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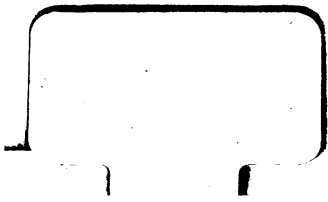
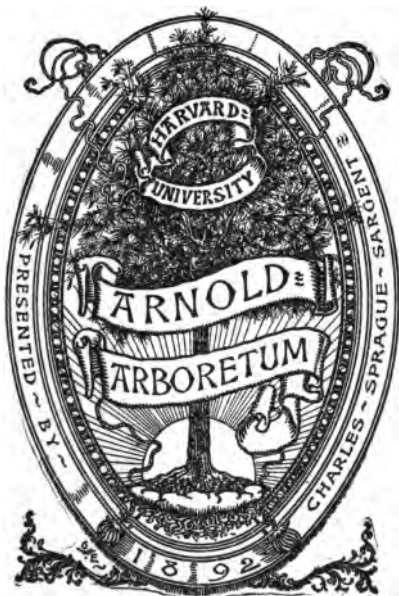
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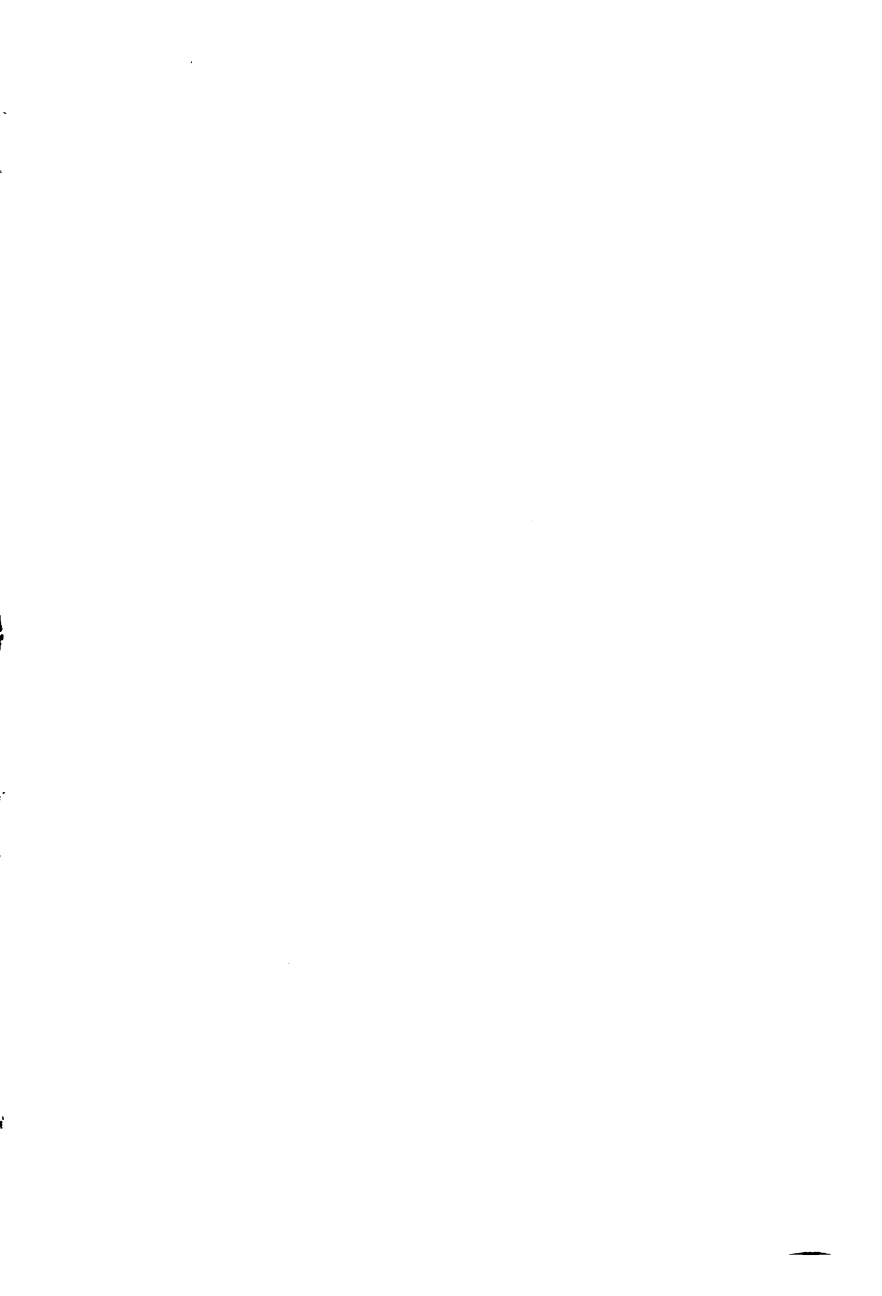
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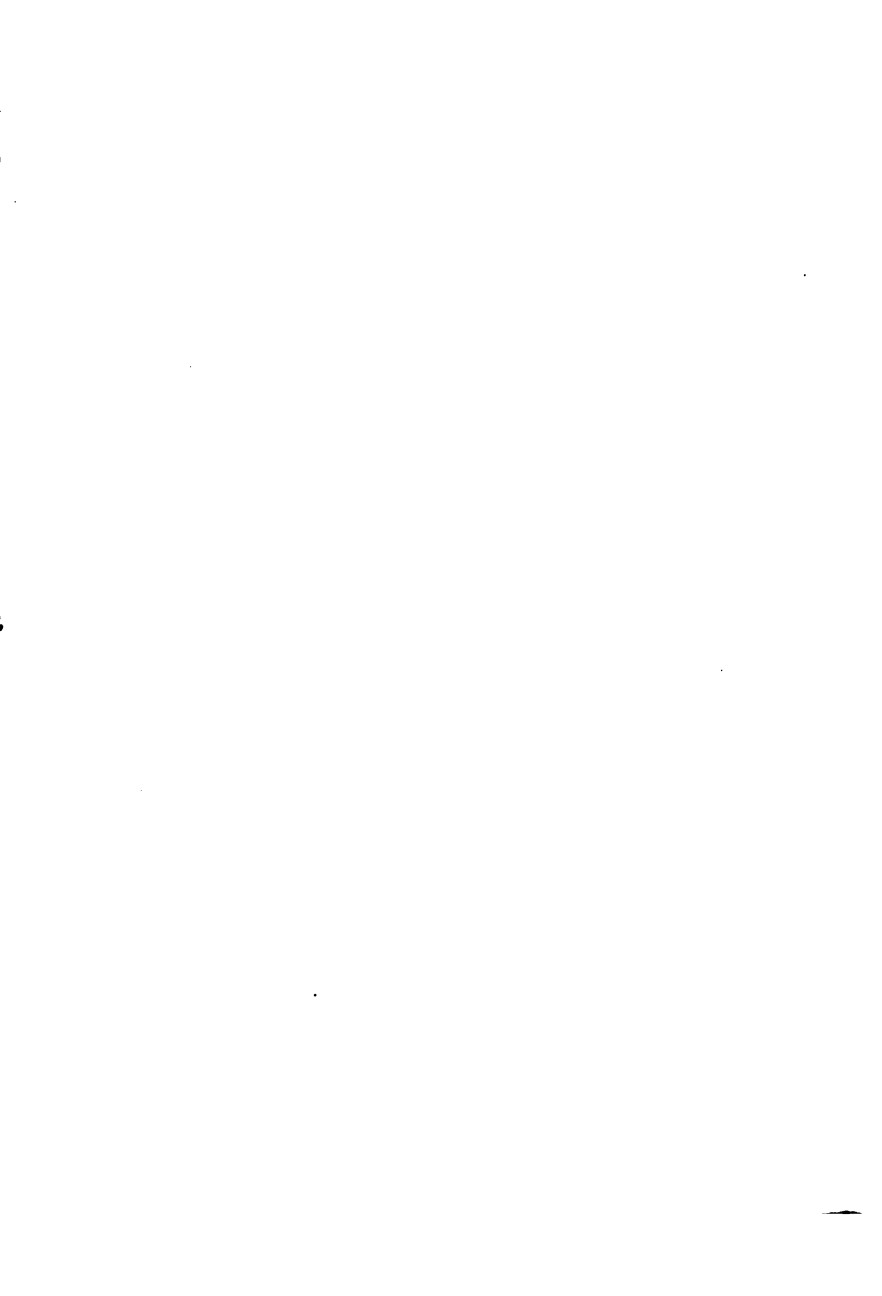
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A P L E A

FOR

A National Museum and Botanic Garden;

to be founded on

THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION,

AT THE

CITY OF WASHINGTON.

READ BEFORE THE CHESTER COUNTY CABINET OF NATURAL SCIENCE,
DECEMBER 3, 1841.

BY WILLIAM DARLINGTON, M. D.

WEST-CHESTER, PENN.
1841.

Dec. 1909
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Me he empeñado en poner en la plaza de nuestra República una mesa de fructos, donde cada uno pueda llegar á entretenerse sin daño de barras : digo sin daño del alma ni del cuerpo, porque los ejercicios honestos y agradables antes aprovechan que dañan. Sí, que no siempre se está en los templos, no siempre se ocupan los oratorios, no siempre se asiste á los negocios por calificados que sean : horas hay de recreacion, donde el afligido espíritu descansa : para este efecto se plantan las alamedas, se buscan las fuentes, se allanan las cuevas, y se cultivan con curiosidad los jardines.

CERVANTES.

A PLEA,* &c.

It is known, probably, to every individual of this audience, that a munificent Bequest was made, a few years since, to the United States, by Mr. JAMES SMITHSON, of London, for the purpose of founding, "at Washington, under the name of the *Smithsonian Institution*, an *Establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men.*" This donation, amounting to about half a million of dollars, has been duly received, and is now in possession of the United States,—awaiting the action of the Government to carry into effect the magnanimous design of the Testator: and as every citizen of this Republic is interested in the appropriate use, and faithful management of the Bequest, I propose to invite your attention, for a few moments, to some remarks and sugges-

* The writer of this brief Address, is glad to have been reminded, since its delivery, that the very proposition which it advocates, was substantially made, and forcibly urged, in the able Discourse of the Hon. J. R. POINSETT, late Sec'y of War, before the *National Institution* at Washington, at their first anniversary meeting. The fact had entirely escaped his memory; though he has now no doubt that the suggestion (which he has been revolving in his mind without recollecting its origin,) was in truth derived from that source. Had the circumstance occurred to the writer in season, he would have endeavored to fortify his own feeble "Plea," by availing himself of some of the more comprehensive views, and powerful arguments, of the Honorable Secretary. As it is, he merely desires—in parliamentary phrase—to be regarded as *seconding the motion*, so appropriately made by that distinguished promoter of Science and the liberal Arts.

tions, which have occurred to me, in relation to the contemplated establishment. The "increase and diffusion of knowledge," I may observe, was the single and laudable motive which gave origin to our own humble Institution,—and is the object which alone prompts its efforts to be an useful auxiliary to inquiring minds. Such is, also, the purpose of various other kindred Associations, in our land. But such an object should not be left to the scanty means of local Societies, and public-spirited Individuals. It claims the fostering care of a *Nation*: and I trust it will not be deemed impertinent, or foreign to this occasion, to present a few considerations on the most eligible mode of establishing the Smithsonian Institution,—and of so conducting it as to make it what the generous Founder intended,—a *National Benefaction*.

Various suggestions have been thrown out, as to the *kind* of Institution which would be most appropriate for accomplishing the object of the Donor; But the public mind does not seem to be settled upon any definite proposition. Some have recommended a National Seminary, in which the usual branches of school learning should be taught gratis, or at a cheap rate: Others have proposed the erection of an Observatory, for celestial observations,—by means of which we might contribute our just quota of astronomical information to the great community of civilized nations: &c. None of these, however, appears to me fully to embrace the object contemplated. Our country already abounds in Universities, Colleges, and other high Seminaries,—many more, indeed, than are adequately supported,—in which the various branches of Science and Literature are ably taught: and the establishment of an additional one, at Washington, would only be to build up a new rival, and thereby to augment the existing redundancy. It would probably weaken other similar institutions,—and therefore tend but little, in fact, to the "increase and diffusion of knowledge among men." Besides, it would necessarily be limited and partial in its operations; and consequently become a source of dissatisfaction among those who were excluded. We see this objection exemplified, every day, in the envious and narrow-minded assaults upon that noble Institution, the United States Military Academy.

The establishment of a National Observatory would indeed be a com-

measurable and useful measure. It is one of those Institutions which every nation, with an extensive maritime commerce, ought to possess for its own sake; and which is due, as a contribution to Science, from every Government that aspires to an equal rank with the rest of the civilized world. But, as the immediate and palpable benefits of an Observatory inure mainly to the commercial and military Marine, it seems to come especially within the province, and to be the duty of Congress, to provide such an establishment at the proper cost of the country. It appears to me to come distinctly under the same constitutional provision, for the protection and regulation of Commerce, which authorizes the construction of Buoys, Breakwaters, and Light Houses: and this opinion has been sanctioned by one of the most learned and eminent of our Statesmen,—who, in urging the erection of an astronomical Observatory, applies to those institutions the figurative but appropriate appellation of “*Light Houses of the skies.*” This being the case, all the duties prescribed by the constitution, and coming clearly within the province of Congress, should be left to that body to perform, in its own good time, with the means derived from the public revenues;—while the appropriation of a Bequest, like that now under consideration, should be made to some worthy national object, for which the rigid construers of the Organic Law may dispute the competency of the Legislature to provide. It is well known, that we have a class of Statesmen, so called, whose minds are of so subtle and disputatious a cast, that no public measure, however valuable and desirable, can receive their support, unless it be expressly provided for in the constitution; and even then, they are always ready and prone to raise objections to any details of a liberal tendency. They have been so thoroughly disciplined in the school of “strict construction,”—and are so “profoundly skilled in analytic,”—that, like Sir *Hudibras*, they can

——— “distinguish and divide

“A hair ’twixt south and southwest side:” —

and no direct proposition can be started, for the generous purpose of improving our moral and intellectual character, as a People, which does not

encounter the most inveterate cavilling; Hence it is, that I am for embracing the golden opportunity — which now presents itself, divested of all these metaphysical difficulties — to establish at the seat of the general government, an Institution for the “increase and diffusion” of a kind of knowledge, which is of undoubted advantage, and should be freely communicated, to *all* men: — I mean a liberal and comprehensive knowledge of the *material world* — a just conception of the productions of Nature, and a general acquaintance with the useful works of Art. It will scarcely be denied, that an adequate knowledge, of this description, would benefit every man that lives. It would enable every one — no matter what may be his particular vocation — better to understand and appreciate his position, in this complicated scene of action, — better to comprehend the means at his disposal, for the promotion of his welfare, — and moreover, to avail himself, on the easiest possible terms, of the skill and experience which have been slowly and painfully acquired by others.

In pursuance of this object, I would appropriate, in perpetuity, the income of the Smithsonian Bequest to the establishment and maintenance of an Institution, at the city of Washington, — the duty and business of which should be, to procure from every region of the globe, as opportunity offered, perfect Specimens of every production in *Nature*, — and intelligible Models of all the useful implements, or apparatus, contrived by the ingenuity of *Art*; — which specimens, and models, should be arranged and preserved expressly for the public instruction. I believe that such an Establishment — properly conducted, and of ready access to all who desired to profit by it, — would contribute more towards “the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men,” than any other Institution which could be devised: and the means being thus provided by the free gift of a generous stranger, I do not perceive how any *constitutional* phantom could be conjured up, to thwart the design, by the most transcendental “Abstractionist” that ever emanated from the “Ancient Dominion.”

Being relieved from such obstacles, — which, though originating in the imagination, are by no means *imaginary*, — as all will admit, who have had any experience in national legislation, — our proposed Institu-

tion would be enabled to commence its career under the happiest auspices. Being the common property of all, — presenting nothing but attractions, and involving no sinister interests, — it would conciliate the affections, and speedily become the petted favorite, of the whole people. Unlike some of our ill-favored and mischievous *political Pets*, it would stir up no unseemly jealousies and strifes; but would present a charming neutral ground, where all generous spirits could meet in harmony and good humor, and find a temporary refuge from the eternal bickerings of *Party*.

What a gratifying spectacle, to see an Institution, such as may now be established, — devoted to the pure purposes of intellectual improvement — uniting all hearts in its support — and impartially diffusing its benign influences throughout the length and breadth of this mighty Republic! And why should we not have such an establishment? Nearly every Crowned Head, in the civilized world, has taken care to found such noble Institutions, — and to render them the delight of his subjects, and the ornaments of his realm. Like the floral beauties which cluster upon the walls of some antiquated castle, they serve at once to disguise and decorate the uncouth structures which sustain them. Why, then, should not the classic pillars of our Republican Fabric be wreathed with the chaplets of Science, and festooned with the garlands of Taste? Are the vassals of every Despotism intitled to the gratifications to be derived from the means of knowledge, and the congregated beauties of Nature? and are the free citizens of a Republic, alone, to be excluded from such rational enjoyments? Must we all, and forever, — in this glorious field for human improvement, — be tied down by “strict construction,” to the groveling, sordid cares, of mere pecuniary concerns; — or, at most, be indulged with a periodical scramble for the “spoils” of partizan victory?

In my humble opinion, those who are worthy the name of Freemen — *intellectual Freemen*, — should have some other, some loftier object — (by *intervals*, at least —) than the everlasting consideration of the meries and capabilities of the “almighty Dollar”: and while I fully assent to the maxim, that unceasing vigilance over the conduct of Rulers, and political Leaders, is the condition on which we hold our Liberties, — I never

theless believe we may occasionally venture to relax the tension of party strife, and allow our minds a brief indulgence in the more amiable recreations of Literature and Science.

But I hold it as an unquestionable truth, that a National Institution, such as has been suggested, would possess the two-fold merit, of promoting intellectual advancement, and ministering to the improvement of our physical condition. Its location has been judiciously fixed, by the Testator, at the seat of the General Government, — the attractive centre of all our national concerns — and enjoying a happy medium, in reference to climate and geographical position. Let there, then, be established, at the City of Washington, an ample *Botanic Garden*, adapted to the cultivation of all the interesting and valuable species of the vegetable creation, — so that we may become practically acquainted with all the Plants which are useful to man; and ascertain how many, and which of them, are worthy and susceptible of being introduced into the culture of the various districts of our Union. The importance of this to *Agriculture* — the great and deservedly prominent interest of our country — must be obvious, on the bare suggestion. — It would moreover insure success, and give an abiding interest, to the noble project, now in agitation, of forming a *National Society* for the promotion of Agriculture. It would afford the ready means for judicious experiments in vegetable culture; and aid in sifting all useful facts from the chaffy mass of idle theory, prejudice, and delusion. In short, it may be made the instrument for collecting the scattered rays of agricultural knowledge, as it were to a focus, — and thence directing them with a concentrated light, and a genial warmth, to every department of that interesting practical Science.

Within the boundaries of this National Garden, should be an appropriate receptacle, or *Museum*, for the preservation, and systematic arrangement, of all Specimens in Natural History, — illustrating as well the Geological structure of our Planet, as the character of the materials which form its crust, and of the organised beings which inhabit its surface.

It should be made the duty — as I am sure it would be the pleasure and the pride — of every officer in the Naval and Military service, to embrace all opportunities for adding to the riches of this National Treasury of

knowledge. The revenues from these sources would soon exceed any estimate which could now be made, — while the cost of collection would be altogether nominal: and although, as *Politicians*, we may quarrel and contend about "*Fiscalities*," and "*Sub-Treasuries*," — I am confident that, as lovers of Nature and true National Glory, we should cordially unite in making every officer, and public agent, a *Sub-Treasurer* for the generous purposes of this Institution. The collections already made and forwarded to Washington, by the glorious Expedition now exploring the Southern Hemisphere, will form an appropriate nucleus, or foundation for the establishment; — and the expected additions, from the same source, will no doubt greatly enhance its value. With these rich materials — the fruits of an enterprise which will reflect honor upon our Government to the latest generation, — we may safely commence the Institution bequeathed to us, "for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men."

To the means thus briefly indicated, for promoting a knowledge of those *Natural Productions* which have been placed at our disposal by a beneficent Creator, I would have annexed — as already mentioned — a Department for the collection and exhibition of all the useful implements and machinery, which have been contrived by *Art*, for aiding the operations, and improving the condition, of the human race: and this desirable appendage — as every one knows — is, to a great extent, already prepared to our hands, in the admirable establishment for the preservation of *Models*, which are required to be deposited on the issue of *Letters Patent* for new inventions. This Department might be conveniently, and most appropriately, made a branch of the proposed Institution.

With these combined advantages, — and the requisite additions being supplied, as opportunity offered, — we should soon possess the means of acquiring a competent knowledge of all that exists in *Nature*, or has been produced by *Art*: and that I should call a genuine "Establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men." While our local Seminaries would be appropriately engaged in imparting Languages, Rules, and other instruments of mental culture, — laboring at the various subdivisions, and *branches* of knowledge, — here, at the common centre

of the Republic, we should have the *entire Tree*, in perennial verdure, — accessible to all who might desire to participate in the pleasures, and benefits, afforded by its flowers, and its fruits. Every terrestrial object, interesting to man, would here be submitted to the examination of his senses, and rendered intelligible to his understanding: and every citizen, whose taste or talents fitted him for the acquisition — instead of wandering, at the peril of life and limb, in the pursuit, — would here find the elements of knowledge, drawn from every region of the globe, and adapted to his use, in the very bosom of his native land. And this, let me add, is in my opinion, the true method for *diffusing knowledge among men*. Present the inducements — furnish the means — point out the way; — and then leave the Student to gain the prize, by the efforts of his own talents and industry.

The ordinary practice of attempting to force, indiscriminately, upon the minds of pupils, a determinate portion of School learning, is something like the process of drenching a juvenile patient with the unpalatable prescriptions of the Doctor. It may be beneficial, and sometimes indispensable: but the medicine is apt to be rejected, — and is almost invariably recollected with loathing. Yet, when the sufferer has acquired a proper sense of his condition, and comprehends the necessity of the case, he seeks a remedy with eagerness, and applies it without the slightest regard to any unpleasant contingencies. Instead, then, of merely adding to the number of Seminaries for the indiscriminate infliction, upon the young, of certain prescribed doses of Learning, — I would establish our Smithsonian Institution as a great National Warehouse of knowledge, where every one might find something suited to his wants, — and to which he could freely resort, whenever he became conscious of his necessities.

I would, however, provide one or more suitable persons, in the character of Curators, who should be competent to expound the principles of arrangement — to elucidate whatever might be obscure — and, generally, to facilitate the researches of all who might require assistance. More extensive, or direct means of instruction — if found expedient — could at any time be provided.

For the general direction and management of the Establishment, there

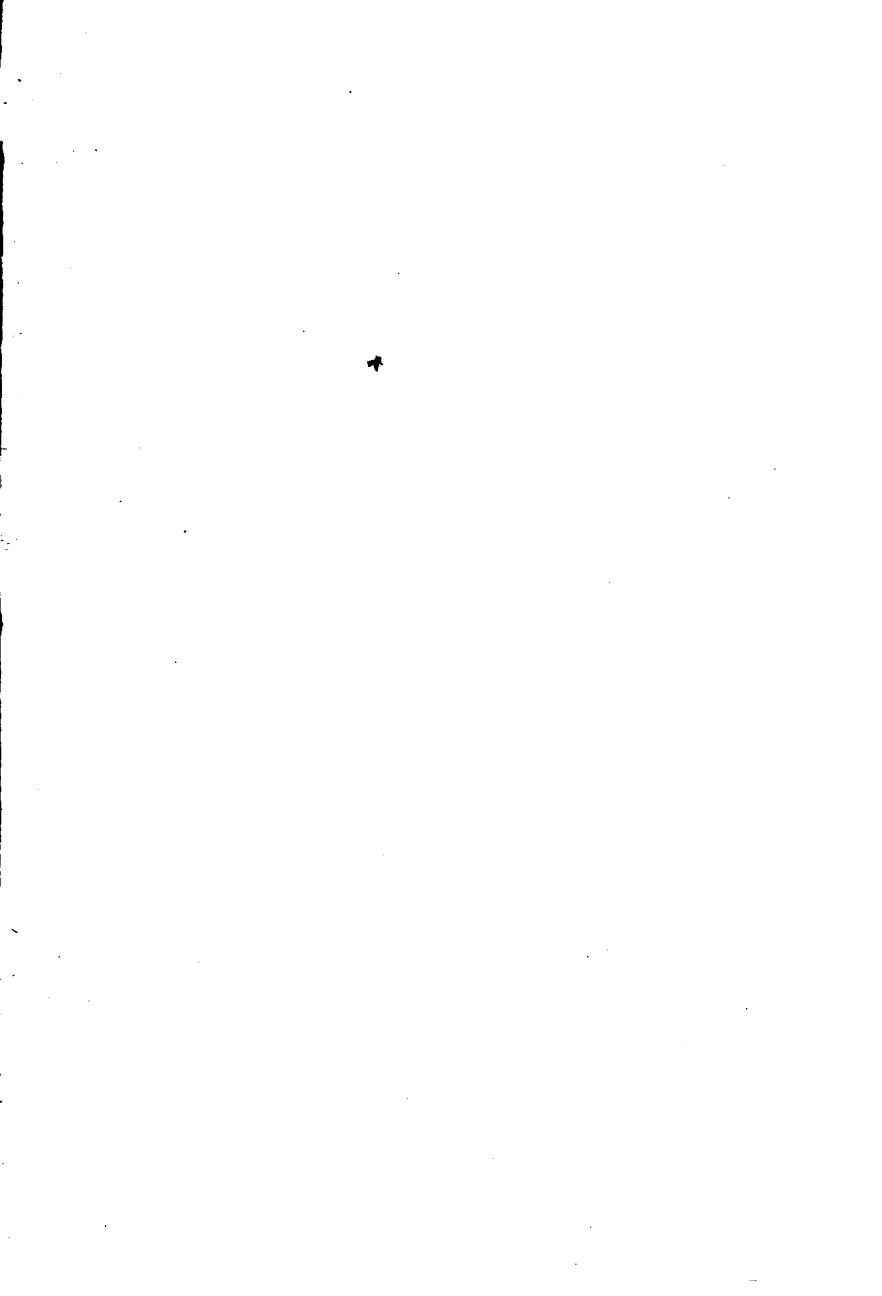
is happily, also, on the spot, an organized body of the most respectable character — well fitted, and no doubt cheerfully prepared, to discharge that duty. A "*National Institution for the promotion of Science*," has been recently established at Washington, which seems to be expressly adapted to such a trust. The Members, and Officers, are of the most distinguished residents of that City; and, by the constitution, the Secretaries of the War and Navy Departments are, *ex officio*, Directors of the Institution. There is, then, an ample provision for keeping the whole concern duly under the inspection and control of the Government: and being, in its nature, entirely unconnected with mere Party considerations, — it would doubtless become, as it ought, an object of generous rivalry with successive Administrations; each striving in turn to excel its predecessors, in promoting the prosperity, and extending the benefits, of the Establishment.

I cannot permit myself to believe there would be any danger of its ever degenerating into an object of mere partizan cupidity, — or being converted into a political *Lair*, by any of that ravenous tribe who instinctively lie in wait for the offal of Government patronage. Such a desecration would shock the national sense of decorum; and would be scarcely less repugnant to the habits of the strange incumbent, himself. Who ever heard of a professed office-hunter — a regular Mosser for party favors — taking an interest in the beauties of Creation, or co-operating in the promotion of Science? The idea is preposterous. His nature would revolt at such a position. The very atmosphere of the place would be unsuited to his respiration; and every influence within its boundaries would combine to expel him from the consecrated ground. Or, if by some miraculous development, a taste for liberal pursuits should chance to be awakened in such an incumbent, we should see a metamorphosis as salutary as it would be rare; — and thus the Institution would still be safe.

In every event, I believe it would prove a most valuable auxiliary in diffusing useful knowledge, — expanding the minds, humanizing the dispositions, and refining the tastes of our People, — and consequently elevating the National Character to that high standard of civilization, which becomes a great and enlightened Republic.

I have thus, hastily and briefly, adverted to a few of the considerations which induce me to believe, that A NATIONAL MUSEUM AND BOTANIC GARDEN, built up and sustained by the *Smithsonian Bequest*, and dedicated to the instruction of the American People, would not only be a legitimate object for the appropriation of that fund, but would practically do more towards the "increase and diffusion of knowledge among men," than any other Institution which has yet been suggested. The benefits resulting from it would be more numerous, more palpable, more accessible—and therefore more generally enjoyed by the nation at large—than those of any other single establishment. If this be true, should we not unite, as with one voice, in urging the accomplishment of so noble a design? And may we not indulge the hope that our public Servants—who profess such eagerness to gratify the wishes of their constituents—would promptly respond to so reasonable a request? To doubt their compliance with such a manifestation of the Sovereign Will, would be treason against the very Theory of our Government. I shall be guilty of no such political heresy. I shall anticipate no such contumacious neglect of Representative duty: But will look forward with confidence to the day, when the citizens of this Republic shall possess all the means, and enjoy all the advantages of Intellectual culture, which have been hitherto monopolized by the subjects of European Monarchies.

Let us, then, never falter in our efforts, nor halt for an instant in our career of improvement, until our Temples of Science shall vie with the noblest of those beyond the Atlantic: And while the Frenchman justly glories in the *Jardin des Plantes*,—while the Briton boasts, with reason, of the Royal Garden at Kew,—and even the Russian, in his frozen clime, is warmed into admiration by the Imperial Conservatory of the Czars,—let *American Freemen*, in their turn, be enabled to point, with patriotic pride, to a *National Institution*, of no less beauty and value, at the Metropolis of their own favored land.











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