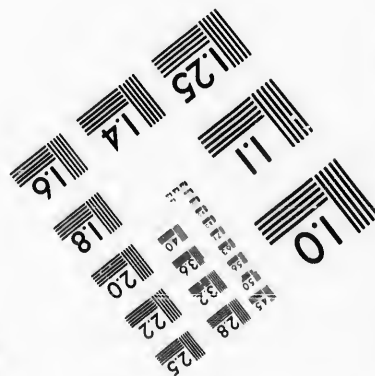
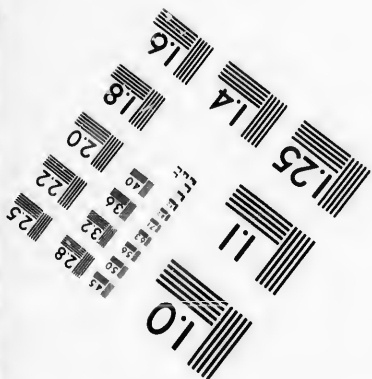
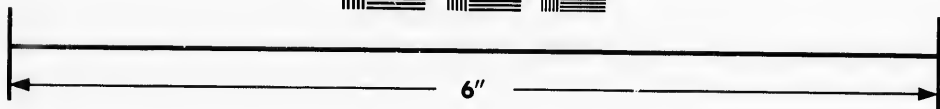
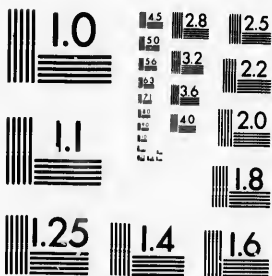


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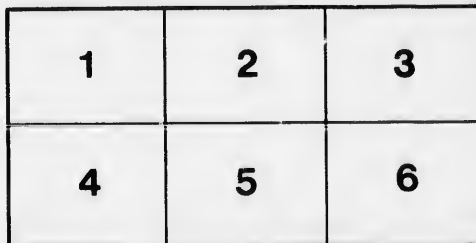
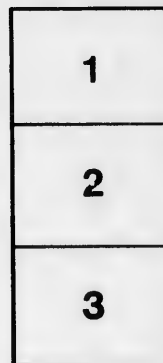
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THE AGE

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YOUNG MEN.

A LECTURE,

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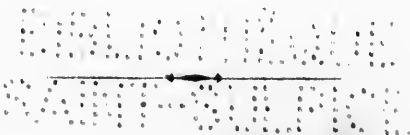
Young Men's Christian Association of Halifax.

ON THE OPENING OF THE SESSION 1857-8.

BY THE

REV. JOHN HUNTER,

CHALMERS' FREE CHURCH,
HALIFAX.



HALIFAX:

PRINTED AT THE WESLEYAN CONFERENCE STEAM PRESS.

1857.

* * This Lecture was never intended for publication, and is now sent to the press without much-needed correction.

J. H.

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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.

H. 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.

When I speak, then, of Young Men and of this Age let me be understood to mean by the former those who commonly go by that name; those whose characters are not yet fully formed, or their position in society fully established,—who are in the period of growth and enthusiasm, and who are, therefore, peculiarly liable to be affected by the plastic influences around them. By the age let me be understood to mean not simply a certain number of years or given period of time, but also the habits, opinions, literature, tendencies of that period. It is not necessary that these habits and tendencies should be fully understood or set forth in distinct language in order to produce an effect on the character of men. The viewless air around is continually doing two mighty works of an opposite nature. Imperceptibly and impalpably it is wearing away the rocks, eating into the strength of the everlasting hills, crumbling into ruins the once solid walls of ancient castle towers; while at the same time it is renewing the face of the earth with the verdure of each succeeding spring, painting the dream-like beauty of the flower and building up the enduring strength of the forest. So, imperceptibly, silently, the thoughts and habits of an age may be wearing down the manhood and character of a people, or may be building them up into confirmed vigor.

It is of no small importance, then, that we should not allow the mighty influences working on society around us to go on unmarked, unreckoned, or unguided. It is of not less importance that we should come to the consideration of them possessed of some right criterion of opinion and action; that all men, but especially young men should learn to measure their age beside Eternity—nor allow the near and the little to shut out the great and the abiding—nor think as the untravelled or unread that all the world lies in sight of their own door, but rise to the contemplation of more extended views, of higher truth, of more permanent influences than can be given by any limited views as to place or time.

The river rises amid unseen mountains. It rushes on its course through rifted gorge, or sweeps over tranquil plain. At one time thundering down through rocks that offer opposition all in vain, at another gliding through the fertile valley—now leaping with wild might from the precipice, again spreading in majestic flow its many winding course, to hide itself in the distant sea. Beside its banks in many quiet reaches whither it bends its wandering wave, are cities, villages, and the scattered abodes of men. Those who live beside its banks cannot behold the beginning or mark the ending of its race. To them the river is simply that small part within view bounded by the opposite side and the curving bend on either hand; and by far the greater number find in that narrow space their living world of hope, fear, desire, influence.—Such is time. A stream flowing from the heights of the bye gone Eternity untraversed by creature step, unseen by angel ken, and ever rolling on to join the unbegun Eternity beyond. Its beginning is hid behind the curtained darkness of chaos, its ending is lost in the brightness of light inaccessible. Its course is varied, yet ever on, and on with resistless power to reach its destined goal. The generations of men dwell on its banks and the windings of the river hide each succeed-

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ing race from the other's view. As time curved round that headland your infant life began; when it rounds that farther point you will have sunk beneath its waters. The most of men dwell within these reaches of the river failing to think of the past even as they fail to see the future. Their present time—its occupations, cares, ambitions are all in all to them. They seldom rise to headlands of thoughts that they may look back where generations once as active, as busy lived, who are now all silent and gone; seldom turn their gaze to the vast illimitable beyond, that dreaded point, so as to feel how small the Present Now compared with the Hereafter.

I shall now invite your attention to certain statements which stand in close connection with the foregoing general truths. You may call them principles or facts whichever you may choose. My first fact or principle is that the Age necessarily influences its Young Men. My second fact or principle is that Young Men necessarily influence their Age.

When we consider what the Age really is—that it consists of the habits, opinions, literature, tendencies of the time, it may seem almost a truism to say that it exerts an influence on its Young Men. How can it be otherwise? A man must be affected more or less by the moral and intellectual atmosphere with which he is surrounded. Every one is aware of the influence exercised on him by the daily companions of life—how insensibly his opinions are moulded by theirs, how their habits of conduct, modes of life, fashions, mannerisms, all have some effect in giving direction to his thoughts and tone to his feelings, so as to make him the man he actually is. There is a natural dislike to appear singular, which readily disposes many to acquiesce in the views and customs of the multitude. Besides there is a real power in the continual reiteration of the same opinions which none, not even the strongest minds, can wholly resist. This constantly enforced expression of the same views meets us not only in ordinary conversation or in the intercourse of business but in the more tangible and impressive form of literature. The books—the current reading of any period are genuine offshoots from its deeper-hidden tendencies and thoughts. We cannot imagine, certainly never heard of a literature which was read that ran counter to the prejudices of its readers. And then how vast its effect, especially on the young. Strange thought!—the dead affect the living! A book—a printed page! a still and silent thing convince and sway the living mind of man. Yet so it is—and who has not felt the magic touch with which the silent words have swept his heart strings, rousing within the minstrelsy of feeling. Not that the cold inanimate form can wield this power; that form is but the medium by which minds hold converse. Thus whether it be by outward act—such as public fashions and national habits; or by the language of the living tongue of man, or by the printed page, the aggregate opinion of the multitude necessarily must exercise a vast influence on each member of society.

It is not always enough to know a fact—we must also sometimes know the reason of it in order rightly to comprehend the fact itself. Would we have power to counteract or to guide the influence which the age exerts on the individual, we must have some clue to the secret of its strength. It is

not simply that men are imitative animals, there is a deeper reason for this wide spread imitation. Man does not copy blindly or without a plan, but in accordance with deep-seated principles of his being. He is so constituted that that which is generally admired, excites within him a kindred feeling of admiration; and he is forthwith impelled as by necessity to strive after and imitate that which he has learned to admire.

I shall now ask your consideration of the fact or principle that Young Men necessarily influence their Age.

They form a large and an active part of every community. Perhaps of all the classes of which each community is composed they are the most likely to receive the impress of their time for good or for evil. If they do nothing more than reflect in their own individual characters the character of their period, then, like the mirror placed behind the Lighthouse lamp that intensifies the blaze, throwing its beams over a greatly extended surface, they increase and continue the power of those tendencies which they did not originate.

When the citizens of Athens grew in wealth they began to depart from their former simplicity of living. The youths caught the example, and not content with mere imitation they advanced as far beyond the first innovators as they had before their ancestral hardihood. Thus the Young Men intensified the evil of their time by accelerating the downward course of luxury and vice, which sunk the might of Athenian greatness and hid the lustre of Athenian genius.

Up to this point I have been engaged in setting forth general views, and no one can feel more fully than I do how meagre has been the statement of them—they have rather been hinted at than unfolded. Let us now enter on the more special investigation of what *this* Age is in relation to those who live in it.

It would be trite, indeed, to talk of this as the Age of Progress—of the rapidity with which men travel and information spreads. Yet these are great and influential facts. It is not less true that men now-a-days live too rapidly,—there is a hastening to be rich—a hastening to be wise—a hastening to be foolish—there is a break-neck race of emulation or competition in which not a few of the runners stumble.

This is peculiarly an Age of combination, of associated effort. Formerly men trusted in Heroes—in great men,—now they look for help from Joint Stock Companies or Affiliated Societies. Is there any new or great thing to be done in Church or world? then there is a gathering together of many heads and many hands, and the individual man is merged in the Society or Committee of which he is a part.

This is an age of expediency and of materialism. There is a tendency to make success the standard of excellence. Men strongly incline now-a-days to let circumstances mould their principles rather than make principles mould their circumstances.

This is an Age of great scientific attainment and of profound investigation,—yet also of the most trivial superficiality,—the few dig deep for knowledge—the many are content with a mere smattering of information.

Yet think not that I wish to give an evil character to our Time. There are many agencies at work for good—many for evil. There is much that is ominous of danger—much that is full of hope. The Age is active—earnest—practical. There is no time for dreaming, for inaction, for triviality. All around may be heard the rush of onward progress or the sound of coming changes. They are heard in the Church and in the world. Mercantile operations are not now conducted as in former times, there is a pressure of competition, a hurry of occupation and an intense anxiety once unknown. Political parties are breaking up before the growth of new opinions, which are sweeping men onward they know not whither. Social relations are changing, education is spreading, and the ends of the earth brought into unwonted contact are exerting a fresh influence on each other. In the region of opinion things sacred and things profane are undergoing examination. I am not sorry for it. Men will not receive anything as true simply because formerly believed. Mind is restless in enquiry. And yet with all this activity and power, betokening hardihood of thought, there is a feature of the Age which presents a strange contrast to the foregoing. The general Literature most read is in character strikingly different from the general course of action. It is for the most part light, frivolous, relaxing in its nature,—nothing in it to brace up the mental strength and fit it for genuine toil. And on that symptom I look with alarm, for it betokens much of feverish, unhealthy excitement, in connection with the active, vigorous striving of our time. It tells of a dangerous undercurrent which, if not counteracted, will drift the social vessel among the breakers. There have been plain signs given of its existence and of its course in the alarming disclosures of reckless living and utter want of principle, combined with singular skill and daring in the pecuniary frauds of the old and new world,—frauds that have stained the shield of proud names in the aristocracy of Britain—that have shown bad faith in the circles of her merchant princes whose very word was once inviolable—that have eaten as a canker into classes of inferior name—that have spread as a festering sore over whole districts of a great neighbouring land.

Now is there not cause for alarm when these two facts are considered in their connection—that there there is abroad in active exercise a spirit of the most unsparing enquiry, at the very time when the great majority of youthful minds are rapidly disqualifying themselves, either for thoughtful examination or for intelligent reception of its results? I repeat that I rejoice in free unfettered thought as a glorious privilege in itself, that as a Minister of the Gospel I am glad to behold on the one side scientific research questioning the secret workings of the Creator, and on the other side critical investigation trying and testing each fact, each doctrine contained in the Word of the Redeemer. But I should wish also that the minds to whom these results are to be presented should at least be capable of manly thought. And it is not for readers of novels, or light skimmers of magazines, for those who have emasculated their mental power by frivolous engagements, whose knowledge of mankind is gained in the ball room or at the card table, who, by yielding to luxurious desires, have

strengthened the habit of indulgence and weakened the power of self-control,—it is not for such as these to look upon the majestic face of Truth through the dark fogs of passionate prejudice, or the drifting clouds of opposing arguments.

We live not in an Age of Peace but of War. I speak not of the opposition of contending hosts, but of the great strife of opinion, of that ancient feud between truth and error which has been so long an affair of outposts, but which now is ending in close and deadly strife,—of opinion which shall yet hurl the monarch from his throne and pluck the tiara from the priest, which shall overturn Empires, remoulding the habits, the characters, the destinies of their populations. It is a strife so tremendous, that it resembles not the contentions of men but the unrestrained boisterousness of elemental war. On the one side we have the onward sweep of infidelity, superstition, luxury, all united in one surging tide, the roaring of which is as the waves of the sea, while behind their front we may behold with the prophet clouds of darkness and shapes of fear, tribulation and anguish, the degradation of our race and the rise of relentless tyranny. On the other hand we behold Christianity spreading her silver waves. Hope sits enthroned on the foremost billow, peace follows serene behind. Above, the Angel having the everlasting Gospel in his hand speeds on his way, while once again we hear the voice of blessed immortals singing there shall be glory to God in the Highest, on earth peace, goodwill to the children of men.

Now I address myself personally, to you Young Men. It is with a feeling of intense sympathy that I do so. You have honored me with an invitation to address you this night as an Instructor. Believe me that while doing so, I take you to my heart with a brother's love. Let me, then, claim the privilege of affection and speak to you with all honesty, and all boldness.

First, let me recapitulate. We have already found that the Age necessarily influences its Young Men. That Young Men must necessarily influence their Age. There is ever going on a constant flow and ebb of invisible power. There is a continual action and reaction of mighty agencies that are affecting the interests of our race; and the question before you is this, Who is to be predominant, the Age or its living Young Men? Are your circumstances to mould you, or will you mould your circumstances? Are you to be mere passive atoms in the midst of active agencies around, taking your habits, characters and opinions from others, reflecting and perpetuating them without the exercise of any responsible influence of your own? Or will you rise up to the height of your true dignity as sharers in the lordship over this lower world?

Deem not that I speak to you of impossibilities when I call on you to do your share in moulding your age, and not to permit it wholly to influence you. It is no visionary scheme of Quixotic enterprise that I set before you. The opinions, habits, character of an Age are but the aggregate of its Individuals; and you, each of you, the youngest, feeblest, least influential, owe a duty to your generation, and are able to benefit it.

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But, in order that you may do so, you must learn habits of mental hardihood; you must resist evil, and join yourself heartily to that which is good. There is a tendency of the age to associated effort, which I have already noticed; and this, though good in itself, may have an adverse influence on your Individuality—may tempt you to sink your personal influence, your personal responsibility. Beware, I pray you, of this temptation.

In this time of expediency you will be tempted often to do what will succeed rather than what is right. Remember that success is fleeting—that truth abideth for ever. Take care what you read: you cannot feed on poison and live; you cannot live on slops and be muscular: so neither can you nourish your mind on pollution, or strengthen it on effeminate fictions. Cultivate true manliness. "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." Be not afraid—be not ashamed to say to empty-headed sinners around you, "I will not do this wickedness and sin against my God." Cherish high aims—lofty aspirations. Seek after that which is noble. Cultivate the true heroic spirit—the true spirit of patriotism: let your first duty be to your God—your second to your country.

But the Age holds continual communication with you—you drink in its influence at every pore. There is a strange fascination in the example of fashion—a strange power in the continual silent pressure of companions and of business occupations. Yes, and you often feel that this is real slavery of spirit, while you writhe under the sorcery from which there seems to be no disenchantment—for that which you can see with bodily eye, touch with bodily hand, hear with bodily ear,—hem you in on every side. Yes, and it is these things which *educate* the majority of our young men. There are two educations which we all receive—that of the school, and that given by Society around: at school we are taught knowledge, but society teaches us what to *admire*. The youth leaves his father's house; or, remaining there, begins to mingle in other circles. He hears their conversation, observes their habits, and without any formal training imperceptibly catches their tone. That which his companions admire, he learns to admire; and therefore, that which they do, he learns to do.

Hence, we have in one set, our *Fast Young Man*. He has early learned to admire the habit of reckless expenditure. He aspires to the character of an open-handed, generous fellow. Tear aside the veil, and let him stand forth for what he really is;—his generosity! the extreme of selfish indulgence—his open-handed liberality, the meanness of dishonesty to others.

And we have in another set our *Good-natured Young Man*—no one's enemy but his own. He is pleasant-tempered when not quite drunk, and always willing to oblige when he has enough intellect at his disposal to enable him to do so.

And we have our *Gay Young Man*. He is the life of parties. Who so merry? and who so agreeable? And at his own home, how often surly, ill-tempered, and disobliging.

I will not speak before *this* audience of deeper and darker stains of character; but I will warn you against that *Education of admiration* which society too generally gives to its Young Men—an education, the results of which are too often seen in fair hopes blighted—in young lives early quenched—in many a father's heart bowed with sorrow—in the sanctuary of many a mother's chamber, made a place of bitter weeping—in the drifting wrecks of humanity which float, alas! far too frequently, on the surface of society.

There was a young man once—a stranger, a captive, and a youth—far from his father's dwelling; yet he did not despond. He was a diligent plodder. Whatever work was given him to do, he did it carefully and well. He was assailed by temptations to vice such as few have ever been tried with and have resisted, yet he maintained his virtue. And that lonely slave, that patient plodder, rose to be Prime-minister of Pharaoh—to be lord of Egypt.

There was also another young man—a captive too—but surrounded by no hardships. He was the cherished inmate of a royal palace. Luxuries were heaped on him. He was tempted, entreated, commanded to use them. But he purposed in his heart to follow a noble course, he entered on the path of self-denial. That man attained the favor of God and the friendship of kings, and his name hath come down to us garlanded with the renown of wisdom.

Need I remind you of William Pitt, at the age of 23 ruling in the Senate of Britain and guiding the affairs of that Empire on which the Sun never sets; of Napoleon Buonaparte, at 26 conqueror of an adverse destiny and victor over Italy; or of Hannibal, the great captain of antiquity, who at 25 had already done enough for fame? What was the secret of these men's success? Take a handful of feathers: throw them against that wall. You cannot; the slightest breeze blows them back; the ordinary resistance of the air cannot be overcome by them. Take those same feathers—compress them; they will make a ball that you can hurl to its mark in face of a rushing tempest, that can make its way through every obstacle. Now, let this illustration teach the true answer to my query, What was the secret of these men's success? It was concentrated power of purpose, leading to concentrated energy of character. They did not dissipate their strength on trifles, or they never would have stood forth as mighty among the children of men. Imitate them in this respect (I speak not of their characters generally), but of their undaunted mental hardihood. Let your aims be honest and noble, then follow them out with resolute determination. Then, though you may not be great, you will live so as to be useful: when you die, you will be missed.

And now come, O young man! come for awhile—stand under the shadow of the unseen. The Age is fast passing away: all those things which seem so great and abiding, so tempting and pleasant now, shall soon fade away. Beyond your present health is a time of sickness; beyond your present life is the hour of death; beyond your present inde-

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pendence is the Judgment Throne, before which, all helpless and alone, you must stand in the presence of God. Would you rightly do your duty to your age? Would you rightly prepare for meeting with your Judge? Then let me point you to a higher than earthly example for your imitation, to a higher than earthly model for your admiration. Take CHRIST JESUS to be your Guide in life, and He will not forsake you in death. He hath condescended not only to become the Atoning Sacrifice, but also the Example for His people. Once He lived on earth, a young man, tried and "tempted in all points like as you are, yet without sin;" so that He is able to sympathize with you in your difficulties, as well as to save you from your sins. When the mighty angel shall plant one foot on the sea and the other on dry land, and swear by Him that liveth forever and ever that Time shall be no longer—when Ages, and Centuries, and Milleniums have been swallowed up in Eternity—then may you, Young Men—may you, each one of my hearers, rejoice with exceeding joy in the brightness of Everlasting Day!

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