349 BC

THE SECOND OLYNTHIAC ORATION

Demosthenes
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Notes and Introduction by Thomas Leland, D.D.

Demosthenes (383-322 BC) - Athenian statesman and the most famous of Greek orators. He was leader of a patriotic party opposing Philip of Macedon.

The Second Olynthiac Oration (349 BC) - The second in a series of speeches which, like the "Philippics," oppose Philip of Macedon. The "Olynthiac Orations" condemn Philip's attack on the state of Olynthus. These speeches, together with the "Philippics," are regarded as Demosthenes' best.

THE SECOND OLYNTHIAC ORATION

INTRODUCTION

To the Second Olynthiac Oration

TO remove the impression made on the minds of the Athenians by the preceding oration, Demades, and other popular leaders in the interest of Philip, rose up and opposed the propositions of Demosthenes with all their eloquence. Their opposition, however, proved ineffectual; for the assembly decreed that relief should be sent to the Olynthians, and thirty galleys and two thousand forces were accordingly despatched under the command of Chares. But these succors, consisting entirely of mercenaries, and commanded by a general of no great reputation, could not be of considerable service; and were besides suspected, and scarcely less dreaded by the Olynthians than the Macedonians themselves. In the mean time, the progress of Philip's arms could meet with little interruption. He reduced several places in the region of Chalcis, razed the fortress of Zeira, and, having twice defeated the Olynthians in the field, at last shut them up in their city. In this emergency they again applied to the Athenians, and pressed for fresh and effectual succors. In the following oration Demosthenes endeavors to support this petition, and to prove that both the honor and the interest of the Athenians demanded their immediate compliance. As the expense of the armament was the great point of difficulty, he recommends the abrogation of such laws as prevented the proper settlement of the funds necessary for carrying on a war of such importance. The nature of these laws will come immediately to be explained.

It appears, from the beginning of this oration, that other speakers had risen before Demosthenes, and inveighed loudly against Philip. Full of the national prejudices, or disposed to flatter the Athenians in their notions of the dignity and importance of their state, they breathed nothing but indignation against the enemy, and possibly, with some contempt of his present enterprises, proposed to the Athenians to correct his arrogance by an invasion of his own kingdom. Demosthenes, on the contrary, insists on the necessity of self-defence, endeavors to rouse his hearers from their security by the terror of impending danger, and affects to consider the defence of Olynthus as the last and only means of preserving the very being of Athens.

THE SECOND OLYNTHIAC ORATION

Pronounced in the year 349 B.C.

I AM by no means affected in the same manner, Athenians, when I review the state of our affairs, and when I attend to those speakers who have now declared their sentiments. They insist that we should punish Philip: but our affairs, situated as they now appear, warn us to guard against the dangers with which we ourselves are threatened. Thus far, therefore, I must differ from these speakers, that I apprehend they have not proposed the proper object of your attention. There was a time, indeed, I know it well, when the state could have possessed her own dominions in security, and sent out her armies to inflict chastisement on Philip. I myself have seen that time when we enjoyed such power. But now, I am persuaded, we should confine ourselves to the protection of our allies. When this is once effected, then we may consider the punishment his outrages have merited. But, till the first great point be well secured, it is weakness to debate about our more remote concernments.

And now, Athenians, if ever we stood in need of mature deliberation and counsel, the present juncture calls loudly for them. To point out the course to be pursued on this emergency I do not think the greatest difficulty: but I am in doubt in what manner to propose my sentiments; for all that I have observed, and all that I have heard, convince me that most of your misfortunes have proceeded from a want of inclination to pursue the necessary measures, not from ignorance of them.

Let me entreat you, that if I now speak with an unusual boldness, you may bear it, considering only whether I speak truth, and with a sincere intention to advance your future interests; for you now see, that by some orators, who study but to gain your favor, our affairs have been reduced to the extremity of distress.

I think it necessary, in the first place, to recall some late transactions to your thoughts. You may remember, Athenians, that about three or four years since you received advice that Philip was in Thrace, and had laid siege to the fortress of Heraea. It was then the month of November. *(1) Great commotions and debates arose: it was resolved to send out forty galleys; that all citizens under the age of five-and-forty *(2) should themselves embark: and that sixty talents should be raised. Thus it was agreed: that year passed away; then came in the months July, *(3) August, September. In the last month, with great difficultly, when the mysteries had first been celebrated, you sent out Charidemus, *(4) with just ten vessels, unmanned, and five talents of silver. For when reports came of the sickness and the death of Philip (both of these were affirmed), you laid aside your intended armament, imagining that at such a juncture there was no need of succors. And yet this was the very critical moment; for, had they been despatched with the same alacrity with which they were granted, Philip would not have then escaped, to become that formidable enemy he now appears.

But what was then done cannot be amended. Now, we have the opportunity of another war: that war I mean which hath induced me to bring these transactions into view, that you may not once more fall into the same errors. How then shall we improve this opportunity? This is the only question. For, if you are not resolved to assist with all the force you can command, you are really serving under Philip; you are fighting on his side. The Olynthians are a people whose power was thought considerable. Thus were the

circumstances of affairs: Philip could not confide in them: they looked with equal suspicion on Philip. We and they then entered into mutual engagements of peace and alliance. This was a grievous embarrassment to Philip, that we should have a powerful state confederated with us, spies on the incidents of his fortune. It was agreed that we should by all means engage this people in a war with him. And now, what we all so earnestly desired is effected; the manner is of no moment. What then remains for us, Athenians, but to send immediate and effectual succors, I cannot see: for besides the disgrace that must attend us, if any of our interest are supinely disregarded, I have no small apprehensions of the consequence (the Thebans *(5) affected as they are towards us, and the Phocians exhausted of their treasures), if Philip be left at full liberty to lead his armies into these territories, when his present enterprises are accomplished. If anyone among you can be so far immersed in indolence as to suffer this, he must choose to be witness of the misery of his own country rather than to hear of that which strangers suffer, and to seek assistance for himself when it is now in his power to grant assistance to others. That this must be the consequence if we do not exert ourselves on the present occasion, there can scarcely remain the least doubt among us.

But as to the necessity of sending succors: this, it may be said, we are agreed in; this is our resolution. But how shall we be enabled? that is the point to be explained. Be not surprised, Athenians, if my sentiments on this occasion seem repugnant to the general sense of this assembly. Appoint magistrates for *(6) the inspection of your laws: not in order to enact any new law; you have already a sufficient number; but to repeal those whose ill-effects you now experience. I mean the laws relating to the theatrical funds *(7) (thus openly I declare it), and some about the soldiery. *(8) By the first, the soldiers' pay goes as theatrical expenses to the useless and inactive; the others screen those from justice who decline the service of the field; and thus damp the ardor of those disposed to serve us. When you have repealed these, and rendered it consistent with safety to advise you justly, then seek for some person to propose that decree which *(9) you all are sensible the common good requires. But, until this be done, expect not that any man will urge your true interest, when, for urging your true interest, you repay him with destruction. You will never find such zeal; especially since the consequence can be only this: he who offers his opinion, and moves for your concurrence, suffers some unmerited calamity; but your affairs are not in the least advanced; nay, this additional inconvenience must arise, that for the future it will appear more dangerous to advise you than even at present. And the authors of these laws should also be the authors of their repeal: for it is not just that the public favor should be bestowed on them who, in framing these laws, have greatly injured the community; and that the odium should fall on him whose freedom and sincerity are of important service to us all. Until these regulations be made you are not to think any man so great that he may violate these laws with impunity; or so devoid of reason as to plunge himself into open and foreseen destruction.

And be not ignorant of this, Athenians, that a decree is of no significance unless attended with resolution and alacrity to execute it: for, were decrees of themselves sufficient to engage you to perform your duty- could they even execute the things which they enact- so many would not have been made to so little, or rather to no good purpose; nor would the insolence of Philip have had so long a date: for, if decrees can punish, he hath long since felt all their fury. But they have no such power: for though proposing and resolving be first in order; yet, in force and efficacy, action is superior. Let this then be your principal concern; the others you cannot want: for you have men among you capable of advising, and you are of all people most acute in apprehending. Now, let your interest direct you, and it will be in your power to be as remarkable for acting. What season, indeed, what opportunity do you wait for more favorable that the present?

or when will you exert your vigor, if not now, my countrymen? Hath not this man seized all those places that were ours? Should he become master of this country too, *(10) must we not sink into the lowest state of infamy? Are not they whom we have promised to assist whenever they are engaged in war now attacked themselves? Is he not our enemy? is he not in possession of our dominions? is he not a barbarian? *(11) is he not every base thing words can express? If we are insensible to all this, if we almost aid his designs, Heavens! can we then ask to whom the consequences are owing? Yes, I know full well we never will impute them to ourselves. Just as in the dangers of the field, not one of those who fly will accuse himself; he will rather blame the general, or his fellow-soldiers: yet every single man *(12) that fled was accessory to the defeat: he who blames others might have maintained his own post; and, had every man maintained his, success must have ensued. Thus, then, in the present case, is there a man whose counsel seems liable to objection? let the next rise, and not inveigh against him, but declare his own opinion. Doth another offer some more salutary counsel? pursue it, in the name of Heaven! “But then it is not pleasing.” This is not the fault of the speaker, unless in that he hath *(13) neglected to express his affection in prayers and wishes. To pray is easy, Athenians, and in one petition may be collected as many instances of good fortune as we please. To determine justly, when affairs are to be considered, is not so easy. But what is most useful should ever be preferred to that which is agreeable, where both cannot be obtained.

But if there be a man who will leave us the theatrical funds, and propose other subsidies for the service of the war, are we not rather to attend to him? I grant it, Athenians, if that man can be found. But I should account it wonderful, if it ever did, if it ever can happen to any man on earth, that while he lavishes his present possessions on unnecessary occasions, some future funds should be procured to supply his real necessities. But such proposals find a powerful advocate in the breast of every hearer. So that nothing is so easy as to deceive one’s self; for what we wish, that we readily believe: but such expectations are oftentimes inconsistent with our affairs. On this occasion, therefore, let your affairs direct you; then will you be enabled to take the field; then you will have your full pay. And men whose judgments are well directed, and whose souls are great, could not support the infamy which must attend them, if obliged to desert any of the operations of a war from the want of money: they could not, after snatching up their arms, and marching against the Corinthians *(14) and Megareans, *(15) suffer Philip to enslave the states of Greece, through the want of provisions for their forces. I say not this wantonly, to raise the resentment of some among you. No; I am not so unhappily perverse, as to study to be hated, when no good purpose can be answered by it; but it is my opinion, that every honest speaker should prefer the interest of the state to the favor of his hearers. This (I am assured, and perhaps you need not be informed) was the principle which actuated the public conduct of those of our ancestors who spoke in this assembly (men whom the present set of orators are ever ready to applaud, but whose example they by no means imitate): such were Aristides, Nicias, the former Demosthenes, and Pericles. But since we have had speakers who, before their public appearance, ask you- What do you desire? what shall I propose? how can I oblige you? the interest of our country hath been sacrificed to momentary pleasure and popular favor. Thus have we been distressed; thus have these men risen to greatness, and you sunk into disgrace.

And here let me entreat your attention to a summary account of the conduct of your ancestors, and of your own. I shall mention but a few things, and these well known: for, if you would pursue the way to happiness, you need not look abroad for leaders; our own countrymen point it out. These, our ancestors, therefore, whom the orators never courted, never treated with that indulgence with which you are flattered, held the

sovereignty of Greece, with general consent, five-andforty years; *(16) deposited above ten thousand talents in our public treasury; kept the king of this country in that subjection which a barbarian owes to Greeks; erected monuments of many and illustrious actions, which they themselves achieved by land and sea; in a word, are the only persons who have transmitted to posterity such glory as is superior to envy. Thus great do they appear in the affairs of Greece. Let us now view them within the city, both in their public and private conduct. And, first, the edifices which their administrations have given us, their decorations of our temples, and the offerings deposited by them, are so numerous and so magnificent that all the efforts of posterity cannot exceed them. Then, in private life, so exemplary was their moderation, their adherence to the ancient manners so scrupulously exact, that, if any of you ever discovered the house of Aristides, or Miltiades, or any of the illustrious men of those times, he must known that it was not distinguished by the least extraordinary splendor; for they did not so conduct the public business as to aggrandize themselves; their sole great object was to exalt the state: and thus, by their faithful attachment to Greece, by their piety to the gods, and by that equality which they maintained among themselves, they were raised (and no wonder) to the summit of prosperity.

Such was the state of Athens at that time, when the men I have mentioned were in power. But what is your condition under these indulgent ministers who now direct us? Is it the same, or nearly the same? Other things I shall pass over, though I might expatiate on them. Let it only be observed, that we are now, as you all see, left without competitors; the Lacedaemonians lost; *(17) the Thebans engaged *(18) at home; and not one of all the other states of consequence sufficient to dispute the sovereignty with us. Yet at a time when we might have enjoyed our own dominions in security, and been the umpires in all disputes abroad, our territories have been wrested from us; we have expended above one thousand five hundred talents to no purpose; the allies *(19) which we gained in war have been lost in time of peace: and to this degree of power have we raised an enemy against ourselves. (For let the man stand forth who can show whence Philip hath derived his greatness, if not from us.) “Well! if these affairs have but an unfavorable aspect, yet those within the city are much more flourishing that ever.” Where are the proofs of this? The walls which have been whitened? the ways we have repaired? the supplies of water? and such trifles. Turn your eyes to the men of whose administrations these are the fruits; some of whom, from the lowest state of poverty, have arisen suddenly to affluence; some from meanness to renown: others have made their own private houses much more magnificent that the public edifices. Just as the state hath fallen their private fortunes have been raised.

And what cause can we assign for this? How is it that our affairs were once so flourishing, and now in such disorder? Because, formerly, the people dared to take up arms themselves; were themselves masters of those in employment; disposers themselves of all emoluments; so that every citizen thought himself happy to derive honors and authority, and all advantages whatever, from the people. But now, on the contrary, favors are all dispensed, affairs all transacted by the ministers: while you, quite enervated, robbed of your riches, your allies, stand in the mean rank of servants and assistants; happy if these men grant you the theatrical appointments, and send you scraps of the public meal: *(20) and, what is of all most sordid, you hold yourselves obliged to them for that which is your own: while they confine you within these walls, lead you on gently to their purposes, and sooth and tame you to obedience. Nor is it possible, that they who are engaged in low and grovelling pursuits can entertain great generous sentiments. No! Such as their employments are, so must their dispositions prove. And now I call Heaven to witness, that it will not surprise me if I suffer more by mentioning this your condition than they who have involved you in it! Freedom of

speech you do not allow on all occasions; and that you have now admitted it excites my wonder.

But if you will at length be prevailed on to change your conduct; if you will take the field, and act worthy of Athenians; if these redundant sums which you receive at home be applied to the advancement of your affairs abroad; perhaps, my countrymen, perhaps some instance of consummate good fortune may attend you, and you may become so happy as to despise those pittances, which are like the morsels that a physician allows his patient: for these do not restore his vigor, but just keep him from dying. So, your distributions cannot serve any valuable purpose, but are just sufficient to divert your attention from all other things, and thus increase the indolence of everyone among you.

But I shall be asked, What then? Is it your opinion that these sums should pay our army? And besides this, that the state should be regulated in such a manner, that everyone may have his share of public business, and approve himself a useful citizen, on what occasion soever his aid may be required. Is it in his power to live in peace? He will live here with greater dignity, while these supplies prevent him from being tempted by indigence to anything dishonorable. Is he called forth by an emergency like the present? Let him discharge that sacred duty which he owes to his country, by applying these sums to his support in the field. Is there a man among you past the age of service? Let him, by inspecting and conducting the public business, regularly merit his share of the distributions which he now receives, without any duty enjoined, or any return made to the community. And thus, with scarcely any alteration, either of abolishing or innovating, all irregularities are removed, and the state completely settled, by appointing one general regulation, which shall entitle our citizens to receive, and at the same time oblige them to take arms, to administer justice, to act in all cases as their time of life and our affairs require. But it never hath, nor could it have been moved by me, that the rewards of the diligent and active should be bestowed on the useless citizen; or that you should sit here, supine, languid, and irresolute, listening to the exploits of some general’s foreign troops (for thus it is at present). Not that I would reflect on him who serves you, in any instance. But you yourselves, Athenians, should perform those services for which you heap honors on others, and not recede from the illustrious rank of virtue, the price of all the glorious toils of your ancestors, and by them bequeathed to you.

Thus have I laid before you the chief points in which I think you interested. It is your part to embrace that opinion which the welfare of the state in general, and that of every single member, recommends to your acceptance.

NOTES

To the Second Olynthiac Oration

*(1) The reducing the Attic months to the Julian has occasioned some dispute among the learned. As I thought it best to make use of Roman names in the translation, I have followed the reduction of Scaliger.

*(2) This expresses their zeal, and their apprehensions of the danger; for by the laws of Athens a citizen was exempted from military service at the age of forty, except on some very urgent occasion.

*(3) That is, the first months of the next year; for the reader is to observe, that the Attic year commenced on that new moon whose full moon immediately succeeded the summer solstice.

*(4) That is, the worst of all your generals; a foreigner, a soldier of fortune, who had sometimes fought against you, sometimes betrayed your cause, and who, on many occasions, had proved himself unworthy of the confidence you reposed in him. Monsieur Tourreil translates this passage thus: “Ce fut en ce dernier mois qu’immediatement apres la celebration des mysteres, vous depechates d’ici Charideme,” etc. Here there are two unfortunate words, which express haste and expedition: whereas the description in the original labors on in the slowest and heaviest manner possible. Every single word marks out the tediousness or the meanness of their armament.

*(5) They had a mortal hatred to the Athenians, as they had favored Lacedaemon after the battles of Leuctra and Mantinea, and had lately taken part with the Phocians against them in the Sacred War. [And even before these times, at the conclusion of the Peloponnesian War, the Thebans strenuously contended for the utter extirpation of Athens.] *(6) In the original nomothetas. So were those citizens called who were entrusted by the people with the regulation of their laws. They were chosen by lot, to the number of 1,001, that their votes might not be equal. Every citizen, at certain times, and in certain assemblies, had usually a right to complain of any law.

The president of the assembly proposed the complaint to the people: five advocates were allowed to plead in defence of the law; and after hearing them, the people referred the affair to the nomothetae.

*(7) The Athenians, as well as the other Greeks, were ever passionately fond of the entertainments of the theatre. Disputes for places soon became remarkably inconvenient, and called for a regulation. The magistrates therefore ordered that a small price should be paid for places to reimburse the builders of the theatre, which as yet knew not that magnificence which riches and luxury afterward introduced. This purchasing of places began to be complained of by the poorer citizens; and therefore Pericles, out of a pretended zeal for their interest, proposed that a sum of money (which had been deposited in the treasury after the war of Egina, when they had made a thirty years’ peace with Lacedaemon, and was intended as a public resource in case of any invasion of Attica) should be distributed among the citizens, to defray the expense of their entertainments in time of peace only. The proposal and the restriction were both agreed to: but as all indulgences of this kind degenerate, sooner or later, into licentiousness, the people began to consider the distribution as their unalienable property; and the very year of the Olynthiac orations, Eubulus, a popular leader of a party opposite to Demosthenes, prevailed to have a law passed, which forbade any man, on pain of death, to make a motion, or proposal of a decree, for restoring what was now called the theatrical funds

to the military, or any other public service. This is the law which Demosthenes here attacks.

*(8) The laws of Solon exacted personal service from every citizen, with the utmost rigor. Those which the orator complains of must have been made when the state began to be corrupted.

*(9) A decree for the alienation of the theatrical funds. While Eubulus's law was in force such a decree could not be proposed. The usefulness and necessity of it, however, the orator ventures to insinuate; for the penalty was not understood as extending to a man's barely declaring his sentiments, provided he did not make the motion in form. In the latter part of this oration he seems to propose another method of avoiding the ill-consequences of the law of Eubulus; and that is, that the theatrical distributions should be still continued; but that all those who were in public offices, and who usually received their several salaries and appointments, should now serve the state without fee or reward. The name only of these distributions would have then remained.

*(10) That is, the country of Chalcis, where Philip took two-and-thirty cities before he laid siege to Olynthus.

*(11) This was the term of reproach which the Greeks applied to all other nations: nor were the Macedonians excepted. In the time of Xerxes, Alexander, King of Macedon, could not be admitted into the Olympic games until he had proved his descent to be originally from Argos: and when he came over from the Persian camp, to give the Greeks notice of the motions of Mardonius, he justified his perfidy by his ancient descent from Greece; which he needed not to have had recourse to if Macedon had not been then considered as a part of the barbarian world.

*(12) The orator did not foresee that, in ten years after, he himself would be guilty of this very crime; be branded with a name of infamy, for casting away his shield at the battle of Chaeronea, and have nothing to oppose to the reproaches of his enemies but a weak and trifling pleasantry.

*(13) This passage, which is translated pretty exactly from the original, seems, at first view, to have something of a forced and unnatural air. Indeed, it is not possible for us to perceive fully and clearly the strength and propriety of every part of these orations. To this it would be requisite to know the temper and disposition of the hearers, at that particular time when each of them was delivered; and also to have before us everything said by other speakers in the debate.

In many places we find very plain allusions to the speeches of other orators; and it is not unreasonable to think, that there are other more obscure one which escape our observation. If we suppose, for instance, that, in the present debate, before Demosthenes rose some other speaker had amused the people with flattering hopes, with professions of zeal and affection, with passionate exclamations, and prayers to the gods for such and such instances of public success; while at the same time he neglected to point out such measures as were fit to be pursued, or perhaps recommended pernicious measures: on such a supposition, I say, this passage, considered as an indirect reproof of such a speaker, will perhaps appear to have sufficient force and propriety.

*(14) This alludes to an expedition that the Athenians had made about an age before. Some time after the Persian War, when the Greeks began to quarrel among themselves, Corinth and Megara had some dispute about their boundaries. The better to support their quarrel, the Megareans quitted the Lacedaemonians, and entered into an alliance with Athens. But as this state was then engaged both in Egypt and Egina, the Corinthians imagined they would not be able to give any assistance, and therefore invaded the territories of Megara. But the Athenians came immediately to the assistance

of their allies, although they were obliged to commit the defence of their city to their old men and boys; and the Corinthians were repulsed.

*(15) This war happened twelve years after that mentioned in the preceding note. The Megareans, after having put an Athenian garrison to the sword that was stationed in their territory, joined with Lacedaemon, and even with Corinth, their mortal enemy, against whom the Athenians had espoused their quarrel. This state, incensed at the ingratitude of their revolt, determined to reduce them to reason.

They issued out a mandate, directing the Megareans to abstain from cultivating a piece of ground consecrated to Ceres and Proserpine; and, on their refusing to comply, published an edict to exclude them from all commerce in Attica, and bound their generals by an oath to invade their territories once every year.

*(16) In Wolfius's edition it is sixty-five. But this reading is found in other copies, and is confirmed by the parallel passage in the oration on regulating the commonwealth. The orator computes from the death of Pausanias, when the supreme command was given to the Athenians, to the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. Add to this the twenty-seven years of that war, during which time the Athenians maintained their power, though not with consent, and the whole will be seventy-two years complete, and part of the seventy-third year. Agreeably to this last calculation, Demosthenes says, in the third Philippic, that the Athenians commanded in Greece seventy-three years. These two accounts are thus easily reconciled by distinguishing the times of the voluntary and involuntary obedience of the Greeks.

*(17) The battles of Leuctra and Mantinea had entirely destroyed their power.

***(18) In the Phocian War.**

*(19) Ulpian and Wolfius understand this of the peace by which the Athenians consented that the people of Chios, Rhodes, and Byzantium, and other revolters, should all continue free. But it seems more natural to apply it to some prior events; as the taking of Pydna and Potidaea, and other cities of Thrace, that were then subject to Athens, and which Philip made himself master of, after he had concluded a peace with the Athenians, in the second year of his reign.

*(20) Demetrius Phalereus records a saying of Demades, in ridicule of the custom of distributing victuals to the people. "The state," said he, "is now become a feeble old woman, that sits at home in her slippers, and sups up her ptisan."

THE END OF THE SECOND OLYNTHIAC ORATION