

The Age—and its Young Men.

A Lecture.

MR. PRESIDENT,—

The invitation with which your Association has honored me to give the opening Lecture of the season is a cause of no slight gratification. Yet there mingles with the pleasure a sense of weighty responsibility, a pressure of thoughts that long for utterance; a solemn questioning with my spirit as to how this present duty may be faithfully performed.

It is with the earnest desire to speak truths that may be permanently useful that I enter this evening on the consideration of some points connected with

THE AGE—AND ITS YOUNG MEN.

The terms are somewhat indefinite. Perhaps, too, they are not very easy to define. Yet every one has a tolerably accurate idea of what is meant by them without any formal explanation. All are familiar with such expressions as the Augustan Age; Age of Louis 14th; Age of Charles 2nd;—without feeling the need of any research we attach at once distinct notions to these phrases. The first we at once speak of as a period distinguished by the perfection of its literature; the second as a time that exhibited the mingled glories of arms and of letters surrounded by royal pomp; while the third has in point of space a more limited reference to the land of England; and to a time when her character was disgraced by the prevalence of open unblushing profligacy. Thus we can understand how a distinct notion may be formed of what “this Age” means, even though the number of years over which it spreads may not be specified; and also how it may present to the observer a certain form or character if he can only reach a true point of view from which to mark its fast fleeting features. There is no doubt a considerable difficulty in a contemporary forming an opinion of his own times. He lives too near the events, it may be, to permit him to look at them on all sides with philosophic candor; and his own character may be too much moulded by their influence. He may be disposed to take too bright or too desponding a view of the state of matters around him. He may exaggerate or diminish unduly their importance. Nevertheless the very attempt to consider them is practically beneficial; and if rightly conducted must lead to the establishment of proper principles of action.