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A SKETCH OF SUNDAY SCHOOL HISTORY

By William Henry Withrow

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By W. H. Withrow

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SUNDAY SCHOOLS

One of the most characteristic and comprehensive agencies for the religious instruction of the young in this century is the modern system of Sunday-schools. The consecrated energies of over two millions of teachers have been enlisted in this vast and voluntary unpaid service, and about twenty millions of scholars have been enrolled in their ranks. Sunday-schools, although they have only approached their grandest development in recent decades, are of no recent origin. There were catechumen classes for religious instruction in both the Jewish and the early Christian Church. Several ecclesiastical councils gave instructions as to the management of such classes. During the Reformation period, Luther founded regular catechetical instruction on Sunday as early as 1529, and the exaltation and authority assigned to the Holy Scripture by the Reformation led to their general adoption in the reformed churches.

Nor were similar schools unknown in the Roman Catholic Church. Charles Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan, instituted Sunday-schools throughout his extensive diocese, 1560-1584, almost identical in form and spirit with their modern analogue. The present writer has seen in the

cathedral church of Milan, and in other churches of that great city, as well as in Venice and elsewhere in Italy, well conducted Sunday-schools under the administration of the members of the Roman Catholic religious orders.

John Knox established Sunday-schools in Scotland as early as 1560. Joseph Alleine, the author of *Alleine's Alarm*, adopted the system in Bath, England, 1650-1668. The early Puritans established such schools in Plymouth Colony 1674-1680. In Pennsylvania Ludwig Hacker organized a school in 1739, which was continued for thirty years, resulting in many revivals. Mr. Edwin W. Rice cites numerous other schools existing before the date of Robert Raikes. In 1769 a young Methodist named Hannah Ball established a Sunday-school, says Dr. Abel Stevens, in Wycombe, England.

These sporadic schools, however, do not detract from the merit of Raikes as being the father and founder of the modern Sunday-school system. Raikes was a citizen of Gloucester, England, and proprietor of the *Gloucester Journal*. In that city many youth of both sexes were employed in the pin and other factories. The heart of Raikes was stirred by the Sabbath desecration, profanity and ragged wretchedness of these untaught youth. In 1781 "he engaged," says Mr. E. W. Rice, "four female teachers to receive and instruct in reading and in the catechism such children as should be sent to them on Sunday. The children were required to come with clean hands and faces, and hair combed, and with such clothing as they had. They were to stay from ten to twelve, then to go home; to return at one, and after a lesson to be conducted to church; after church to repeat portions of the catechism; to go home at five quietly, without playing in the streets. Diligent scholars received rewards of Bibles, Testaments, books, combs, shoes and clothing: the teachers were paid a shilling a day."

Not until November 3, 1783, did Raikes refer in his journal to these schools. The following year he published in his paper an account of his plan. John Wesley reprinted this account in the *Arminian Magazine* and exhorted the Methodist people to adopt the new system of religious instruction. He speaks of them prophetically: "I find these schools springing up wherever I go; perhaps God may have a deeper end therein than men are aware of; who knows but some of these schools may become nurseries for Christians?" The early Methodists took Wesley's advice, says a contemporary writer, and "laboring, hard-working men and women began to instruct their neighbors' children, and to go with them to the house of God on the Lord's Day."

John Fletcher, of Madeley, adopted the method, and soon had three hundred children under instruction, and diligently trained them till his last illness. Sunday-schools were introduced into the metropolis by Rowland Hill in 1786. The same year John Wesley states that five hundred and fifty children were taught in the Sunday-school of his society at Bolton, and the next year he found there eight hundred, taught by eighty "masters."

Richard Rodda, one of Wesley's preachers, records that, in 1786, he formed a Sunday-school in Chester, and soon had nearly seven hundred children "under regular masters." Wesley wrote to him in the beginning of 1787: "I am glad you have taken in hand that blessed work of setting up Sunday-schools. It seems these will be one great means of reviving religion throughout the nation. I wonder Satan has not yet sent out some able champion against them." In 1788 Wesley preached at Wigan "A sermon for the Sunday-schools," and "the people flocked from

all quarters in a manner that never was seen before." The year before his death he wrote to Charles Atmore, an itinerant preacher: "I am glad you have set up Sunday-schools at Newcastle. This is one of the best institutions which has been seen in Europe for some centuries."

"Thus," says Dr. Abel Stevens, "is Methodism historically connected with both the initiation and outspread of this important institution. Under the impulse of its zeal, the Sunday-school was soon almost universally established in its societies. A similar interest for it prevailed among other religious bodies; and, in three years after Raikes' published account of it, more than two hundred thousand children were receiving instruction from its thousands of teachers."

As early as 1785 a society was organized for promoting Sunday-schools throughout the British dominions. This society in fifteen years expended about four thousand pounds for teachers' wages. It met with strong support from several of the bishops and clergymen of the Established Church. But, strange as it may seem, the Bishop of Rochester violently attacked the movement, and the Archbishop of Canterbury called the bishops together to see what could be done to stop it. In Scotland, Sabbath-school teaching by laymen was declared to be an innovation, and a breach of the fourth commandment.

Sunday-schools rapidly multiplied notwithstanding such opposition in Great Britain and Ireland, and on the continent. They were introduced into America by Francis Asbury, first Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in 1786. In 1791 a society was established in Philadelphia "for promoting the religious instruction of poor children on Sunday." It employed paid teachers, in ten years expending about four thousand dollars. This society still continues its operations.

These schools all employed paid teachers. Their purpose was to reach chiefly the children of the poor and neglected classes. They were, in fact, simply mission schools or "Ragged Schools." The system of payment made their maintenance expensive, and greatly limited their usefulness as well as deprived them of their grandest characteristic of voluntary service. Gradually this principle was introduced. John Wesley, in 1787, speaks of Sunday-schools at Bolton, England, "having eighty masters who received no pay but what they received from the great Master." This method touched fountains of consecrated zeal before unknown. The system of voluntary instruction gave a new impulse to this great movement by adapting it to the needs of the poorest community in town or country. The early statistics of Sunday-school progress are imperfect, but in 1827 the number enrolled throughout the world was 1,350,000. In 1851 the number had increased to six millions. On the Raikes centenary in 1880, that number had reached over fifteen millions. At the ninth international Sunday-school convention held in 1899 over twenty-five were reported.

Immense development has taken place also in Sunday-school organization and equipment. The schools founded by Robert Raikes were, as we have seen, chiefly for the poor and neglected classes. Hence reading and writing were taught, and oral instruction in the catechism and Scriptures was given. There was no concerted scheme of lessons. Each school selected such portions of Scripture as it chose. About 1826 the American Sunday-school Union introduced a series of uniform lessons for its three or four hundred auxiliaries. "In 1829," says Mr. Edwin W.

Rice, "Mr. Gall urged his lesson system upon teachers in England; and in 1830 regular lessons were furnished, with notes for the use of teachers.

In 1840 the London Sunday-school Union issued a list of lessons for general adoption, adding lesson notes in 1842, which it claims to have continued uninterruptedly till the present time, now using the International Series. "For the most part, however," continues Mr. Rice, "in America, for a number of years previous to 1872, each school prepared its own scheme of lessons (if it used any), often unsatisfactory, insomuch that this method has been not inaptly termed the 'Babel series' of lessons.

"Schemes of lessons for Sunday-schools, with notes, were issued in the Sunday-School Teacher of Chicago, in 1865; and in 1867 Mr. B. F. Jacobs suggested uniform lessons anew. The desire for such a series increased, until in 1871 a meeting of Sunday-school publishers was held in New York, at the suggestion of the executive committee of the National Sunday-school Convention, which agreed upon a tentative scheme of uniform lessons for 1872. At the Indianapolis convention in that year, a lesson committee was appointed to arrange a course of lessons for seven years, covering the whole Bible, which course was recommended for the use of Sunday-schools throughout the country. This committee was re-appointed and enlarged in 1878, and empowered by the convention to select another seven years' course of Bible lessons for use throughout the world.

"In 1875 the lessons were reported to be in use in America, Great Britain, most of the countries of Europe, in Syria, Hindustan, China and Japan, in Mexico, Australia and the Sandwich Islands; and in 1878 it was added, 'United Bible study has gained many new friends.' Comments on these lessons have multiplied like the leaves of the forest, publishers issuing notes, questions and lesson-leaves, and even many secular papers give regular weekly comments upon the Sunday-school lesson. The most learned professors in colleges and seminaries, and pastors have contributed the results of their ripest study and scholarship in exposition of these lessons. Many publishers vie with each other in securing the ablest comments, and producing the best and cheapest lesson helps. A different series of Sunday-school lessons are in use in most of the schools connected with the Church of England, and with the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States.

"When the modern Sunday-school movement began, a century ago, juvenile religious literature did not exist. The Pilgrim's Progress, Watts' Divine and Moral Songs, a few catechisms and similar books, comprised the religious works specially prepared for children at that day. Gradually a juvenile religious literature was developed by the desire of Sunday scholars for reading, and the circulating library in connection with each school was introduced, owing largely to the earlier work and issues of the American Sunday-school Union. The number of books, periodicals and lesson-helps for Sunday-schools has vastly increased by the introduction of the International lesson system and other improvements, and is so extensive that it would be hopeless to attempt to gather statistics respecting them."

Many of the most eminent and successful business men in the United States are engaged in Sunday-school work. There is, for instance, B. P. Jacobs, a successful real estate agent, of Chicago, one of the originators with Bishop Vincent of the International lesson system more than a score of years ago, who has ever since given to it his best energies. John Wanamaker, late

Postmaster-General of the United States, the head of two of the greatest business enterprises in Philadelphia and New York, has one of the largest Sunday-schools in the world. The late John T. Wattles, the publisher of the Sunday-school Times superintended for many years a very large Sunday-school. The late Mr. William Reynolds left a very successful business to devote himself exclusively to Sunday-school work. Dwight L. Moody won his first laurels in this work. Some of the Presidents of the United States, including Mr. McKinley, Chief Justice Brewer and associate justices, Generals and Admirals, Senators and Congressmen, presidents of colleges, and great business men, have been Sunday-school teachers.

It must be remembered also that this devotion of two millions of teachers to this work is an entirely unpaid service. Not only is it unpaid, but the teachers and superintendents give large sums of money for Sunday-school equipment, and for Sunday-school literature. In this way many scores of Sunday-school magazines and papers are sustained, and vast editions of Sunday-school commentaries are called for.

On the value of this voluntary service Mr. B. F. Jacobs says: "A low estimate in money of the services of these teachers would be one dollar per week for each or about \$100,000,000 per annum, but much more than money is the power of love and sympathy; the true teacher gives himself: this is known and appreciated by the scholars. Without undervaluing other work, where can we find a parallel?"

One of the most striking developments of the Sunday-school system has been the annual county, state and provincial conventions in which these philanthropic workers have assembled to compare methods of instruction and devise the wisest plans for carrying out their great work. For the last twenty-four years triennial international Sunday-school conventions have been held for the promotion of Sunday-school work in Canada and the United States. These conventions have elected the international executive and lesson committee. The lesson committee serves without payment in selecting the lessons for international study. The denominational publishing houses then procure the preparation of notes, comments and illustrations of these lessons, the lesson committee wisely refraining from deriving any monetary advantage or exercising any denominational control over these notes and comments. The executive committee serves without payment in managing the inter-convention business of the association.

The first world's Sunday-school convention was held in London in 1889. A ship was chartered to convey the delegates going from America. A second world's convention was held at St. Louis, in 1893, and the third was held in London in 1898. In the judgment of Mr. B. F. Jacobs, the number of persons engaged in the systematic study of the Word of God in Sunday-schools is not less than twenty-five millions.

A recent development of the Sunday-school idea is the Home Department. Like the Sunday school itself it was a child of Providence. Nothing could be more obscure than its beginning. In 1881 a Christian woman in New York State collected a group of boys and girls in a porch to study the Sunday-school lesson. She asked at a Sunday-school convention for "the same recognition and help as a teacher as was accorded to other teachers. But these were withheld because she was not in the same building at the same time with the other teachers, instructing her class under the personal supervision of the superintendent."

Dr. William A. Duncan, a Congregational layman, saw the large possibilities of extending the boundaries of the Sunday-school from the narrow walls of the schoolroom to the furthest reach of the parish. Before the New York State Sunday-school Association he announced the vital truth: "Where there is a parlor, a kitchen, an empty room in the barn; where there is a tree which God has made to throw shade upon the earth; where there is a Christian mother who loves her sons and daughters; where there is a Christian sister who feels like doing something for the Master, -- there these boys and girls can be gathered in and taught about Jesus."

Gradually the new idea spread like leaven. It was discussed in Sunday-school conventions and Sunday-school papers. The conception was enlarged so as to embrace not merely the young, but those of all ages, the infirm, the sick, the gray-haired grandsire and prattling child.

The movement commended itself to the different churches, and has received the endorsement of the International and World's Sunday-school Conventions. "The number," says Dr. Hazard, "is rapidly, even phenomenally, growing, and the suggestion is that soon there will not be a Sunday-school which pretends to be well equipped which will not have its Home Department."

The Home Department is a provision whereby persons unable to attend the Sunday-school may have its benefits brought to their homes. In this way the "shut-ins," the prisoners of God's providence, the sick and the afflicted, the aged and infirm, mothers having the care of young children or engrossed in household duties, domestic servants, persons in hospitals, asylums and similar institutions, may be regularly visited, supplied with Sunday-school literature, and enrolled with the school. So, too, the "shut, outs," the great army of commercial travelers, the railroad conductors, brakemen, engineers, newsboys, railway postal clerks, telegraph operators, hotel clerks, drug clerks, steamer officers and employees, army officers and soldiers, civil engineers and their assistants, boatmen, and the like.

"Some families are situated so far from church and Sunday-school that they cannot attend either service, or more than one. Others are in small communities where there are no church or Sunday-school privileges, or live in localities where they are isolated from all the benefits of society. To such families the Home Department is an inestimable boon. It brings them into connection with thousands of others. They feel the impulse of the spiritual life which throbs in the church and Sunday-school. This mental and moral stimulus is just what they need. It is like bringing into the home a telegraph wire which connects it with the great world without, though it may be upon some lonely mountain top or in some unfrequented vale."

Nor is this movement confined to the United States and Canada. It has been adopted in Austria, Germany, Russia and even in India. To Austria it is peculiarly adapted, for the laws prohibit independent or officially unrecognized meetings, so that the Home Department can accomplish what cannot be done through the Sunday-school.

Nor are the prisoners in the jails, penitentiaries and reformatories forgotten in this Sunday-school instruction. In almost all these institutions devoted teachers are seeking to impart instruction week by week in the Word of God. The stranger within the gates, the Chinese,

Japanese, Syrians, foreigners of every name and tongue also receive the ministrations of the Sunday-school.

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