighty changes but to notice how particularly why nations and individuals also have excelled in the arts and sciences. The chief promoter of these is public patronage

Greece has ever been regarded the model of perfection in learning and the arts. Her temples and her public buildings, her statarary and her paintings her philosophers and her orators have presented the most pleasing fields for the historian, the sublimest themes for poet. Athens the centre of Grecian glory was indeed a splendid city. As the stranger advanced along her streets lofty domes and towering porticoes continually struck his astonished gaze. The various orders of architecture seem rising with each other in adding beauty to their city. Within her edifices were portrayed the painters skill. Now could be seen the majestic form of Jupiter Olympus frowning in solemn grandeur upon his worshippers. While the public places were graced by numerous statues of lesser deities. In her groves were collected the Athenian youth around some Grecian sage. Her fretted roofs and garrisoned walls continually resounded the sonorous notes of her poets. While the shouts of applause told of the wonderful effects of Grecian eloquence. Such might once have been the scenes

in the capitol of Attica. But whence this splendor and magnificence? This thirst for knowledge? This devotion to the Muses? This glow of eloquence? It was on account of public patronage. Architecture painting and sculpture philosophy poetry and oratory all became the subjects of Grecian care and under her fostering hand they rose to perfections. It was this that reared the splendid edifices of Athens and adorned the pages of Grecian history with so many illustrious names

The architect as he laboured knew that he was sure of his reward. Wealth honor and fame were before him and as he grew faint by his continual toil the hope of obtaining these again nerved him to action. Hence the splendid temples the lofty pillars the majestic arches of the Grecian cities. Here too painting received its share of attention. Kings and nobles became its patrons. Perhaps as the weary painter leaned over his easel the thoughts of his future embolism and war and arrow awoke his slumbering imagination to activity. He saw himself a man of wealth the companion of royalty. Hence arose the genius of Zeuxis and Apelles the glory of the Grecian name

But perhaps to no art was Greece more attached than to sculpture. Hence there was none carried to greater perfection than this. The sculptor enjoyed peculiar advantages. Not only was he favoured by the people and by kings but were de-

vinity was somewhat dependent upon him
 for homage. From these circumstances
 the sculptor occupied a situation that
 might well excite the emulation of the
 lovers of fame. Urged on by such an in-
 fluence on every hand the Athenian
 youth apply themselves to this ennobling
 art. The groves of Attica become peopled
 with deities and over every public edi-
 fice a god presided. Did any one of their
 numerous deities bestow a peculiar
 favour upon Athens the sculptor was
 called for to do him honour. And as the
 sculpture was handed down from age
 to age his name shared its fame and im-
 mortality. It was the hope of this that awoke
 the latent energies ^{of Phidias} and filled Athens
 with the wonderful works of his plastic
 hand. Tragic too anticipating similar
 glory grasped the chisel and from under
 his hand arose Venus in all the loveliness
 of woman. No wonder that Grecian Sulp-
 ture has never been surpassed. "The im-
 ages of Venus and Apollo are as much wor-
 shipped now as miracles of art as they were
 by the ancients as representations of
 deities

But although Greece ever encouraged
 her artists yet ever under the charge of
 her rulers the truth of our proposition is
 sustained. And when Cimron and Per-
 iclus the great lovers of art sat upon the
 throne of Athens twas then she rose to
 the zenith of her glory and shone with
 her most dazzling splendor

But if Greece was attentive

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to the arts she was no less so to the sciences
Hence her renown for wisdom. Patronizing
learning her sons apply themselves with
diligence and perseverance to their stu-
dies. Their country called for philosophers
poets and orators and they determined
she should not call in vain. Before each
of these she held out a glittering prize
Honor and fame were their reward. Even
their most powerful rulers owed their
success to their philosophers. and Alex-
ander himself learned his wisdom
from Aristotle. The philosophers of ancient
Greece looking down the vista of futu-
rity saw their names engraved for
immortality. It was this hope that
drew forth Aristotle and lead him
through the obscure mazes of logic. It
was this hope that revealed to Pythagoras
the hidden treasures of mathematics
It was this hope that gave to Socrates and
Plato the palm for wisdom
Hope too animated the Grecian poet. In
their games and at their festivals and
feasts the lyre and the song afforded
their most favourite amusement-
Hence poetry became a great highway
to distinction and immediately nu-
merous rivals are travelling to the
desired goal. Thence emanated the sub-
lime conceptions of the Grecian poets
They were the honoree of the nation. Was
a great banquet prepared for the enter-
tainment of the people? the poet was
there to add his quota of amusement-
Had a warrior returned from some

bloody field crowned with the laurel wreath of victory? the poet was the one to welcome him home and herald abroad his fame. To be a poet was to be immortal. It was such bright anticipations as these that gave to Greece a Homer whose immortal poems like a meteor in the gloom of night brightens the obscure antiquities of his country.

But to none was hope brighter than to the Grecian orator idolized by his countrymen and courted by kings he shone preeminent in the nation. To him "gates proud portals opened wide" and power was in his grasp. Upon his shoulders hung the destinies of his country. His field for eloquence was as boundless as space. On the battle field or in the council chamber the orator alike wielded a potent influence. Peace and war both offered occasions for display. It was under such circumstances as these that Minerva and Mercury showered their blessings upon their sons of Greece. As the praises of the hoary-headed orator resounded in the ears ~~renewed~~ of the tyro he with increasing energy renewed his exertions. It was the shouts of applause that followed the orator Callistratus that first inflamed the ambition of young Demosthenes. Once excited he perseveres in his course until he stands before us the most perfect model of eloquence and the ruler of the Athenian council. But soon the shouts of battle & the din of war is heard within the Grecian states and a powerful army is threatening an invasion. But why delays the Macedonian conqueror upon the borders of

Attica? It was because Demosthenes thundered from the forum at Athens. He feared not the armies then opposed to him but he feared the influence of so great an orator. Finally however the victory is won and the Macedon sways his sceptre over subjugated Athens.

He does not demand the sons of her nobles but requires ten orators as pledges of submission. What greater evidence could we have of the influence and patriotism of her orators. The foes to tyrants and the friends of their country it is the greatest eulogy that could be pronounced upon them.

Thus Greece became the most learned nation of her age. For her attainments in literature she remains unrivalled even at the present day.

Tracing back her superiority in each of these respective branches we have found it to be the result of public patronage. Hope was extended to all her citizens. "Hope which warms up the torpid sensibilities lights up the fires of genius and unlocks the treasures of intelligence". Public patronage was the cause glory honor and fame were the effects. But "when Rome became the mistress of Greece and placed her iron foot upon the neck of that proud nation her lamps of literature warmed in its brightness and art which had attained the very acme of perfection sunk into obscurity". Her sons no longer studied under a wise and powerful government & hope no longer beamed upon the efforts of genius. Greece had fallen. Next Rome appears before us the most powerful nation of antiquity. Extending

her arms from country to country she at least
 proclaimed herself to be the mistress of the
 world. In her government however hope
 shone brightest upon the warrior. Her
 favours were chiefly bought upon the bat-
 tle field and the toga of distinction was more
 frequently stained with blood. Yet she did
 not entirely neglect civil honours. The eter-
 nal monuments of Rome can still bear
 testimony of her skill in the arts and
 under some of her rulers Roman
 genius shone forth of no inferior order.
 Thus under Augustus and Maecenas
 Virgil and Horace wrote. To true their
 patronage could not inspire them with
 the gift of poetry yet it was by their assis-
 tance that they rose to renown. Were
 it not for the encouragement of Augustus
 The Mantuan bard contented with
 the humbler lays of pastoral life had
 never aspired to the loftier strains of the
Eniad. Had not Maecenas been the mu-
 nificent friend of Horace his name had
 never survived the revolutions of centu-
 ries. The atmosphere of Rome however
 was more congenial to the orator. The thrill-
 ling scenes of that government were
 well calculated to draw forth his resour-
 ces. In the decision of every momentous
 question he swayed all influence and
 as he stood upon the forum he saw around
 him a people who could appreciate eloqu-
 ence and were ever ready to bestow upon
 it their applause. It was such thoughts as
 these that induced Cicero to forsake the
 joys of private life to mingle in polit-

ical strife. Inspired by such bright hopes he eclipsed all his rivals and became the boast of his countrymen.

But Rome too was destined to decay. Corruption had seized upon the heart of that government and although that mighty empire tottered long upon its foundation assailed by foes without & foes within it at last yielded to its fate. With Rome expired the patronage of learning and consequently learning itself began to wane. Thus we have seen that in two of the most powerful nations of antiquity the success of the arts and sciences depended upon public patronage.

It is true it may sound more poetical to ascribe the advancement of the ancients to their climate and scenery but when we search for facts we will find that it was because they patronized learning. If not why is it that they do not now exhibit the same degree of excellence they once possessed? The same breezes fan their mountains the same sun warms their vallies, but alas! their power and magnificence has fled forever. The Ilissus still threads its way through the consecrated groves of Attica but no longer do groups of philosophers hold high converse upon her shady banks. Scios rocks still throws back the waves of the Aegean Sea but no blind bard appears to catch inspiration from their mirroring. The eternal monuments of Athenian glory yet remain but no longer do they recede the elo-

quence of a Demosthenes. Spring still turns
 her garlands around the summits of Ita-
 ly's mountains but the chaplets of literary
 fame have withered from the brow of the
 sons

After the fall of the Roman empire
 the world became shrouded in darkness
 From the 6th to the 13th century there was
 a mental night and the arts and scienc-
 es were entirely neglected. The dark ages
 had begun and hope no longer shone
 upon the lover of literature. Why should
 the philosopher spend his life in gaining
 wisdom when there were none that would
 give heed to his counsel? Why need the po-
 et strive for glory when there were none
 that would appreciate his excellence?

Why should the orator learn to be eloquent
 when the only argument used was the sword?
 About the 11th century however the cru-
 sades commenced. The coming of
 Christ is announced and all Europe
 prepare to wrest from the hands of his
 enemies Jerusalem and the Holy Land
 For 200 years the crescent and the cross
 struggle for victory and existence. Mean-
 while the magnificent libraries of Con-
 stantinople are thrown open and
 science and the arts again dawned
 upon the world. Struck with the splen-
 dor of the cities through which they
 passed the crusaders return home eager
 to imitate their example. Thence began
 the patronage of learning and hope again
 awoke the slumbering intellects of the
 East. From them light and knowl-

edge began to radiate and soon all Europe shone in one blaze of glory. The dark ages were past.

But mark the effects of public patronage. The astronomer does not now ascend the lofty towers of the east to watch the stars but from diurnal frosts in barbarous climes he learns to trace their regular motions. It is not now the azure mountains and serene sky of Italy that wakes the poet's lyre, but enlivened by hope men the hazy atmosphere of England possesses the gift of inspiration. The voice of the orator is no longer born upon pleasant zephyrs from inland seas but it is mingled with the tempests that sweep old oceans over. Alured by hope genius has fled thine lonely climes and found a more congenial home in the wilds of the old world.

England proffering his assistance to the arts and sciences sees that the sons of the sea-girt isle are those of no inferior minds. Bright beamed the star of hope, and the honoured names of Newton Milton Peel and others have long since secured for their country the lofty station she holds in the civilized world. But she was not alone in this noble enterprise France Spain Germany and others were too proud to forego a fame so honourable without a struggle worthy of its cause. Emulous of each others glory in each of these, public patronage was extended and in each of these the truth of our proposition is sustained. Light and knowledge have been increased and science and the arts have advanced.

But old Ocean was impotent to check the march of science, and after its rays had long lighted up the old world the fires of knowledge began to be kindled in the wilds of America. The pilgrim fathers were too well impressed with the greatness of their mother country to turn a deaf ear to the calls of wisdom. Yet in a new and infant republic they could not give that share of attention to the arts and sciences which they justly demanded. And this is the great reason why they have not advanced faster towards perfection. Let the U.S. patronize learning and she may equal in literary fame any nation of the earth. What had Greece Rome or England that she does not possess? The fame of a West Franklin Henry and others have refuted the assertion that her sons were of an inferior grade. Possessing a country so vast in extent—so diversified in scenery why should Columbias seek a foreign clime to aid them in their studies? Does the clear blue sky, the gentle breezes or the vineclad mountains of Italy appear inviting to your imagination? These may all be enjoyed in your own dear native land. Or would you prefer the colder regions of the north? These too you may visit and yet exclaim here is my country. The intellect the mountains and valleys, the rivers the lakes and the seas of Greece Italy and England may all be found upon Columbias soil, and with a sufficient share of public patronage also shall say that she must be inferior to

them in glory or fame?

In one branch of science however our country is not deficient in encouragement. I refer to oratory. Its true time may not have brought oratory to a great degree of perfection yet the inducements to its study are such as will not allow it to be overlooked. Greece became the patron of eloquence. Her orators were the defenders of justice the boast of their country ~~were~~ the idols of the people. Under such circumstances we are not surprized at the untiring perseverance the ultimate success and the towering eloquence of a Demosthenes. Then may we not expect a Demosthenes among Columbias sons? Every encouragement that Greece gave the ~~U.S.~~ now offers. Kings and nobles may have been the subjects of Grecian oratory. but here 20,000,000 of freemen are equally alive to the persuasive eloquence of America. Truly of all others the orator is most honored. Who is it that best fills the sacred desk, that gathers the largest crowd around him that chains the attention longest? in short that is most successful in the work of salvation? It is the orator. Who is it that is the most powerful advocate at courts of justice? It is the orator. Who is it that wields the mightiest influence in our national assemblies? It is the orator. In the pulpit at the bar or in the senate chamber oratory sways its influence. Then study oratory. Would you be useful to your fellow men in the cause of religion or a fame more dazzling to your eyes or the

shouts of applause more pleasant to your ears? Then hear us to be eloquent. In this respect public patronage has already done her part. Let therefore untiring perseverance and never ceasing energy be the characteristic of Columbias sons for theirs is a country that is ever ready to bestow upon them her choicest blessings and brightest honours

Gentlemen of the Phi Delta Society

The latter part of this subject should be peculiarly interesting to you. It is laid down as a maxim that to produce effort in any cause two things are necessary. First the advantages which would accrue to us must be sufficiently great and important - ~~and~~ Second, there must be a probability of success. Why should we labour for that which will not profit? or why should we strive for that which is entirely beyond our reach? Hence it becomes necessary for him who would persuade you to any course to establish both of these points. It frequently happens however that one of these is already sufficiently evident. And this is doubtless the case in recommending to you the study of oratory. The great patronage and favour bestowed upon the orator must have long since convinced you of its advantages. Who is here that has not heard the plaudits of the orator? Who is here that has not seen smiles clustering thick upon the brow of eloquence? Hence I consider the first point as already established.

Second. the probability of success. I do not pretend to predict the success of any individual of this society. That gentleman depends too much upon the improvement you make of the facilities here afforded you. Yet I unhesitatingly say Phi Deltas have advantages which the world at large do not possess. With wisdom and eloquence for your motto every thing has been done to aid you in acquiring them. Then get wisdom for without it eloquence is but an empty sound. Get eloquence for it is the messenger of wisdom and without it much of her usefulness is destroyed. Make these your aim strive after them and success attends you. Your society is ever ready to assist you in obtaining them when obtained glory honor and fame are yours.

Yet gentlemen amidst all of these cheering anticipations a retrospect of the past brings a sadness to our hearts. The angel of death has entered our ranks and again his shaft has struck a shining mark. Walker now lies cold in the grave. The improvement he made whilst with us can well bear testimony of the advantages of our Society. We had long looked upon him as a strong pillar of its interests. But time rolled on. He bid us an affectionate farewell. And although grieved to part with so valuable a member we looked upon him as one who had left us but to enter upon a more extensive sphere of action. We had fondly hoped that he was one who had gone forth to scatter light in a world of darkness and from a us

ful life to reflect honor upon the name Phi Delta. But he is gone. No longer will his voice be heard in our hall. No longer will he aid us in our difficulties. No longer will he give us the grasp of friendship.

But death did not confine itself to our honorary members, entering our regular list it has plucked thence one of its brightest jewels. At the mention of Gordon sadness deepens on every countenance. But why need I speak of his many good qualities? They are fresh in the memory of every one. Firmly united by friendship the mysterious cement of the soul he was dear to us all. Dear to the members of our sister society because they saw in him a noble and a generous soul. Dear to us because he was a true Phi Delta. Dear to all because he possessed the virtues of Gordon. Walker and Gordon can never again aid us by their precepts. Alas! their lips are sealed forever. Yet gentlemen the past still speaketh. They have left you an example which might well be adopted as the guide for every Phi Delta. Then follow that example. If he whose birthday we have chosen as our anniversary is worthy your imitation as patriots, they are no less worthy your imitation as Phi Deltas. Like them improve the facilities here afforded you and when you shall have left this place you will ever refer to this association as the one of the most

profitable you had ever formed and
your most pleasing recollections
will be entwined around the name
Phi Delta " " "

An Anniversary oration

Delivered before the

Phi Delta

Society

On the 22^d of February 1848

By

H. B. Bennett

Mercer University

Penfield

Georgia

M. B. Bennett