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## IMMORTALITY OF ART.

*An Oration delivered by Mr. J. R. O'Connor, '92, at a Public Entertainment, in the Academic Hall, on May 23rd, 1891.*



On glancing over the complex phenomena of modern life, the feature which especially impresses itself on our observation, and marks our age as peculiar from its predecessors, is that rapid, restless advancement along the whole line of human thought and endeavor called modern progress. Not that progress belongs especially to our own time; it is a characteristic of every age. From its cradle to its present maturity, the human race has ever moved on, sometimes more slowly, sometimes faster, sometimes temporarily arresting, nay, even retracing its steps, but on the whole the movement has been on ward and upward towards a higher plane of existence.

What, then, is the chief factor of this advancement? Has our race arisen to its present eminence through an evolution from a lower to a higher degree of perfection of the essential elements of its being? It certainly has not. Man appears as great and as noble on the early pages of his history as in our own day. A Moses, an Alexander, a Caesar, or a Homer, a Plato, a Cicero, find no counterparts among the leaders and teachers of men in our own time. Not, then, by an evolution of his species, but by an expansion of his mind has man become greater, and not the individual, but the human family, as a whole, has advanced. On its long march through the past, humanity has gathered in a vast

amount of experience, knowledge of nature and of self, and this knowledge has grown and accumulated at an ever increasing proportion, and advances with an ever increasing momentum, until at least it has become a very torrent on whose surface we are borne along.

The question now presents itself, whether this progress, so phenomenal on the material side, does not show signs of weakness on the ideal side of life? The answer must, unfortunately, be in the affirmative. In its advancement through knowledge, and in its feverish search after knowledge, after knowledge especially that speaks to the sense, our age has neglected that knowledge which speaks to the heart and to the conscience. Nature has been ransacked to her farthest limits, every day adds a new leaf to her opened volume, and man rests triumphant upon her newly discovered forces which he has chained to his chariot. Even the laws of his own being he has scanned, he has conquered pain, and has all but conquered death. But death remains an ever present monitor, pointing to that fathomless abyss, that lies beyond the grave. Still man is heedless of the warning. His belief is anchored in the material, the natural, and he denies, or at best ignores the supernatural, the ideal. He respects the adoration of an eternal God, but would fain bend his knee before the golden calf of eternal matter. He has erected his idol in the temple of Beauty, and Art shall henceforth be his worship, and the artist shall be his high priest, and his prophet.