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THE HISTORY AND ADVANTAGES OF YOUNG MEN'S ASSOCIATIONS.

A Lecture

DELIVERED IN THE WESLEYAN SCHOOL HOUSE, BEECHWORTH,

BEFORE

The Beechworth Young Men's Association,

ON TUESDAY, JUNE 10TH, 1856,

BY THE

REV. JOHN C. SYMONS,

PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

"WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE SHALL BE THE STABILITY OF THY TIMES." Isaiah xxxiii. 6.

"KNOWLEDGE IS POWER."—Lord Bacon.

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## PREFACE.

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THE following Lecture was prepared at the request of the "Beechworth Young Men's Association," and was delivered a large and highly interesting audience at the public inauguration of the Association, on June 10th, 1856. It was prepared solely in reference to delivery. Its publication is owing to the following resolution of the Members of the Association, "Resolved unanimously,—That the President be requested to publish the Lecture delivered by him on June 10th." In deference to this request, made by about forty young men, the Lecture is now committed to the press. I have not felt myself at liberty to make any alteration; the Lecture is *printed* precisely as it was delivered. I must, therefore, ask the indulgence of the reader, and remind him that these pages should not be read and criticised as if they had been written for publication.

It was my privilege and honour to be one of the fourteen young men who instituted the London "Young Men's Christian Association" in 1844, and to be its first Honorary Secretary. I am not without hope, that the cursory glance at its rise and progress, which I have given in the following pages, may induce some

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young men in this land to attempt and *persevere* in similar efforts. The "Beechworth Young Men's Association" has commenced with fair prospects of success. Though in a very limited community, in one month after its establishment it numbers more than fifty members. If the publication of this Lecture should in any degree call attention to, and induce efforts for, the mental and spiritual improvement of the young men in Victoria, its design will have been fully answered.

JOHN C. SYMONS.

*Beechworth, June 18th, 1856.*

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# YOUNG MEN'S ASSOCIATIONS:

## THEIR HISTORY AND ADVANTAGES.

### A LECTURE.

I CANNOT commence my address to you this evening without referring for a moment to the pleasure which I feel in being invited by the Beechworth Young Men's Association to give the introductory lecture, and thus, as it were, publicly to inaugurate their proceedings as a Society.

The subject on which I am to address you is the "History and Advantages of Young Men's Associations:" it is not of my own choosing, but has been selected by the members of the Association, yet had the selection rested with myself it could not have been more to my mind.

It is reported of the celebrated Correggio that, while wandering one day through a gallery of pictures at Rome, and contemplating the triumphs of art, forgetful of every surrounding circumstance, he burst forth into the passionate exclamation, "I also am a painter;" so, when I am associated with a number of young men, when I consider how full of hope is their future, how awful their responsibilities, and how important the influence which they must exert over the destinies of the present and future ages, I can hardly suppress a sentiment similar to that of the great painter, and exclaim "I also am a young man!"

Looking upon man as an immortal being—reflecting upon his great capabilities for good or evil—knowing something of the dangers to which his morals are exposed, and the specious snares which would allure him from virtue, remembering that the *youth* is *father* to the *man*, that the habits, the tendencies, the moral education of the young must greatly influence and mould the character of the mature man; I feel the overwhelming importance which should ever be attached to the period of youth, and to the institutions and principles in which "our young men" are trained.

One of the characteristics of the age is the attention which has been attracted to the education of the masses. Learning and science are now no longer confined to the cloister or the forum,

but are scattered broadcast over our land. The last quarter of a century has done more towards the elevation of the middle and working classes, than probably any two preceding centuries; and the efforts which have been made have proved most reproductive, in the physical and moral benefits which have resulted from them. Science and art have an almost magic power, greater and more astounding than the necromancy of past ages, or the fabled powers of the gods of heathen mythology. Machinery has lightened the labour and cheapened the products of industry to an almost incredible degree. Railways and steam ships have brought the poles almost within hail; while the electric telegraph enables us to chain the lightning, and by its mysterious agency, hold converse with the most distant parts of our earth, and thus annihilate space.

The implements of education are now placed so completely in the hands of all, that the workhouse boy can, by his own effort, raise himself to the eminent Biblical scholar—the blacksmith to the proud pre-eminence of being able to read eighteen languages—the carpenter lad to be professor of Oriental Literature in the academic halls of Cambridge—the humble farmer's son to the honour of being the discoverer of the planet Neptune; while the number of distinguished individuals who have risen from the artizan to the employer, the inventor, the engineer, and have astonished the world by their stupendous tubular bridges, fleet locomotives, ariel machines, and wonderful mechanical appliances, is so great as to forbid our referring to them in the limits of the present lecture.

Time was when the mental and moral elevation of the masses was feared. "A little knowledge" was said to be "a dangerous thing,"—disastrous consequences were predicted from the general dissemination of literature, science, and art. But that period has passed away. The problem has been solved, and, instead of sowing the seeds of moral and political dissolution, it has proved to be the cement, which, by its inherent qualities, binds man closer to man.

Rank, wealth, office, and other outward circumstances, must ever exert their influence while society is constituted as at present. The gradations of our social organisation arise from the constitution of our natures, and the fitness of things, and must therefore be regarded as the ordinance of God; and a judiciously directed improvement of the people will not only not lessen the wisely settled order of society, but will rather tend to cement and consolidate it. Educate the people, educate them in the great principles of Christian morality which the Bible teaches, and you will help to establish the times of the church and the nation.

Much has been accomplished in the present century by the establishment of mechanics' institutes, literary institutions, public libraries, young men's associations, &c. They give opportunity to the middle and working classes to cultivate letters, art, and science, during their hours of cessation from labour; and they have had the two-fold effect of stimulating effort to acquire the education necessary to use these advantages, and of lessening the

hours of labour, so that the advantages may be obtained. The mechanic, the artizan, the clerk, and the shopman, no longer regard themselves, and are no longer looked upon, as machines, necessary for the successful carrying on of trade, and the implements by which wealth is to be accumulated; but are seen in their true character as men, as moral agents, as rational beings, whose claim to mental and physical recreation and education is as strong as that of the more favoured of their race. Hence it is that the age of adult education, for it is this at which the mechanics institute and the young men's association aim, has also been the age of moral elevation and amelioration of the curse of labour. Landed proprietors have built their model labourers' cottages, manufacturers have established their factory schools and factory libraries, merchant princes and retail tradesmen have instituted their lecture halls and libraries. The hours of labour have been brought within more reasonable limits. Noble lords, elected commoners, and cabinet ministers have not only rivalled each other in zeal in the senate on behalf of those oppressed by labour, and by legislative enactment protected them from the pressure of tyranny and avarice; but they have been likewise found in the mechanics' institute, the farmers' society, the athenæum, the young men's association, foremost as instructive and popular lecturers.

Happy the country where such sights are seen, and such facts heard. England, the home of the brave and the free, the land of liberty, equality, fraternity,—the focus of literature, science, and art,—the land of the Bible,—may thy sons long continue to grow in virtue, morality, and religion. May thy armies and navies ever be invincible; may thy soil never be trodden by foreign foe, never distracted by civil disturbances. May thy merchant fleets long continue to sail on every sea; thy sons, by their indomitable energy, to people distant shores, and plant the banner of thy "phantom flag," and of the "cross," in many lands. May thy Queen long be spared by her virtues to adorn thy throne and shed lustre upon her crown. May thy laws, thy institutions, thy religion, thy commerce, long bless thy own and distant climes, and may thy destiny be "upwards and onwards" till time shall be no more!

Manifold are the illustrations which the history of human effort afford, that "*great results from little causes spring.*" Few circumstances of late years have more strikingly shown this than the history of "Young Men's Associations." About the years from 1840 to 1844 considerable attention was attracted to the physical and moral condition of the young men engaged in business in the metropolis. At that time the usual hours in the shops were from seven in the morning to ten, eleven, and twelve o'clock at night—from fifteen to seventeen hours. There was no class more degraded and dissolute—none who lived in greater disregard to morals and religion—none who were sunk deeper into ungodliness and dissipation than the 50,000 shopmen of London. And what

is said respecting them must, in some sense, be said of those similarly occupied in the large provincial towns. The great confinement, and the respiration of a vitiated atmosphere, induced disease of various kinds, and resulted in a frightful mortality. The testimony of the most eminent medical men went to prove that "The healthiest youths often, after two or three months of this drudgery, fall ill; if they recover, it is to become sallow, thin, sickly, and thus to drag on their doomed life in cheerless lassitude till they exchange it for an early tomb." The revelations of medical science led many of the young men to make an effort for the physical and moral regeneration of themselves and their fellow-assistants. "The Metropolitan Drapers Association" was formed for the purpose of obtaining an abridgment of the hours of business in the drapery and other trades. In this movement the assistants were joined by many of the most respectable employers. A prize essay on the evils of the "Late Hour System" was published, and obtained a very wide circulation. Public meetings were held; medical gentlemen and the ministers of various denominations earnestly aided the effort, and in the course of a few years a very marked change was effected, and nearly all the respectable houses of the metropolis, and in the provincial towns, reduced their hours of business to reasonable limits.

It may be supposed that such a movement as that which I have briefly sketched would be met with many obstacles. But the chief objection of its opponents was that "If young men had more time at their disposal they would spend it in dissipation; and that, therefore, to close the shops earlier would do them more harm than good."

It was to meet this objection that Young Men's Associations were formed. A few young men, residing in one of the houses of business in which their physical and mental culture was not overlooked, began to consider how they might be useful to their fellow assistants in other houses. A meeting was the result of these reflections, and it was held in a bedroom in the house of G. Hitchcock and Co., St. Paul's Church Yard, on 6th July, 1844. Eight young men were present at that meeting, and these, with six others (fourteen in all), formed themselves into an association for promoting the improvement of the moral and spiritual condition of young men engaged in houses of business. Early in its history the society adopted the name of the "Young Men's Christian Association." Its efforts were at first confined to the seeking out Christian young men in different establishments, and encouraging them to attempt the introduction of religious services and mutual improvement classes. Once a fortnight meetings of members were held, at which reports were furnished as to the success which attended the efforts of the association, and also for mutual edification and prayer. The first place in which these meetings of members were held was at the St. Martin's Coffee-house, Ludgate Hill. About two months after the formation of the association, the place of meeting was changed to Radley's Family Hotel, Bridge street, Blackfriars, the former room having become far too



small. In four months the number of enrolled members had reached to seventy, and religious services were established in fourteen large houses of business.

At this state of the Society's progress it was deemed advisable to make the public acquainted with the movement, for until then its operation had been carried on in the most private and unostentatious manner. No person was admitted to its meetings but by direct invitation of the committee; and no public intimation whatever had been given of its existence or operation.

On the 8th November, 1844, a tea-meeting of the members and friends of the association, was held in the large room at Radley's Hotel. Many fears had been expressed that in this step the committee were precipitate; but the event proved the wisdom of the course they had adopted. About two hundred persons, mostly young men, sat down to tea together. The meeting which followed will never be forgotten by those who attended it. The ministers who took part in the meeting were the Revds. John Branch, of the City Mission; William Arthur, Wesleyan; William Fraser, Baptist; and R. W. Dibdin, Church of England. Mr. Owen, of Great Coram street, occupied the chair. The association was now fairly launched. Many were the predictions that it would have only a brief existence, and the idea was ridiculed that an association of a few young men could hold together long. Some trembled and some hoped, but none were *sanguine* enough *even to dream* that it would ever affect the good or reach the position which it has now attained.

Many were the difficulties with which the association had to contend, and much watchfulness and care had to be exercised on the part of the committee. Exception was taken by some to the exclusive character of its membership. The accomplishment of the objects at which it aimed was regarded as utopian by others; while a large number openly avowed their belief that the movement would speedily die out.

But attention was soon attracted to the association; its objects and agencies were warmly advocated by the religious press and from the pulpit, and its progress from that period became rapid and permanent. Branches were formed in several parts of the metropolis, and the existence and success of the society soon became a most powerful argument against the objection, "That if young men had more time they would use it improperly."

During the winter of 1845 the experiment was tried of the delivery of a series of lectures, on topics not strictly religious but religiously treated. The trustees of the Wesleyan Centenary Hall kindly placed that large and spacious room at the disposal of the committee, and who, in order to meet the case of the young men in the West End, also engaged the lecture room of the Leicester Square Institution; the lectures being delivered alternately at either place, and the hour of delivery so fixed as that the young men could attend. The price of admission was nominal. The lecturers were men of well known and acknowledged ability; among whom may be mentioned Revs. Dr. Cumming, Dr. Archer, William Arthur, John Stoughton, and James Hamilton. The

experiment was completely successful; all the lectures were well attended, and some of them crowded. It was a *triumphant answer* to the *calumny that if time were given young men, they would spend it badly*. The winter lectures thus inaugurated have been continued annually, and for several years past have obtained crowded audiences, and the Exeter Hall Lectures of the "Young Men's Christian Association" are now familiar as "household words." The eleventh course of lectures has just been completed, nine courses have been published in a cheap form, and have had a very large circulation. It is not too much to say of these volumes that in interest, in importance, and in general literary ability they stand unrivalled.

When the association had been in existence about six months, it was found to be necessary to employ a paid secretary. Twenty-eight applications were made for the office, and among the applicants were nine ministers of the Independent Denomination, and one minister of the Established Church. Many of the candidates were evidently superior persons; but after a very careful and anxious consideration of their merits and claims, and personal interviews with those who appeared to be the most eligible, the committee declined to appoint any one of the applicants. The office was then offered to the honorary secretary, but was not accepted by him. The appointment of Mr. T. H. Tarlton to this office was followed by the happiest results. To his deep piety, untiring energy and judicious conduct of the society's affairs, much of its present position is due. The appointment of a secretary naturally led to the engagement of an office, and a suite of rooms was rented for this purpose in 14, Sergeant's Inn, Fleet street. The operations of the association were carried on from this place until towards the end of 1849, when the premises previously occupied by the "Whittington Club," 7, Gresham street, City, were secured. Here the committee were enabled to carry into successful prosecution a scheme which had occupied their attention at an early period in the history of the association, viz., the establishment of a library and reading room, and the formation of a "home" for those who arrive friendless in London, where domestic comfort and Christian guidance shall be combined. The library for circulation and reference was a most valuable help to young men, and the reading room was supplied with all the literary and religious periodicals of the day. A news and refreshment room was provided, and supplied with the principal daily and weekly papers, and in which refreshments, tea, coffee, &c., were obtainable by the members on moderate terms. Rooms were appropriated for classes, of which the following were formed:—German, Latin, French, Hebrew, English grammar, Greek, Arithmetic and Mathematics, and Discussion. There was likewise a Lecture Hall, in which devotional meetings, lectures, and addresses were conducted weekly. Here young men could meet their friends, without being obliged to go to the tavern; they could consult a valuable and well-selected library; they could take home with them books for reading and study; they could make themselves acquainted with the great movements of the age; with

the politics of the day, and the news of the hour. They could join in the weekly devotional meeting, or listen to a lecture, or address, from some eminent minister, while on Sabbath afternoons the excellent secretary conducted a most interesting and profitable Bible class.

Here then, the entire scheme of the projectors of the Young Men's Christian Association was fully developed, and I am sure that those of its early friends who had laboured and prayed, and anxiously watched its progress, must have been amply repaid for their toil and expenditure, when they witnessed the successful inauguration of their entire project, at the opening of these rooms on the 1st October, 1849.

About the end of 1854 the committee purchased the lease of the premises known as the "City of London Literary Institution, Aldersgate street," in which place the association is now carried on with full vigour and great success; every succeeding year giving increasing evidence of its great usefulness.

I have given this brief sketch of the association, but it would be altogether incomplete did I omit to state that, so early as January, 1845, branches were commenced, in order that young men in other parts of the metropolis should share advantages in common with those of the city. The first of these was the West branch, founded 16th January, 1845, the meetings in connexion with which were held in the School-room of the Scots Church, Swallow street, Piccadilly; this was followed by branches in the Borough, East (or Whitechapel), Islington, Pentonville, Paddington, and Kennington.

At the time when the Young Men's Christian Association was instituted such agencies were unknown. There might have existed a few societies of young men connected with Christian churches, but it was not known by the projectors of the Christian Association that any attempt had ever been made to bring the young men of different denominations together, for mutual, spiritual and mental improvement. The ground was untrodden—there was no previous experience upon which to rely, or from which to gather data. The enterprise was a noble one, and its first efforts were watched with deep interest, not only by those engaged in it, but by many who wished it well, but who declined to commit themselves to any movement, the permanence and practicability of which were somewhat doubtful. That small band of young men who first gave birth and shape to the association were noble and indomitable spirits, and deserve the enduring fame of the marble or the page of history, far more than many whose names are emblazoned there. But their record is on high, and the great day of accounts alone can reveal the benefits which have resulted from their efforts.

Mechanics' institutes, and literary institutions, had been in active and successful operation. They had performed an important part in the mission of the age—the elevation of the working classes. But they were not sufficiently social on the one hand, and were

too exclusively literary and scientific on the other. When rightly conducted they led from "Nature to Nature's God;" but it often happened that through the indifference of those who should have taken the lead, the management was left to others who perverted the objects for which they were established, and not unfrequently scepticism and socialism "philosophy *falsely* so called," were taught to the serious detriment of the young and unwary, instead of that true science which is ever the "hand-maid of religion."

The great problem of the age was, shall religion be dragged down to the level of the ideas and principles of man's selfishness; in other words, shall the commerce of the world prescribe its terms to religion, or shall religion regulate commerce. As it is strikingly put by Mr. Binney, "Is it possible to make the Best of both Worlds."

Infidelity and irreligion boldly asserted the negative, and from the accumulated evidence which they brought, the host of illustrations which they presented, in which falsehood and "sharp practice" in trade succeeded, while truth and probity were unfortunate, seemed to make it a hopeless task for those who would take the affirmative. The task was an important one. None appeared to have the moral courage to enter the lists, and the champion was about to withdraw from the field a victor. It was then that the Young Men's Association appeared. Few in number, —without the aid of rank, or fame, or name,—"alike to fortune and to fame unknown;" their banner inscribed with the asserted truth, that man was the better servant, the better master, the better artizan, the better employer, the better man of commerce, for being a Christian: That *commercial and Christian excellence were compatible*. The voice came *not* from the *pulpit*; it had often been asserted there; but it was said "*what do ministers of religion know about business?*" It came from the *shop*,—the *counter*,—the *counting-house*. The field was fairly and hardly fought; but the victory did not long hang in doubt—*Religion and commerce were compatible*. The labourer at his humble toil,—the mechanic at his work,—the shopman behind the counter,—the merchant in his multifarious business,—the manufacturer among his machinery,—and the ship-owner in his counting-house,—could be "diligent in business," while "fervent in spirit serving the Lord." It *was* possible to make the *best of both worlds*—the Christian Association had successfully solved the problem.

But there was yet another question, subordinate, it is true, to the preceding one, yet of great importance. Could the men of business, and especially those who were *the employed*, attend to business, and, at the same time, cultivate the social and intellectual principles of their nature. No, was the all but universal answer to the query. No! "for attention to intellectual pursuits will make young men less fit for business." No! said another class, "for give young men more time at their disposal, and they will spend it in dissipation." On this question also the association ventured to join issue, and after a full fair, and impartial trial, the

almost unanimous verdict has been given against the soundness of the first objection, while the second has been declared to be a calumny and a libel!

The field which Young Men's Associations found open and unoccupied was that which lay between the Mechanics' Institute and the Church. These were looked upon, in many instances, as antagonistic. They *should not have been so*; for science should be "the handmaid of religion." Could they be brought nearer together? Could men—Christian men—be induced to regard each other as brethren in Christ, and, putting their peculiar religious views in abeyance, meet on the broad basis of our common Christianity? And, further, could they be induced to rid themselves of the narrow prejudices which many of them held, and look upon literature, science, and art as *not* antagonistic to religion? And could the devotee of science, literature, and art, condescend to meet the humble and unpretending Christian man, and thus seek, each of them, to understand one another better? It was said to be *impossible*;—it has been *proved* to be *possible*! And the social meetings,—the friendly intercourse,—the Christian companionships,—the literary tastes,—the scientific inquiries,—which have been formed and promoted by Young Men's Associations, have demonstrated the practicability of uniting religion with social and intellectual pursuits.

The objects at which these associations aim are twofold:—the preservation of young men from vice, and the assisting them in the acquirement of virtue. The former is sought to be accomplished by leading them from scenes of temptation and from evil associations—the latter by helping them to form safe and profitable companionships,—by making the path to intellectual pursuits smooth and pleasant,—by teaching them the dignity of their nature, and the awfulness of their destiny,—by making the hall of science the vestibule of the temple, and the social re-union the introduction to Christian communion.

The agencies employed for the accomplishment of these objects are Devotional Meetings, Classes for the Study of the Bible, Science, and Letters, the reading and discussion of Essays, the delivery of Lectures; in fine, the adoption of any methods really calculated to elevate and bless man.

And what a harvest of good has sprung up from the seed sown! Twelve years ago fourteen young men formed the first Young Men's Association. The infant has grown so marvellously, that though so youthful in years, it is a fully developed man; taking his position side by side with the great societies of the metropolis, inferior to none of them in the deep interest it creates. And the society, though so young, has been a fruitful parent, and can point thankfully to many lusty sons in Great Britain and Ireland, most towns and cities in England possessing a vigorous scion from this parent stock. Some of the provincial children almost rival the parent himself in the magnitude of their proportions, the energy of their action, and the success of their operations. Thousands of young men in various parts of our fatherland, are enrolled as mem-

bers of Young Men's Associations, tens of thousands have been benefitted by their instrumentality, and hundreds of thousands are reached by their published lectures.

How many have been saved by the fostering care of these societies from the paths of vice and depravity; how many attracted from the tavern, the theatre, the gaming-table, the house of infamy; how many incited to the cultivation of their mental and moral natures; how many led to the Saviour and the church; and how many to the realms of eternal blessedness;—cannot now be told, but will be known in “that day.”

Young Men's Associations have not been confined to the land of their birth, but have been planted and have taken deep root in America. In many of the most important cities of the United States', Associations exist, and are characterised by the energy of the American people. The following extracts from the “National Magazine,” an American publication, will, I am sure, be felt to be deeply interesting:—

“We take pleasure in reminding the young men into whose hands this magazine may fall, of the formation of “Young Men's Christian Associations” in several parts of the country. The association in this city has commenced its career with spirit and promise. Its rooms are at 659 Broadway. The association in Boston has advanced rapidly. It now has the finest hall in that city, furnished with genuine elegance, and supplied amply with periodicals. Its library is also rapidly augmenting.

“An association, we observe, has been formed recently in the city of Washington; and we doubt not that similar institutions will soon be organized in all our principal cities.

“This most interesting provision for our young men originated in the example of the London Young Men's Christian Association—an institution which now occupies a commanding place among the religious schemes of the English metropolis. Besides a well supplied library and reading-room, it has in the same building a spacious hall for lectures, a salon for conversation, an apartment for refreshment, well guarded against intemperance, bath-rooms, &c. The Christian young men of various denominations find it a capital substitute for the ordinary clubs and similar resorts. All persons who are considered entitled to membership are considered also entitled to each other's confidence and friendship. Important acquaintances are thus formed, tending to both the social and business advantages of the members. Young men from the country especially find it a favourable resort, as it affords them intellectual and social entertainment, and valuable introductions to the safest society.

“We hope our American associations will soon be able to provide all the conveniences, and even luxuries, of their London model. Every innocent attraction should be given to the scheme.”

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The Rev. Dr. Ferris, in an address at the organisation of the

New York Association, spoke in the following warm terms of the project:—

“The blessing of many a young man will be yours—the blessing of many a family, from which the young stranger comes, will be yours—the blessing of many a pastor, over whose young men you exercise your liberal enlightened influence, will be yours. We shall all bless you; for you will lead on to usefulness many who will take their place by the side of those who come here as stranger lads, but are now the pillars of our churches I have spoken of many ruined, but we should not forget that multitudes of those who came here to ‘seek their fortunes,’ strangers, friendless, almost penniless, are now our most worthy citizens—ornaments of piety—the reliance of all our benevolent societies,—the actors and liberal promoters of all useful enterprises and improvements. The fact is a striking one, that the once strangers and their children are the life of our city, as they are most amazingly the majority. May you have the privilege of adding many to this number, and with even a more consecrated influence.—*Nat. Mag.*, vol. i., p. 472 (1852).”

“Association for mutual improvement is the feature of the times. In several of the city (Boston) and suburban churches an experiment has been tried with marked success. A society for social and intellectual culture has been instituted, open to all the members of the congregation, with certain moral restrictions. Its office is to secure the development of the social affections, to encourage thoughtfulness, to provide for the sick and poor, and to gather children into the Sabbath School. Lectures, discussions, conversations, and music varied to save from monotony, and previously arranged by appointed officers, render one evening in a fortnight a means of peculiar profit and unalloyed pleasure. A very lively social feeling is secured throughout the society; successful enterprises for doing good are originated; valuable mental discipline is attained, while the expense and small talk that are the almost indispensable attendants upon a church benevolent society is avoided.”—*Nat. Mag.* vol. iv. p. 93 (1854).

Young Men’s Associations in this land have not, so far as my information goes, been generally successful. The past few years have been so peculiar, and the influences at work so unfavourable to mental culture, that few projects, aiming at intellectual or moral improvement, have prospered. The exciting nature of men’s engagements,—the insane speculation which has been so rife,—the engrossing cares to which men have given themselves up;—the rude and uncomfortable mode of life to which many have abandoned themselves,—and the very general prevalence of vice and ungodliness, have proved such a formidable list of obstacles, that almost every effort of science and religion to cultivate the understanding, and affect the heart, has been in vain. What these have failed to effect the Allwise Disposer of events has accomplished in another way. Reckless speculation has brought its own cure. The intemperate race for gold has, by its own reaction, sobered its victims. *All* have learned lessons of wisdom and economy from the past; and it is to be hoped that *most* will practise the experience so dearly and painfully bought. In the return of general prosperity with which we are now favoured, it is of the last consequence we should remember, that the true greatness of any people depends upon the cultivation and practice of virtue, and religion. Every right-minded man should remember that *he* has a *mission* in the *world*, and standing in the midst of society,

strewed with the moral wreck and ruin of multitudes,—with a vivid apprehensions of its evils and dangers, and with a deep wrought conviction of his *individual duty*, he should swear *allegiance* to his *Maker*, and solemnly *vow*, by his aid, *to do what one man can do to elevate and save his country*, and drive from her sunny skies and fertile soil, *vice and ungodliness*. And, having made this *resolve*, he should *manfully persevere* in his *duty*!

There is an awfulness, a sublimity, a fascination about the future, which makes some men dread its contemplation, whilst it allures others onwards to foolish speculation, and reckless prognostications. I do not assume to be a prophet, nor to be able to look further into the future than an ordinary mortal. I have no desire to lift the veil, which our wise and benevolent Creator has hung before the future. I have implicit confidence in the power of physical, mental, and moral truth. I have no apprehensions as to the ultimate result of the grand conflict which wages between truth and error. I am not alarmed, albeit the vantage may seem often to be on the side of error. It will not always be so; it is less so now than in the past. Truth may sometimes retire to her "lines of Torres Vedras;" but it is not because she is vanquished, it is only that she may gather new strength, and hurl her forces with irresistible destruction upon the foe. Vice and crime continue; but they are compelled to abandon their apologies. Infidelity and scepticism still evince vitality; but they have been forced to shift their ground, and appear under new and more specious names.

"Error has had her triumphs in the past;  
Truth's are to come. In ages far remote,  
Her light was feeble as a glow-worm's lamp,  
But fed by noble thoughts and valiant deeds,  
Fann'd by the aspirations of the wise,  
Tended by virtuous hearts with patient care,  
'Mid cold and darkness and tempestuous wrong,  
Rose higher and glowed clearer, until now—  
When, like a beacon on a mountain top,  
Seen of the nations, it illumines the world.

Truth was a snow-flake on a precipice  
In the far-off cold summits of the past,  
Which fell; and falling gathered strength and bulk  
To fall again more heavily, and roll  
Adown the slope of time. 'Tis rolling now,  
Huge as an avalanche; and in the air  
The whizzing, and the roaring, and the crash  
Of its great progress may be heard afar."

What shall the future of this land be? is a question of the deepest moment to us, and to the whole world—a question the solution of which is in the hands of its people! I would not have you be insensible to its political constitution;—as citizens and electors, act your parts and fulfil your trusts with a steady view to its present and future weal. But it is in reference to its social and moral condition that I ask the question. Most of us—if not all—



have made this our adopted land. In it our children and relatives will live when we have passed away. Tens of thousands of our countrymen, as well as multitudes from other nations, will flock to these shores. *Australasia must be a great empire!*—shall she be a *blessing*, or a *curse to the world*? Remember, Australia—Victoria—will be what *you—the present generation—make her*;—*rich in commerce and in crime—the land in which to make money, but not to remain and live in: or blessed with a virtuous and happy people attached to its soil, educated, religious, and exhibiting the characteristics of that righteousness which “exalteth a nation.”*

When an African Prince sent an embassy, with costly presents, to the Queen of Great Britain, and asked her in return to tell him the secret of England's greatness and England's glory, our beloved Queen sent him, not the number of her fleets or her armies, the cost of her crown jewels, or the details of her commerce, but she sent him a beautifully bound copy of the Bible, and said, “this is the secret of England's greatness!”\*

No Englishman will ever forget the memorable day when Britain's greatest Admiral hung out from his ship the signal, “England expects every man to do his duty,” nor will he ever cease to remember how nobly that signal was answered. There are *other times* and other scenes when the same demand is made, and the true patriot is called upon to enter the battle field, take his share in the conflict, range himself on the side of virtue, and conquer or die in her service. *Such a time is the present,—such a scene, this land.* Behold its present condition; think of its capabilities; view its geographical position; ponder its almost fabulous mineral wealth; reflect upon its almost magic progress; gaze upon its intemperance—its impurity—its open profanation of the Sabbath; look forward to its future destiny for good or evil, and *then take your stand either for truth or error—for virtue or vice,—but forget not that Victoria expects you to do your duty!*

There are signs of hopefulness in the land. They are multiplying, and the influence of the wise and virtuous are being felt. Let us unite with them and strengthen their hands. The dawn of a brighter day is streaking the horizon. Moral and religious influences have not been exerted in vain; the cloud may yet be no larger than a man's hand, but it will spread until its showers shall fertilize the entire moral soil.

I look with pleasure upon the organisation of this society. I trust that it is but the beginning of similar associations in other parts of our land, and especially on other gold-fields. I trust this society will accomplish the most sanguine hopes of its projectors. The omen of this evening is for good; and most heartily do I adopt the language of the gifted transatlantic poet and apply his eloquent words to our adopted land:—

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\* Speech of the Rev. Cannon Stowell, at the Manchester and Salford Bible Meeting, October, 23rd, 1853.

"Sail on, Victoria, strong and great ;  
 Humanity, with all its fears,  
 With all its hopes of future years,  
 Is hanging breathless on thy fate !

\* \* \* \* \*  
 Fear not each sudden sound and shock,  
 'Tis of the wave and not the rock ;  
 'Tis but the flapping of the sail,  
 And not a rent made by the gale !  
 In spite of rock and tempest roar,  
 In spite of false lights on the shore,  
 Sail on, nor fear to breast the sea !  
 Our hearts our hopes are all with thee,  
 Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our tears,  
 Our faith triumphant o'er our fears,  
 Are all with thee—are all with thee !"