



## I AM THE WAY.

John xiv. 6.

### "THE PLACE OF RELIGION IN ASSOCIATIONS FOR YOUNG MEN."

*Extract from an Address by Rev. WM. GUEST, at the Annual Meeting of the Y. M. C. A., Islington.*

**I** HAVE come to a period of life when the mind gathers up the teaching of the past, and when the lessons learnt round themselves in a completed form. The one conviction which I desire emphatically to offer here is this: no voluntary organization for the intellectual or moral advantage of men will *abide* where *vital Christianity is not made the supreme, the ever-ascendant, and the all-controlling principle.*

I remember in my youth the flourishing Mechanics Institutes that then existed. Never was anything attempted under more favourable auspices. Never was there a movement originated with loftier expectations or with better intentions. A vast net-work of these Institutes spread all over the land. They were wonderfully popular. Where are they now? They have only here and there left a trace behind them. The scheme was *baseless*. It never attempted to introduce and maintain vital religion.

Since that time I have seen scores of local Young Men's Improvement Societies started with excellent purposes. Little by little the healthy salt of a purifying religion has been excluded, and from that time I have seen them melt away like snow in July.

I have known of Literary Associations in connexion with places of worship. They meant well, gradually, however, religion was put in the background. Entertainments became the chief object. Those who could best cater to such entertainments were brought to the front. The history of such Associations has been a two-fold beacon of warning. If they did not die out sud-

denly, they lingered to injure the Christian community with which they were connected.

I bear therefore this witness after more than thirty years of public life; that efforts to promote the moral elevation of men which set aside the influence and ascendancy of spiritual religion will disappoint their originators. The Young Men's Christian Associations of Great Britain and of three continents—those of Europe, America and Australia, *where Christianity has been strenuously maintained as the vital and ascendant element, are now among the MOST PERMANENT, FLOURISHING, and useful Associations on the face of the globe.* If in an evil hour the passion for amusement should enter these associations, *and the paramount control of religion, be set aside, they also* will be numbered among the well-meant but abortive schemes of the past. I care not how right a movement may appear, if, for the sake of swelling the numbers, you tempt into it men who do not themselves want to be right towards God, you will find that such men will strangle that movement. There is nothing more instructive in the life of the Lord Jesus than the manner in which He shook off from Him men who wished to live in the sunlight of His temporary popularity, but did not care to accept His teachings or to sympathize with His spirit.

I would also like to say this. The conception that everything connected with religion is necessarily dull, and everything connected with worldly entertainments is necessarily brilliant, is the most consummate and astounding misconception ever entertained. Mr. John Hullah said lately, at a meeting held in Westminster Deanery, that his visits to music halls had impressed him with these two facts: "The remarkably good behaviour of the people, and the astonishing, the stupendous, the incredible dullness of the entertainment." So have many of us found when brought into connection with worldly enjoyments. Why, in the name of all reason, is religion to be called duller than this "astonishing, stupendous, and incredible dullness" of certain forms of worldliness? We repudiate the notion? It only proves the profound ignorance among men as to the rich enjoyment to be found in engagements that bring them into the sunlight of God's great love.