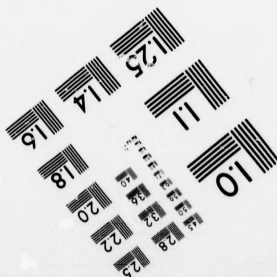
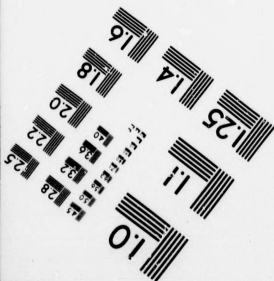
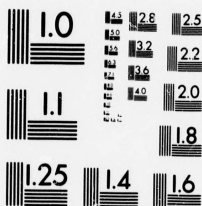


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DELIVERED BEFORE

KNOX COLLEGE

Metaphysical and Literary Society,

BY

THE PRESIDENT, W. ARMSTRONG, M.A.,

ON THE EVENING OF

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1ST, 1871.

PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY.

ROWSELL & HUTCHISON, PRINTERS, TORONTO.

1871
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INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

*To the Members of Knox College Metaphysical and
Literary Society.*

GENTLEMEN,—At this the first public meeting of our Society for the present year, it devolves upon me as your President to deliver the customary Inaugural Address. So far as I am aware there is nothing that should mar the pleasurable feelings to which an occasion like the present is expected to give rise. Our Society is in a prosperous condition. We have reason to congratulate ourselves not only on the number of new members added to the roll, but also on the hearty spirit that has hitherto pervaded our meetings. And, if we do regret the absence of some whose faces were familiar, whose voices we were always glad to hear, our regret is lessened when we remember that they have gone forth to the fight for which they were here preparing, and their valor in the field is a cause of just pride to us as students of this College and members of this Society. Without mentioning other names of equal honor, I may allude to the fact, that the President of our Society last year is now President of a rising College in the Far West, being thus rapidly raised from the ranks of this Society to the dignity of a Professor.

It is not my intention, however, to go over the annals of the past; but, with your permission, what I shall say to-night will be concerning *the age in which we live, and ourselves in relation to it.*

It is a trite and hackneyed phrase—"We live in an age of progress." Everybody says it—everybody believes it. Every age to the people who live in it must at least *appear* to them to be an age of progress. The human mind cannot rest satisfied with any present attainments, and therefore, whether true or not, must fancy itself in the midst of a movement onward. On before it there ever stands an ideal of perfection—the goal towards which it presses—and every step, however blindly taken, must at least *seem* to it to be one in advance. It is just this ceaseless struggle for something beyond the present, this felt capacity for progress, that ennobles man, lifts him above the brute, and proves to him his higher destiny. Many and terrible have been the mistakes of men; mad and foolish many of their enterprises in seeking to give scope to this capacity. They have not been all in vain. Material advancement has been made. The struggles of centuries have lifted us to higher ground, and it may not be too much to hope that experience will yet teach mankind to some extent the path wherein true progress lies—the way to universal peace and happiness.

We are *proud* to think that we live in an age of *real* progress—nay more, in an age that will hereafter be looked upon as a great landmark in the history of the world—as a time of moulding and formation—a time in which the mind of man was quickened by a fresh impulse, and received a truer guiding towards the realization of the ideal of human perfection. There are times when the world moves but slowly—"slowly creeping on from point to point." Now it

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proceeds not slowly but with tremendous stride. In such an age a man is unworthy the name who does not note the tendencies of the times, and so far as he can, seek to guide them aright. And when we consider how rapidly science is advancing, widening in its influence as it proceeds, scattering light and blessing and gladness on every side; when we consider the startling discoveries by which the powers of nature are tamed and made daily subservient to the will of man; when we consider the vast proportions of commerce; the gigantic social and political movements; the upheavals of thought in Literature, Politics, and Religion, which characterize the present day, we conclude that it is no holiday task to decide what influence all these things may exert on the true well-being of man. Still, from such an inquiry, no earnest mind can shrink; and I trust I am expressing the sentiments of every member of this Society and of every student of this College, when I say that it is especially incumbent upon us to look at the question steadily, fairly, and courageously.

We have come together here as students of Theology. The world has no right to question the sincerity of our motives for the step we have thus taken; but the world has a right to ask, what object we have in view, what influence we expect to exert on mankind? What is the position, then, in which we place ourselves before the world by our presence here? Is it not, that by the influence of College instruction, of societies for mutual improvement, of mutual contact and private study, we may be the better prepared to *guide* the progressive tendencies of this age in the path that leads man to happiness and perfection.

We are here with no less object in view than to fit ourselves to become the *true leaders of Society* in every

thing that is ennobling to man or honouring to God. This is a lofty position to take, but no other is compatible with the pretensions of the church and ministry. Looking at it in this light, what a wide range of thought and duty opens to our view! How imperative it is for us to study every movement among men, every phase of the society in which we live!

We must remember at all times that it is to the *present* we sustain our relations. It will not do to prepare ourselves for a condition of things that is *past*. Our study must all have reference to the active present. Knowledge of the past, and conjecture for the future, are only useful so far as they bear on the duty of to-day. He who acts as if he lived in a past age is but at best a grave anachronism, useful only as a warning to others. Action is the watch-word of our day. He who spends his time in dreamy speculations or useless controversy is left behind. Time *was* when the Minister of Christ could sit in his lone study pondering hour after hour over themes the most abstract or the most sublime, or engage himself in the minutest analysis of his own state of mind. He who would be a religious guide to the present age must make his hours of study tell directly upon the activities of every-day life.

Time was when the minister could issue from his study once a week, and arrayed in official costume, dictate to a reverential audience what views they should hold in matters of the highest importance. Nowadays there is nothing received, simply because it is *ex cathedra*. The right of private judgment is exercised everywhere, and exercised with a special vengeance in church pews. He who in the pulpit persistently indulges in false feeling or false logic, who habitually gives forth crude ill-digested thoughts or badly expressed sentiment is sure, sooner or later, to be

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brought to the bar of a merciless criticism and condemned. At no time have men seemed more ready than now to obey the Apostolic injunction, "Prove all things." Some that they may scatter everything sacred to the winds; others that they may the more surely "hold fast that which is good." Creeds hoary with age; beliefs handed down as sacred heirlooms from generation to generation, are submitted to the minutest analysis, and if they cannot stand the test of the smelting furnace, are thrown away as metals of the baser sort.

We rejoice at such a spirit. Without it, truth can never be found; without it, real progress would be impossible.

Another feature of the age worthy of notice is the general diffusion of knowledge among all classes and grades of society. Learning, long confined to academic halls, bursting the barriers which made it flow in these narrow channels, is spreading in every direction. A great mental excitement is among the people everywhere. Hence, we have popular editions of all books from the profoundest philosophy or most recondite science to the last sensational novel or the latest lines from the pen of a favourite poet. In a thousand ways does the craving for a higher knowledge make itself felt. May it increase until ignorance, the parent of crime and misery, is driven from the earth. It makes the heart beat faster to contemplate what purer forms of life, what nobility of character may result when the general intelligence of mankind is raised from grovelling in the dust; when every man realizes the fact that he is something more than a mass of self-interested, "money-making clay."

No one will deny these to be characteristics of the present age. It is well, then, for us to remember that these are the circumstances under which we are here preparing ourselves

to become teachers and guides to men in matters of the weightiest import—to remember, too, that if we would maintain our proper position and influence in society, it can only be by thorough preparation—a preparation that will enable us to stand the test of severest criticism, and lead the way in advance of the general intelligence of the people. This is no small task. It will involve much patient toil and unwearied exertion. It will demand a most extensive course of reading—a continued study of books and men.

But, says some conscientious objector, "I am here as a student of Divinity. Theology is my special subject, and to it I must confine my attention." With the words of this objection we entirely agree. We would even put it in stronger language, and say it is the duty of every student to, study nothing else but Theology. If, however, by Theology the objector means no more than a comprehensive view of church creeds and formularies, with an orderly arrangement of proof texts from the Bible, we must demur to any such contracted view of the science. We must take Theology in its widest signification, as embracing all that we can know about God, his being, his attributes, his connection with the universe, and his dealings towards mankind. Where, then, can we place a limit to it? True, the Bible is the unfailing and infallible source of Divine knowledge. Everything that can be drawn from or based upon the Bible is of pre-eminent interest to the student of Divinity. But the Bible is not the only source whence knowledge of God can be derived. He can have only a limited idea of his responsibility as a teacher of things Divine who does not on the one hand seek to bring the light of Science and Philosophy, of Literature and Art, of History and Politics, to bear upon the written Word as it unfolds the character of God and the redemption

of man; and, on the other hand, seek to infuse the spirit of that Word into studies and activities of life.

The study of one department of knowledge aids in the study of another. All sciences are intertwined, and all are subservient to the greatest of all sciences, Theology.

We should therefore study Geology and Mineralogy not merely that we may be able to describe the successive strata of the earth's surface, or tell the chemical composition of its mineral products, but that we may gain new conceptions of the wonder-working God from the tracings of his finger in its rocky album.

We should study Natural History not merely to be able to arrange all the plants and animals of the globe in classes and sub-classes, and label them with names high unpronounceable—not merely to learn some of their properties and peculiarities; but that in the manifold adaptations and contrivances which are presented everywhere in nature from the dust of the fungi to the giant pine of California—from the microscopic animalculæ to the ponderous whale, we may recognize the more fully the *power*, the *wisdom*, and the *beneficence* of Him who supports, sustains, and rules over it all. We should study Astronomy, not for the pleasurable bewilderment of contemplating world on world revolving in illimitable space; but that we may be led thereby to form truer and more devout conceptions of that Infinite Mind which by a single law binds and blends so many systems together in perfect harmony.

We should study Philosophy, not that we may hope to be able to answer all the questions she asks, or solve the mysteries which hang around our being; but that, humbled when we perceive the narrow limits within which our knowledge is confined, we may the more deeply feel it true that:

"Our little systems have their day,
 They have their day and cease to be;
 They are but broken lights of thee,
 And thou, O Lord, art more than they."

We should study Art, for by it the mind is elevated and refined, and [thereby enabled to approach nearer to a conception of Infinite Goodness and Truth.

We should study History, for it is the manifestation of God's Providence towards men and nations. All literature, in short that is worthy the name, whether prose or verse, should be the object of our attention, for, as Carlyle says:—"Literature is but a branch of religion, and always participates in its character." Nor does this view confine within too narrow limits the domain of literature, for it can be true without making every poem a psalm, every essay a sermon, history an ecclesiastical record, and biography a detail of daily devotions and pious reflections.

Some will no doubt say that the scheme of study indicated here is chimerical; that there is no need for a Divinity student to seek to become a polymath; that there is much of which he can and must afford to be ignorant. Now, we do not say that we are bound to pursue the facts of science with the minuteness of a Lyell, a Huxley, or a Herschel; that we are to spend our time in philosophical speculations like a Kant or a Hamilton, or are to cultivate history like a Hallam or a Froude; but, certainly, we cannot well afford to be ignorant of any department of knowledge that will serve materially to give us more light as to the character of God, the nature of man, or the relations in which man stands to his Maker and to his fellow-men. We hold that it is only by making pure theology the basis of study, and looking upon all departments from a theological point of view, that we can hope to

advance in true knowledge or preserve our minds from being weakened by desultory reading and useless flights of thought.

We need not stop to meet the objection so often urged that too much learning tends to call the mind of the minister away from his proper work, the conversion of souls. The fact that Paul was taken from the feet of Gamaliel, and never found his learning a hindrance, is a sufficient answer. Nor must we ever forget the requirements of the present day—the character of the age in which we live. If, as no one will deny, men of the highest order of intellect and greatest attainments in science and letters, look with contempt on the church and her ministers generally; if old and forgotten heresies are being revived and led forth again to battle against the truth; if we frequently see in pamphlets, treatises, reviews, and novels, boldly asserted scepticism, sneering insinuations against Divine truth, or unmanly side-thrusts at things held as venerable and sacred; and if, as it seems, there is, an ill-suppressed murmur against the efficiency of the Christian pulpit in our day, it is surely the duty of those who would put themselves forward as the special defenders of Truth, that they equip themselves thoroughly for the task they have undertaken. It will not do to slur over the honest convictions of scientific men, or seek to belittle the doubts which, arising from the great conflict of opinions now taking place, painfully oppress many an enlightened mind in the present day.

It is more than probable that our greatest struggle will be against the assumptions of the unsanctified intellect. As soldiers of the Cross, we must not shrink from the fight. And if the enemy draw his weapons from the armoury of Science and Philosophy, we must do the same, and wielding them with intellects sanctified by grace and dedicated to the

cause of truth, seek to vanquish the foe on the ground that he himself has chosen.

Nor need we fear the result, for we may rest assured that when Philosophy has attained the object of its pursuit; when universal Science has reached its ultimate conclusions; when the Bible has received its true interpretation, it will be found that Philosophy, Science, and Revelation. unite in maintaining the same eternal truths.

Again, if we look at our position from a *social and political* point of view, we shall find its responsibility greatly increased. It will be felt by every one who fairly considers the subject that a more intelligent consciousness of Christian obligation both as to great public questions and private actions is much to be desired in the community. Religion should pervade the *whole domain* of human activity. It should be felt by men in every relation of life, social and political; and just in proportion as it is felt will be the influence of ministers of the Gospel among mankind. Around us are taking place many great philanthropic movements. Enterprises are set on foot for the removal of ignorance, poverty, and misery; societies of various kinds are formed for the amelioration of man's condition. To such extent is this being carried as almost to justify the paradoxical saying, "that we now need a society to protect society against unnecessary societies." In this state of things there is an evident duty devolving upon us. We hold that the Gospel is the power that can truly ameliorate the condition of mankind; that it is the true enlightener and refiner of the mind; the only panacea of the world's ills. If, then, we are to maintain our influence in the social sphere, we must prepare to take the lead in every really good philanthropic movement, and see that it be leavened with the leaven of the Gospel of Christ.

Not only so, but it is our duty to seek to have intelligent views of national policy, that we may be able to advance the true welfare of the country in which we dwell. It is almost considered a virtue by many now-a-days for ministers of the gospel to manifest little interest in civil affairs. It surely cannot be right to leave the affairs of state uninfluenced by religion. There is an ethical side to public affairs to which we must never close our eyes, if we would have men of integrity in positions of public trust, and purity in the measures brought forward for the welfare of the people. National Government will never attain its true standard until those who frame the laws, frame them with an eye to the eternal law of God; and those who administer them, do so in the fear of the Lord.

I have hitherto been speaking only of the *attainments* necessary for those who would be the highest public teachers of this age. The truth of what I have said must be obvious to every reflecting mind. For myself, gentlemen, I am convinced that, unless a high standard of intelligence be maintained among the clergy, their influence upon an age like this will sink very low indeed. Let no one, however, so far mistake me as to think that I advocate for them a life of mere mental culture, or make their duty to lie in a purely rational sphere. The theme, the basis of their life-work, must be the GOSPEL OF CHRIST; the preparation for that life-work such as will tend to make that Gospel in its fulness acceptable to all classes of men.

Allow me now to say a few words concerning *some traits of character* we should seek to cultivate, and the development of which this College and Society may materially promote.

The first I shall mention is a manly independence, an *individuality of character based on strong self-respect*.

You have heard a good deal recently concerning the comparative value of secular and denominational colleges. Much that is true has been advanced on both sides of that discussion. True it is, that there are some who, leaving a home of tender piety and coming suddenly in contact with the conflicting opinions sure to meet them in a purely secular college, have abandoned the simple faith of their childhood, and, failing to reach the safe ground of a manlier creed, have plunged into hopeless and heartless scepticism. Equally true is it, on the other hand, that those brought from homes where no breath of opposition to religion ever reached them, and placed in a denominational college where one set of opinions is constantly held up as alone worthy of attention, are apt to become narrow-minded, and inclined to bigotry. Both these are dangerous extremes. The best character is formed where settled conviction of truth has followed the anxious strugglings of doubt.

The Christianity which an age like this demands, must be neither a sickly sentimentalism nor a blind belief. It must be something manly and courageous. A character that will not shrink from the arduous duties of life—that can without fear of taint come in contact with the hostile influence of the world. One that is *firm* to roll back the tide of evil, *resolute* to grapple with, and *strong* to overcome the difficulties that cross its path. It must not be like the tender house-plant, scarcely able to bear the sunlight; but rather like the majestic oak which storms but strengthen, and which roots itself all the more firmly, because of the wintry blasts that howl through its branches.

That character should be *ours* which is ready fearlessly to encounter every error, and as fearlessly to welcome every truth. That independence should be *ours*, which, based upon

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settled convictions formed from the investigation of facts, lifts us above the mere opinions of others. Accordingly, whilst we diligently labour to collect information from every source, let us beware of sinking our own individuality so far as to become the mere receptacles of other men's thoughts—the parrot-like propagators of opinions received by the eye and ear and spoken from the memory not the heart.

We rejoice that there is no influence brought to bear upon us in this institution calculated to repress freedom of opinion, but that independence of inquiry is not only urged, but even demanded from us.

Nowhere is a man more likely to be thrown back upon his own resources, or more surely taught to rely upon his own powers of mind, than in those free discussions which necessarily hold a prominent place in a Society such as ours.

Not seldom, perhaps, does a man for the first time experience the pleasure which attends the creative power of the mind when forced to deliver an extemporaneous speech elicited in the heat of debate. Not seldom has he learned for the first time really to respect his own opinions, when he finds that, in the judgment of the Society, they are superior to those of his opponents.

It is only when a man is really convinced of a truth, that he should presume to teach it to others. Let us then seek to have convictions of our own. Let us dare to express them; and if there be anything further required to constitute true heroism, it is to stand by our convictions when we have expressed them. This alone will give us true independence—true individuality of character. Let us remember, then, that if egotism is odious, and self-conceit abominable, a want of due self-respect is as great a defect in a man's character as either.

Another trait of character well worthy of cultivation is *that disposition which will lead us to maintain our own opinions with calmness and moderation, and treat the opinions of others with candor and courtesy.* We read in fable of a certain man who went about with an iron flail, beating down whatever came in his way. It is just so with some men who, because they have definite views on some subject, consider it to be their duty to be ever avowing them, and to beat down all and sundry who happen to entertain opinions contrary to theirs. This unreasonableness finds, to a certain extent, a cure in the pitched battles of a debating society. Debaters soon learn that others can hold opinions as well as themselves, and that there are often valid arguments for both sides of a question.

Another lesson taught by debate is, that a person can differ from our opinion without forfeiting his right to be considered a rational being. In this respect some persons seem to have a morbid faculty for mistaking the point in dispute. If they undertake to prove that the earth is flat, they would do so by seeking to prove that all who maintain it is round, are either knaves or fools. This kind of reasoning is not uncommon in the world; so that it is no vain lesson such logicians receive in a Society such as ours, where each debate is decided strictly in accordance with the merits of the arguments as they bear upon the point at issue.

But I must not allow myself to be carried away to speak of the special advantages we each receive from our connection with this Society. I have striven throughout to keep a higher object in view. My desire has been to state our relation as students of Divinity to the busy, restless age in which our lot has been cast—to indicate the extent of preparation requisite, if we would do our life-work well, and to shew some elements

of character we should seek to develop. All along I have assumed the existence of personal piety, and personal consecration to God's service as indispensable prerequisites, and have spoken only of those attainments which should be added thereto for the successful discharge of the sacred office to which we are each looking forward.

Gentlemen, let us seek to realize the true relation in which we stand to our fellow-men. Let us recognize our mission in the world. Let our purpose through life be a lofty one. What that purpose should be, cannot be expressed better than in the words of the great Edward Irving: "There are few things," said he, "that bind me to the world, and but a few; one is, to *make a demonstration for a higher style of Christianity. Something more magnanimous, more heroic than this age affects.*" The world has now need of a higher style of Christianity—something more magnanimous, more heroic, more Christ-like than the present age affects. In the spirit of humility, let us seek to make a demonstration in its behalf.

Let no preparation be thought too great, since it cannot compare with the greatness of the object in view. That object is, to hold up Christ to the world; to bring the wisdom of man, the truths of science, the speculations of philosophy, to the foot of the Cross; to reclaim the wanderer from the error of his way; to succor the miserable; to raise the fallen; to preach salvation to the lost; a rest for the weary, aching heart of humanity.

Can any acquisition be thought too much, if by it we are enabled to clear a mind of troubling doubts, or free it from the meshes of a fatal error. Can any motive be stronger to impel us to diligent exertion, than the hope of becoming the instrument of raising the degraded, of wiping the tear from

the pale cheek of the sorrowing, or of saving a soul from eternal death.

Such, our mission. The task is great; the difficulties, numerous; the responsibility, overpowering. Yet, leaning on the arm of the Omnipotent One, we would

“Bate not a jot
Of heart or hope: but still bear up and steer
Right onward.”

Our faith is firm in the power of the Gospel. We are loyal to its truths. We have examined the lines of proof which, converging to a point, have produced the ineffaceable conviction that the Bible is the Book of God. Therefore are we sure it will stand the test even of these sceptical times, and bring light and life to many in the future, as it has done in the past.

For a long time now has that goodly ship, the Gospel, been sailing—an ark of safety to many amidst the billows of care, anxiety, and sin. It will sail to the end of time. Its timbers may appear ready to crack before the rough storms that assail it, but they will never give way. In time to come, as in time past, will it carry many a soul safely across the troubled ocean of life to the haven of eternal rest. In that ship is all our confidence, and with full heart we bid her,

“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, our prayers, our tears,
Our faith triumphant o’er our fears,
Are all with thee, are all with thee.”

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