

# A MODERN LAY ORDER<sup>1</sup>

BY ERNEST HAMLIN ABBOTT

WHEN the man at the club discovers what the subject of this article is, he will probably turn over the pages to find something else to read. To him it suggests the dull, the colorless, the vapid. When he thinks of the Young Men's Christian Association, he naturally pictures to himself a room where a group of innocuous young men are playing checkers, or a hall where an anæmic person with a limp Bible in his hands is exhorting a gathering composed of commonplace young men.

Even if such a picture were really representative once, when the Association was more nearly like its prototype, the original society of drapers' clerks, it is by no means representative now. In one city of the Middle West a very different picture comes to the minds of some of the most successful men when the Young Men's Christian Association is mentioned. They are members of a Gymnasium Club. Down a corridor they see doors opening into a series of compartments. Within one of these compartments a man, wrapped in a blanket robe, is resting after his exercise and bath. Other men are preparing for a game on the gymnasium floor and then a plunge in the pool. An attendant is moving about with the air of quiet efficiency. To others the picture is that of a room in which a couple of gasoline motor-cars are raised, by supports under the axles, several inches from the floor. Around each stands a group of men, one or two with wrenches in their hands. Under one of the cars a man is lying face upward examining the mechanism. They are members of the Automobile Class. To a group of boys in a Western city the Young Men's Christian Association means a room in which the furniture

and the fireplace are their own handiwork and where they gather to read, to plan their games, and to receive, perhaps unconsciously, a good part of their moral training. In a big machine shop once a week, just as the wheels begin to slow down for the noon hour, the men greet with a nod of recognition a newcomer who appears with a bundle under his arm. Taking their dinner-pails, some of them begin their lunch where they are; others gather in one end of the shop; still others set to work distributing song books. While the men are eating, the visitor chats with one and another; then the men join in a song to the accompaniment of a little portable organ, listen to a direct, homely talk on a religious subject of practical import, and, as the machinery begins the creaking that soon is to grow to a din, return to their places and resume their work. To those men that "shop meeting," a welcome diversion, if nothing more, is the Young Men's Christian Association. A railroad fireman leaves his engine after a night run, makes his way to the Association building, orders a hot meal with steaming coffee, has a smoke in the billiard-room, and then goes up to sleep in a clean bed, glad to escape from the dirty, crowded boarding-houses into a place he can call his own: this is the Association as hundreds of railroad men picture it. To the Japanese soldiers in Manchuria the Young Men's Christian Association, the society bearing the name of an alien religion, is the only place put at their disposal where they can in any comfort read and write.

There is little resemblance between any of these pictures and the scene presented by the gathering of a few dry-goods clerks in the parlicus of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, in 1844. Yet out of the latter gathering all the activities which I have illustrated, and scores of others, many equally unlike their original, have sprung. On this continent at least it would be difficult to find a society out-

<sup>1</sup> This is the third and concluding article of the series on the Young Men's Christian Association, written as a result of travel and observation. The other articles appeared under the titles of "Christian Pagans" and "The Exodus from Philistia," in the issues of *The Outlook* for December 16 and 30, 1905, respectively. Editorial comment on this series will be found on another page.—THE EDITORS.

wardly resembling the first Association. That was little more than a prayer-meeting, composed of young men in the drapery trade. George Williams, its founder, who died only last November, lived to see the Association become a great lay order, masculine in constituency and character, unchanging in religious impulse, elastic in form, indefatigable in experimenting with methods, free from entanglement with any ecclesiastical body, capable of almost indefinite development, adapted to promote by every means individual and social wholesomeness, morality, goodness, righteousness, and prepared to be the instrument of any man or body of men intent on achieving that end.

Like other living bodies, the Young Men's Christian Association has thus been evolved from a very simple organism to one that is complex. At first a society of clerks, it has become adapted to most diverse classes, groups, and communities. The Associations established for railroad men soon became a distinct species. The nature of the railroad employee's calling (unless he is an "office man") requires him to live much of his time away from his family. The Association provided him with a home away from home. The Army and the Navy branches similarly became differentiated from the ordinary Associations by conforming to the conditions of the soldier's and the sailor's life. College Associations, finding already in colleges certain common instruments used by Associations, such as the gymnasium, the library, and the club-room, met the exigency by developing in other directions. At Harvard, for instance, the Association has been the leader in organizing the philanthropic activities of students. At Yale it is in effect the college undenominational church. Where large factories exist, industrial Associations, so called, have been formed with special reference to the use of workingmen. Associations conducted for colored young men have thrived. Special Associations have also been organized for Indians and for foreigners. Of such as these it is possible for me here only to make mention, to indicate the many modern ramifications of the Association

in America. The City Association, which is the original type, and from which all of these are departures, has been in turn influenced by them, as in the wide adoption of dormitories and the relaxation of arbitrary rules concerning conduct and amusements, both largely due to the example of the Railroad Associations.

One modification in the City Association deserves special mention. This is the development of special departments, and even buildings, for boys. Against this modification one Secretary made to me an emphatic protest. "I advocate the boy's coming into the general building, so that I can see him. He belongs to the organization. I want him to feel that he belongs to it. If a boy has to come in by a back alley entrance or go to a separate building, he'll drop out at sixteen, if he holds on as long as that. In this building the boys have the best rooms." There was no real change of subject when he added: "There is no smoking allowed in the building except in dormitory rooms. I don't want any. If we had a public smoking-room, there would be a lot of loafing. It's not very elevating. When a man goes to church, he doesn't claim the right to smoke there; he shouldn't here." This secretary recognized, as most secretaries do, that in dealing with boys he must exercise restraint. Parents who do not want their twelve-year-old son to smoke would justly hold the Association responsible if their son learned to smoke in a public room of a Young Men's Christian Association building. So he applied the same restraint to grown men as to boys, and assumed to decide for everybody what was "elevating" and what was not.

Association secretaries, as a rule, however, are coming to realize that the liberty which it is necessary to deny to the immature it is impertinent to deny to adults. They have already discovered, moreover, that a boy's interests and ideals are not those of a man. Instead of disregarding the men and adjusting their standards to the boys, or of abandoning the boys at the most impressionable age, they have grafted upon the Association trunk another branch, com-

monly called the "junior department." The man in charge of this department is surprisingly often one who has decided talent for gaining the respect and affection of boys. Some of these "junior departments" have acquired a very distinct character of their own. In one the boys have grouped themselves into clubs for various purposes, one of which was composed of the leaders among the boys. In another Association the central interest is provided by the summer camp; material for winter study and recreation is there gathered; *esprit de corps* is created by preparation for it; and throughout the year the groups of boys are largely determined by their natural grouping as they tent together.

There is an age, however, when the boys are not yet men, though they are no longer boys. It is during this transitional period, which is roughly that of the college undergraduate, that occurs a hiatus in the work of the Young Men's Christian Association. The boy who is entering upon that period is becoming impatient with the restraint that he formerly accepted without question; but as yet he has not acquired the self-control which is expected of the man. It is then, according both to the testimony of secretaries and to the statistics of Associations, that he is most likely to leave the Association, not to return. If, in the attempt to solve the problem of those who, as one secretary expressed it, "are no longer boys and not yet men," the Association should put forth another branch midway between the junior and the senior department, it would act in accordance with its past history.

Coincident with this growth in diversity of forms there has been a growth in organization. This growth amounts to a constitutional change in the Association. By it has been made possible the multiplication of branches. Originally the Young Men's Christian Association was a voluntary organization whose members were its "workers," its officers, its executives. As its interests multiplied the Association employed men to do special tasks. Its first employed officer was called, I believe, a "missionary." Gradually the employed officer became more important. His function, at first

mainly that of a lay preacher and leader of evangelistic meetings, was enlarged. It included clerical duties. He became known, then, as a "secretary"—a title which is still attached to the chief employed officer. To clerical duties were added administrative. As the activities of the Association became more and more involved, these accumulated functions were distributed among several men. The office of General Secretary was created, charged with the duty of general oversight; the occupant of this office became the chief executive. Subordinate offices were devised—those of Physical Director, Educational Director, Religious Work Director, and the like—each charged with some distinct responsibility.

It is this body of employed officers which now really constitutes the Young Men's Christian Associations throughout the land. True, these men are nominally but the employees of a society in which there are many thousands of members; true, certain men elected from these members hold the property and can control its administration. As a matter of fact, however, the members of the Association exercise no authority, and the boards of directors or trustees seldom initiate any plans or guide the development of any project. The active members, who, in distinction from the associate members, have the privilege of voting, are most abstemious in the exercise of that privilege. Indeed, in some Associations their number is not even recorded. The character of the Association is derived almost altogether from the character of the employed officers, its prosperity due almost entirely to their efforts; its limitations are their limitations. I have referred to the Association as a lay order. It would be more accurate, however, to say that the lay order consists not of the members of the Association at large, but of the employed officers. The membership in the Association is fluctuating; the body of employed officers is stable. The members are hardly more than men who pay dues to obtain the privileges which the Association offers, or who engage in the work of the Association incidentally; the employed officers are men who have made

of the work for the Association their calling.

Of the small group of employed officers in a local Association the General Secretary is the head. He is the abbot or prior, as it were. His coadjutors, though nominally chosen by the Board of Directors, are generally selected by him. He impresses upon the Association the stamp of his own traits. If he is slovenly, the Association building is in disorder. If he is pietistic, the men who gather about him pass the pious phrase like current coin. If he is courageous in making experiments, the Association is permeated with the air of enterprise. If he is broad in his interests and can discern the signs of the times, the Association becomes a stronghold for conspirators on behalf of the public good.

In some Associations the tradition of the old days when the General Secretary and his coadjutors were little else than hired men is still strong. Such an Association I found in one of the important cities of New England. The General Secretary proved to be an amiable man, conscientious in the performance of his routine duties, and as absolutely incapable of doing anything original as he was of doing anything wicked. He was not unaware of the most obvious defects of the Association by which he was employed. He deplored its isolation, not only from the great mass of men, but even from the churches. But he was as helpless in respect of these defects as a coachman is in respect of the domestic infelicities of his employer. He had the special disadvantage of being responsible, not to an individual, but to a society. He was evidently studying to please, not one man's tastes—that is comparatively easy—but the tastes and whims and prejudices of a continually shifting group of people. Personally he may have had the courage of Luther, but officially he displayed the timid caution of a political time-server.

Happily, men of this type are slowly disappearing from the ranks of employed officers. They would disappear more rapidly if it were not for the unconscious influence of the so-called international organization. The fact that the Associations throughout the world are bound

together by a federal organization has made wasteful duplication impossible, and has enabled the Associations to render each other mutual aid; but it has also retarded the growth of independence among the employed officers. The officials of the international organization inevitably emphasize the importance of conformity. Uniform reports, which they call for from the secretaries, are impossible without uniform standards; and these standards they exalt. By virtue of their position, moreover, they are constantly acting as intermediaries between the Association at large and the public. They are consequently sensitive to any tendency which might temporarily alienate or even trouble their constituency. The federal organization has therefore urged upon secretaries the duty of submitting to the authority of their boards of directors. The handbook published sixteen years ago by the International Committee exhorts the secretary to take and keep "a subordinate place," and tells him that "he should studiously avoid making himself prominent in the community, in the press, or in conventions."<sup>1</sup> That such counsel this year would sound somewhat antiquated is due to the constitutional change by which the employed officer is rising out of the position of hired man and becoming a member of a new profession.

This elevation of the employed officer has been the unavoidable result of the process of ramification in the Association itself. When the Association was little more than a permanently organized prayer-meeting, it needed no employed officer; when it became a missionary organization, the only employed officer it needed could very well be a subordinate; but now that it finds itself called upon to solve new problems, to adjust itself to various environments, to become a versatile instrument for social amelioration, it cannot require of the men who are devoting themselves to its service anything less than that they be leaders.

Such a continuously widening experience as the Association has had could not fail to be educative. As the Association has tended to become multiple

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in the Young Men's Christian Association of Chicago Official Bulletin, October, 1905.

in form and more highly organized, it is tending to become broad in spirit. It is now tolerant of much that it once vehemently denounced. The proprietor of a clothing store whose first comment on the Association of his town, when I called to see him, was a condemnation of it for having pool-tables was a survival of a past period. The only real objection to pool and billiards which I could elicit from conservative secretaries was an economic, not a moral, one; the games, they asserted, cost in money and in supervision more than they were worth. But this breadth of spirit is more than a tolerance of what was once thought intolerable. It is not a sign of a loss of convictions, but of the acquirement of new convictions. Perhaps I may indicate the ruling spirit in the Young Men's Christian Association by contrasting its traditional conceptions of democracy and of religion with the conceptions which are now gaining ascendancy.

From the first the Association has been democratic; that is, it has never been deliberately exclusive. Indeed, the more conservative secretaries seem to be the more insistent on democratic methods. One of these told me that in his opinion the Association was losing its democracy. He cited the newer buildings with their marble entrances, their artistic furnishings, their comfort and elegance. Another protested against doing anything for any particular class of men; he wanted everything that was done to be done for all classes. Another criticised the tendency of the Associations to treat men in groups. He would not provide any special accommodation for business men, or for mechanics, or for working boys. "The Association," he argued, "ought to break down class feeling. I believe in mixing clerks with mechanics, especially in social life." On this theory of democracy the Association practically acted for years. The result was that the men who did not care to be mixed with other men indiscriminately, without regard to any common interests, avoided the mixture by avoiding the Association. This was due, not to snobbishness, nor to class feeling, but simply to the fact that men prefer to

associate with those who are congenial to them. The Association consequently remained for a long time a class institution. The Associations governed by this traditional view of democracy I found to be the least democratic among Associations; to be, as a rule, composed mainly of clerks, salesmen, small shopkeepers, and the like. If in any such there happened to be a considerable number of artisans, I found on inquiry that they made little use of the building except to patronize the "educational classes," thus remaining a group largely by themselves in spite of the theory under which the Association was managed. The tendency now is to abandon that method of trying to force upon men democracy devoid of class, and in its place to adopt methods which will make the Association a democratic force—that is, a force in which all classes of men can and will participate. In a New England Association where the government had become virtually a close corporation, the secretary proposed that the members be grouped into clubs, each club to be represented on the Board of Directors. In that same Association the "junior department" is organized on that very basis; as a consequence, not only is the membership composed of all kinds of boys—street boys, working boys, and school boys—but the boys themselves direct their department. The experience of other Associations has confirmed the principle that democracy is promoted, not by destroying the barriers that keep the classes distinct, but by providing some service in which men of all classes can share. Association secretaries are, therefore, now more than ever inclined to the practice of forming within the local Association clubs, each composed of men mutually congenial, and at the same time to bring certain men from all these clubs together for certain kinds of service. Men who will never join in a common pastime or mingle naturally on a social occasion will heartily unite in carrying on a series of religious services or in advancing some project for municipal improvement. It is those secretaries who are acting on this idea that have had the greatest success in drawing into their Associations all classes of men.

Of religion, as of democracy, the Young Men's Christian Association is tending to take a broader view. Under the guidance of its employed officers the Association has been far ahead of the churches in practically regarding religion as a matter affecting a man's body as well as his soul. But in its attitude toward all modern intellectual movements in Christianity it has been extraordinarily conservative. It has been afraid of the least intelligent in its constituency. Yet it is growing in courage as it is growing in breadth of view. The narrow, conventional, mechanical, materialistic interpretation of Christianity I have heard in all its baldness presented only once in the various Association meetings I have attended. Then it was at a little noon prayer-meeting in an Association which is almost a byword among secretaries for its depressing lethargy. Less than a score of miles away its reputation for immobility was such that the mention of it was greeted with laughter. On the other hand, I have heard in several Association meetings interpretations of Christianity given which attempted to make account of the knowledge of the world and the Bible which men have now acquired. Few secretaries with whom I have talked have evinced hostility to the critical study of the Bible; though the opinion of many might be expressed in the words of one: "The religious conservatism of the Association has been its salvation, has kept it out of doctrinal controversy." I think it is very doubtful whether the so-called evangelical test in its present form could be adopted now if presented anew. One Association which I visited has formally discarded it, and is flourishing, though it is deprived of the benefit of the international organization; others have practically ignored

it and have not suffered. The most thoughtful secretaries are very well aware that the Association can no longer afford to disregard those intellectual difficulties which make religion a perplexity to many young men of to-day. Several Associations are supplementing the ordinary classes for "devotional study," as it is called, with courses in the literary study of the Bible. With the increase in the number of secretaries who have had a college training, the Association is less than ever subject to that fear of honest questioning and independent thinking which is the bugaboo of untrained minds. It is finding itself intellectually.

The development of the Young Men's Christian Association has been of the most normal sort. Its present tendencies are the natural product of its past history. Its first period of growth was one of branching out into a variety of forms. Its second period was one of organic development in conformity with the varied functions it was called upon to perform. Its third period, in which it is now entering, is one of intellectual growth in response to the experience it has gathered. These three periods are overlapping. The first is not yet ended. The Association was happily spared in the beginning the incubus of a philosophy or creed. Its capital was, fortunately, not a doctrine, but a religious and moral purpose. Now that the Association is reaching maturity, it can formulate a much truer philosophy than it could have had in the beginning. Its officers are now trying as never before to define its function, to put before its members an ideal. When that function is defined, that ideal formulated, it will not be based on theory and therefore be mechanical, but will be the outcome of experience and therefore be vital and growing.

# PRESIDENT JOHNSON'S POLICY

BY JAMES SCHOULER

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THE policy initiated by President Johnson upon his accession to office was substantially that which Abraham Lincoln had announced to his counselors and prepared to enter upon before his assassination. And this explains readily why Lincoln's Cabinet co-operated with the promoted Vice-President, and—all except Stanton—secured for him, despite any misgivings as to his temper or capacity for carrying that policy out, a harmonious and united administration, each member bearing his own share of the obloquy which followed. Some changes in this Cabinet came about naturally.<sup>1</sup> Yet Johnson made no reactionary changes, as various ardent Democrats urged him to do; and his new advisers—Alexander W. Randall, Orville H. Browning, and Henry Stanbery—were Northern men of sound Union affiliations and principle, worthy to be ranked as friends and followers of Abraham Lincoln. For the great Union party of 1864, we should remember, was made up of war Democrats as well as Republicans, and Lincoln was not rechosen, nor even renominated, without a strong factional opposition from most of those radical leaders who now opposed the plans of his associate and lawful successor.

Ward H. Lamon, the friend and former law partner of the murdered President, wrote Andrew Johnson, in February, 1866, that, to his own ample knowledge, as long Marshal of the District, peculiarly intimate at the White House, Lincoln's intended policy of reconstruction was "in exact accordance" with that of his successor; that Lincoln had known well the plans of the Northern radicals and opposed them; that he had meant to bring about "immediate reconciliation" between the sec-

tions, and pursue "a vigorous prosecution of peace." There is other clear testimony, perhaps even more conclusive, to the same effect.<sup>1</sup> But how tactfully and patiently, with consummate skill and regard for surrounding circumstances, would President Lincoln have pursued his ends, mingling as he did in his own nature both Northern and Southern sensibilities! He would have held well together his own party support, and avoided to the utmost an open schism. The popular confidence he had gained during his first term would have sustained him. Nor would his guidance have shown inflexibility of methods. He was an ingenious experimenter in politics; yet, having no pride of opinion, he allowed any experiment to fail which was not found feasible. While an emancipator at heart, and, as time proved, a determined one, he had sought first to persuade the loyal border States to emancipate upon the basis of National recompense; he had further proposed colonizing the blacks, when freed, in some jurisdiction abroad; and both these plans he quietly allowed to fail because they proved impracticable.

Andrew Johnson's influence as Chief Executive and reconciler of the sections may be said to have culminated on the Washington's birthday anniversary of February, 1866. He had now been President for more than ten months, and on the whole had administered the Government well, carrying himself with dignity and decorum on official occasions and in the crowded audiences of the White House. Delegations and visitors from all quarters of the Union had been well impressed by his frank and generous utterances, made in the full sincerity of a high official purpose. Once, since Congress had met and measured its majority strength against him, he had met its reconstruction measure with a

<sup>1</sup> Among those suggested for the Cabinet by letter to President Johnson, during his first year of office, were Dickinson, Sumner, Charles Francis Adams, and John A. Dix, for Secretary of State; also General James B. Steedman (whom influential men of all politics indorsed) and Francis F. Blair, Jr., for Secretary of War.

<sup>1</sup> See Schouler's History of the United States, vol. 6, page 616, and citations.