

THE YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION

OF

ST. JOHN, N. B.

BY A MEMBER.

It is difficult at present to get at the particulars of the history of the Young Men's Christian Association, in this city, as most of the records were destroyed in the great fire of June, 1877. The old Association, which was kept together until 1860 or 1861 was rather a literary society than a Y. M. C. A.

It is believed that its failure was due to its devotion to the intellectual, rather than to the moral and spiritual interests of young men. It was one-sided. What Christian young men needed to hold them together, and enthuse them was something broader—something that would develop them, not only mentally, but also physically and spiritually, and which would also meet the requirements of their social instincts. The old Association, however, did a good work, so far as it went. It established a fair library—it brought the magazines of the day within the reach of many, who would have otherwise been without them—and by its public debates, gave the public pleasant entertainment, and what is better, helped to make speakers of some of the foremost public men of this day. But the society lacked vitality, and like many others of the same class, and conducted upon the same principle, soon passed into oblivion. It was not, until the month of November, in the year 1867—the year of the confederation of the British Provinces of North America, under the name of the Dominion of Canada, that the Young Men's Christian Association, of St. John was permanently organized. The Association, before this time, had been well established in the neighboring province of Nova Scotia, and had held a Provincial Convention in the summer of 1867, in the city of Halifax, N. S. This convention was attended by a number of the Christian young men of St. John, whose zeal was so enkindled, that when they returned home, they earnestly set about the work of organizing a Young Men's Christian Association. They so far succeeded that on the 28th of November, 1867, a public meeting was held in the lecture room of the St. David's, Presbyterian Church, at which most of the Evangelical clergymen of the city, and a large representation of the mercantile and professional community were present. At this meeting the formation of the Association was announced and received the hearty endorsement of the clergy and citizens present.

The Association continued to meet weekly in the lecture room of St. David's Church for several months, it then met for a short time in the school room of the St. John's Episcopal Church. The increasing membership and interest of the Association made it a matter of plain duty to secure a room which could be kept open every day, and where more frequent and varied meetings could be held. Accordingly a large and centrally situated room was secured in Horton's building, in which the association continued to meet until the year 1873. From that time the association continued to increase and enlarge its field of usefulness. It secured a young man to take care of the rooms, opened a free reading room, established a library, a musical society, a Tuesday evening literary meeting, a Thursday night prayer meeting, a Sabbath evening union prayer meeting, a Sabbath afternoon Bible class. In a short time the young men added to this indoor work, the distribution of tracts, the holding of cottage open-air meetings, visiting the marine and general hospitals, the visitation of the sick and imprisoned. The Sabbath evening prayer meeting, held after the church services were ended, has always been an open meeting, free to every person, but the Thursday night prayer meeting, was for a long time exclusively for young men. The afternoon Bible class was for several years, one of the most useful of the association meetings, presided over by a warm-hearted, liberal, and cultured gentleman, Dr. Botsford. It was the scene of many pleasant Scriptural conversations. We had not been many years in the rooms in Horton's building, when it was found that that place was too small for us, especially the Sabbath evening meetings, which were uncomfortably crowded. In 1869 the Inter Provincial Convention was held in St. John, and attended by large number of delegates from various sections of the Provinces of Nova Scotia,