

Educational.

The following address was delivered at Wolfville on Monday evening June 5, before the Associated Alumni of Acadia College. The Chairman who presided on the occasion, Dr. McN. Parker of Halifax, stated to the audience that the Hon. Judge Johnston had engaged to be the Society's orator for 1865, but his official duties having demanded his presence in Cape Breton, the Rev. Mr. Munro, at the urgent solicitation of the Committee, had consented to deliver the annual oration, although when he gave his consent to do so, there were but three weeks left for preparation.

In further explanation of the Chairman's introductory remarks Mr. Munro would now add that neither when writing this essay, nor since, has he had time to refer to all the authors from whom he may have derived aid. Wherever his memory enabled him with certainty to attribute anything to its original source he has done it. But in some few instances this would have required an amount of research for which there was not time. Hence some of the thoughts he has expressed must go forth without the sanction of eminent names that might have added authority to their intrinsic worth.

Characteristics of the present Age, and the duties of the Educated Classes as suggested by them:

AN ORATION DELIVERED BEFORE THE ASSOCIATED ALUMNI OF ACADIA COLLEGE, JUNE 5, 1865, BY THE REV. A. H. MUNRO, OF HALIFAX.

Gentlemen of the Associated Alumni of Acadia College.—

As a general rule, I believe it is best for public speakers to avoid making apologies, if for no other reason than that they are so frequently made, and therefore liable to be regarded as a mere form, better omitted than observed. But on the present occasion, I think it is necessary and just, both for my sake and on behalf of those, whom this evening I not only address, but in some degree represent, that it should be made known, as it has been by the chairman, how brief was the period afforded me to prepare myself for the duty that now devolves upon me. But while a knowledge of this fact ought to moderate the expectations of my audience, and shield me from much criticism that otherwise would be allowable, I do not desire that it should cause the views I am about to advance to be regarded as crude and hasty conclusions which I would probably withhold or modify, upon more mature deliberation. The thoughts I shall endeavor to present this evening are some of the results of the reading and thinking, the notes and reflections of the last 10 years of my life. How many of them I owe to others, or have been coined in my own mind, it is now impossible for me to say. On that point you must judge for yourselves. But I am less anxious to impress you with the originality than with the correctness of the views I am about to present, without any attempt at eloquence or rhetorical effect, upon what I trust we will all feel to be an appropriate and important subject.—The Characteristics of the present Age and the duties of the Educated Classes as suggested by them.

Nothing is more common in the present day than to hear the remark, "We live in an age of progress." Like many a truism, its repetition is apt to be the ill-disguised expression of a serious error. No doubt many persons in using this language wish it to convey their belief that this epoch of the world's history is distinguished, as a progressive one, from all that have preceded it. The sentiment, it is well to know, is not by any means peculiar to this day and generation. Our ancestors cherished it as firmly as we, and were equally convinced that their own time surpassed all that had gone before, and could be rivalled by none that might follow them. Dr. Johnson had this opinion of his own era, which he thought had brought learning to its highest perfection, and exhausted both discovery and improvement. And this, be it remembered, was before steamships and railways, telegraphs or cheap literature, photography or papier machie were dreamed of. Yes, when gentlemen had to wear their pantaloons without braces and ladies their hoops without crinoline. Dr. Johnson thought that there was nothing to discover, and little to improve.

This is an age of progress. But there is nothing in that assertion to minister to our self-elation if it be rightly understood. It is but the recognition of the fact that this, like every other period of human history, is a link in that mighty chain of providence which has no broken or redundant parts. Amid all the changes of the past, its light and darkness, its folly and wisdom, its great crimes and great mistakes, its growth and decay of empires, its revolutions and bloody conflicts, its barbarisms emerging into civilization, and its civilizations sinking back into barbarism, overruling omnipotence has been leading, erring, unconscious man along the path of human progress. Stow commences his history by saying:—"Thank God old London was burnt." If the old city had not been burnt the new could not have been built. We need not call evil good, nor darkness light; we need not give all races and times equal praise for their contributions towards the grand result, to believe that somewhere and somehow, in all the past, amid its direst calamities and darkest intellectual nights, whatever was sought or suffered, lost or won, mankind were learning some truth, gaining some experience essential to the advancement of the race. This is the spirit in which we should say—"Ours is an age of Progress." That which enables us to say it of the day when the Israelites upon the shores of the Red Sea, with strained eyes beheld the hosts of Pharaoh engulfed in the waves, and then for the first time drew the breath of a free people. And equally so of that period when the long wearied justice of heaven at last smote the idolatrous tribes and scattered them for all time, a remnant among many people. To say it not only of the age in which Roman power extended from Roman law from Arabia to Britain, but also of the time when Goths, Huns and Vandals, Franks and Sævi, poured their desolating hordes upon the fertile fields, vine-clad hills and luxurious cities of Southern Europe. To say it of the time in which vainglorious and superstitious crusaders fought for the Holy Sepulchre,—of that in which

Charlemagne wept as he saw the barks of the Norsemen in the Mediterranean;—of that in which Danish pirates wasted and Norman William oppressed Saxon England; and of that in which the nation divided into hostile factions, fought on a score of bloody fields to decide whether a white rose or a red rose should adorn the crown. When we can thus see that every age has been a progressive one, not always in the same degree nor in the same manner, but really and essentially furnishing its indispensable quota towards the elevation of mankind, then we shall not be injured but benefited by the conviction that this is a progressive age, marked by a civilization that is the nearest approach yet made to that epoch which shall be the product and embodiment of all previous history and attainment.

"The heir of all ages in the foremost files of time."

Which will see the human family fulfilling its destiny on earth in the complete realization of all that the beneficent Creator has designed, and all it is possible for man to achieve in the last and highest phase of civilization.

And what is Civilization? The etymology of the word points plainly enough to the refinement of the citizen contrasted with the coarseness of the rustic. Its accepted and legitimate signification is, the superiority of man in a state of culture above man in a barbaric condition. Civilization then is the degree of advantageous change effected in the character and circumstances of man, and measuring his distance from savage life. Its actual value is to be tested by an examination of the kind of benefits it confers and the extent to which they are enjoyed. That civilization is the highest and best which most successfully elevates the individual and most widely diffuses its blessings throughout society and the world. Man's physical, intellectual, and moral nature are the things with which it has to deal—ministering to the wants, developing the capacities and remedying the evils belonging to each. The Health, Intelligence, and Morality of any community or age, are the component elements of its civilization. Its Health, because it is the sure evidence of the extent to which all classes are properly housed, fed, clothed, employed and enabled to enjoy life. Its Intelligence, because it includes the things known, the numbers who know them and the uses to which that knowledge is applied. Its Morals, because they are the basis of personal characters, the items that constitute the nature of social life, determining its manners and customs, laws and government, policy and faith.

In man's advance towards ideal perfection in connection with these things he has to gain three victories:

First, over Nature. To discover her secrets, learn her laws, enrich himself with her treasures, and avail himself of her resources to achieve what without them would be gigantic impossibilities, and to reach through them what would else be unattainable enjoyments, is the first great battle of civilisation. It includes every discovery man has turned to practical use, from the spark that would kindle his fire to the electricity that would carry his thoughts and every invention, from the rude arrow to the ocean steamship.

Second, over Oppression. While waging his conflict with nature, man has had to put forth his energies in a more fierce and bloody strife, that with his fellow man. It has ever been the disposition of some portion of society to lay burdens and impose restraints upon the rest; not for the general good, but for the benefit and aggrandisement of a few. The extent to which it has been attempted is less surprising than the degree to which it has been endured at the hands of tyrants, oligarchies and priests. From this thralldom man has had to emancipate himself. Long and dire has been the conflict of many of the martyrs, but worthy of it all was the victory sought. For the question at issue has been this—Shall the powers of man be paralysed, his enquiries after truth suppressed, his advancement arrested, that a selfish few may be paramount, or shall he enjoy freedom of thought and liberty of action to pursue that path of progress for which his Creator designed him? And in the decision of this question how through successive ages has the tide of conflict ebbed and flowed. One battle field exchanged for another, one combatant falling, another rising, one weapon having done good service being laid down for another to do better; till now, O most noble army of martyrs, O great champions of Reformation, and all who fought in the great fight for human liberty, the tyrannies you resisted unto death, are unknown to us and experienced only by those too debased to win or appreciate the blessings of freedom.

Third, over Social Evils. The aggregation of large masses of human beings in the same community has always given rise to social anomalies and disorders of suffering, vice and crime, both peculiar in their nature and vast in their amount. In some instances they assumed an aspect that is frightful, and a magnitude that is appalling, and at the same time appear to arise inevitably from causes impossible to remove or counteract, while they threaten the destruction of the whole social fabric. Of all the victories civilisation has to win, the last, the greatest, that which needs most faith in God and help from him, is its triumph over social evils.

If these are the elements and aims of civilization, a little reflection upon them will save us from the errors of either too highly exalting, or too much depreciating the civilization of the present age, in comparison with those of past ages. Most of the latter have left us sufficient to form a just opinion of their merits:

Assyria's winged bulls with human faces, typical of deity and carved representations of king's hunting or slaughtering captives, speak conceptions of the divine nature and human glory, that, independently of the few pages of her history that we possess, tell us that when she ruled the world the human race was in the infancy of its culture and the childhood of its thought.

If Egypt had left us nothing but her pyramids they would be enough to teach what all else she had left confirms. Built in ostentation and by oppression with reckless waste of human toil and life they still lift their gray heads in the desert to tell that the wisdom of the Egyptians was not

productive of a civilization that either subdued nature or elevated man.

But Greece what shall we say of her with her Parthenon, poets, orators and heroes? Are not the relics of her art the priceless treasures of modern museums, the fragments of her literature the models of ours?—Would not an Athenian mob applaud a play too intellectual for our most cultivated audiences, and repeat verbatim an oration it would be an effort for most of us to follow? Was not that a civilization most perfect, and as yet unrivalled? I answer, No. The Greeks knew a few things and knew them well, but they were not the best things for man to know or do. Probably they carried intellectual culture, in some of its departments, to the highest perfection of which it is capable. But, after all, their civilization was like one of their own temples, perfect on its form but monotonous; beautiful, but not sublime; appealing only to the eye, addressing nothing to the heart: Pagan not Christian. The edifice of modern civilization has a wider base, a deeper foundation, loftier heights, and more varied aspects; it is Christian not Pagan.

By the last remark I mean that the special features and peculiar advantages marking the civilization of the present age, are those christianity has conferred upon it.

The traveller in passing the boundary which separates heathen from christian lands is conscious of an entire change in social relations, sentiments and life, the different items of which he may enumerate, one by one, but to the whole of which, he would find it difficult to apply any general term. And it is just so in passing the boundary which separates ancient from modern civilization, that which preceded the introduction of christianity from that which followed it. The flora and fauna of the frigid zones are not more unlike those of the tropics, than are the developments of ancient, pagan civilization from modern and christian civilization. And as the student of natural history knows, that the peculiar forms of animated nature he observes in any region are but the external evidences of vital forces, infused into its air and hidden in its soil, so the student of human history knows, that the peculiar aspects of social life, distinguishing modern from ancient civilization, must arise from the only adequate cause not formerly in operation, namely, the influence of christian doctrine and life. If now, the whole landscape is new, it is because christianity has furnished fundamental ideas and sympathies entirely unlike those out of which pagan civilization grew. If now the social atmosphere is so vastly changed it is because christianity has impregnated earth and heaven in man's consciousness with other thoughts, feelings and hopes.

When Christianity imparted to man its sublime, holy and beneficent conceptions of God—when it declared that the immortality of the soul was a truth beyond question, and its value a price beyond calculation—when it proclaimed the death of the son of God for mankind—when it taught that the soul's highest aspiration was that after goodness, its loftiest, most blessed attainment, that of an ascent through an enlightened conscience to communion with its Creator—when it revealed, instead of "the Socratic Demon, but at best an intellectual guide," the Holy Spirit, given to create new life in the soul, to lead it in duty, guard it in danger, cheer it in sorrow, along the path to heaven's gate—when instead of the cold abstractions of ancient philosophy, it solved the problem of life by presenting the living Jesus as its model—when it pointed to a certain but undated future, in which good should triumph over evil, right over wrong, and truth over error, a reign of righteousness and peace, a moral conquest to be gained through human instrumentality, but assured by divine promise and help—it gave to human nature, new dignity, principles, and aims. The greatest fact in the past history of civilisation, is not the discovery of the magnet, the invention of printing, the French Revolution, nor any similar event, but the advent of Christ into our world; the grand consummation of its future, to which it is slowly often unconsciously, but ever surely, advancing, is his second coming when the world shall be filled with his glory—the glory of the universal prevalence of his gospel. This is the meaning of our civilization, let who may be blind to it. Grecian culture did its best for man; it taught him to rejoice in the present. Its final conclusion was—"let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die." Christianity's best gift to man is not so much an enhanced joy in the present as a prayer, purpose and hope for a world wide, better, and nobler future.

It is not my intention to night to endeavour to fully illustrate this view of the subject by attempting to show all that Christianity has done to benefit our world and elevate man. My object is far less ambitious. It is simply to point out some of the more important features of our civilization, that exist as evidences of the triumphs Christianity has already achieved, or as the victories it has yet to win, after 18 centuries of conflict with human folly and wickedness.

1. The first Characteristic of the civilization of the present age to which I would call attention, is its PROGRESSIVE, AGGRESSIVE AND DIFFUSIVE NATURE. I put all these together, because they must coexist if they exist at all. A civilization may be stationary, like that of Greece, which accomplished all it could, and then passed away. No better temples could be built, or statues carved, or poems written, or orations composed, or speculations invented, than it gave to the world. What more could it do than it had done? Why, then, should it live? How could it. Life is growth. Its doom was inevitable; it must pass away and leave its memory, its dead language art and literature.

The civilization of the present day is a living thing spreading its roots and branches on every hand. "Rest and be thankful" is not the motto of our age. No wonder its quotation brought so much ridicule upon the nobleman who has made it famous. He should have left it where he found it, its appropriate place, the tomb stone of a dead Highlander. The present age cannot rest; all it has done is but an opportunity and inducement to do more. More it