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THE ORIGIN, HISTORY AND AIMS OF THE SUNDAY SCHOOL.

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THE religious teaching of children is not a peculiarity of the Christian Faith. It is common among all the ancient religions, Mahommedans, Confucianists and Hindus.

For the first Christian Sunday School we need not go outside the pages of the Gospel, where we read that "They brought little children to Him that He should touch them, and He took them up in His arms and blessed them." It is characteristic and important to notice that the contact was a personal one, and we are not even told of any instruction given at all.

The Christian Church from the earliest times has recognized the duty of bringing the children to the knowledge of Christ, but it has not always carried out this duty with thoroughness and efficiency.

Charges were given by the Bishops and decrees issued by Councils from time to time urging the Parish Priests to teach the children in the faith. Here, for instance, is an extract from the Decretals of Gregory IX, Bishop of Rome, 1227 to 1241:—

"Let every Parish Priest have his Clerk to read the Epistle and Lesson, a man able to keep school for teaching boys the Psalter and singing, and admonish his parishioners that they send their sons to church to learn the faith and that the Priest may chastely educate them."

Thus there grew up the Parish, or Canonical Schools. Carlo Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan, 1538 to 1584, did much to revive this custom, and ordered every Parish Priest to catechize the children in Church.

A nearer approach to the idea of the modern Sunday School arose under the influence of a French Curé, Mgr. de la Chetardye, Curé of St. Sulpice, Paris, who bethought him that the vacant hours of Sunday night might well be used for instructing the youths of his parish, whose disorderly behaviour on that day was a public scandal. The thought took shape in a Christian Academy conducted by St. Jean Baptiste de la Salle and his brethren of the Christian Schools. Here some 200 young men and boys were taught, not only religion, but the three R's, and even geometry and drawing. The movement did not last. It appears to have died out after three or four years and left no successors to carry on the work.

The next outstanding figure is the Rev. Theophilus Lindsey, Vicar of Catterick in the North Riding of Yorkshire, who afterwards became one of the prime movers in the Unitarian Body. He held Sunday Classes in his Vicarage at Catterick for the religious instruction of the young people of his parish.

Up to this time we have noticed that the principle is acknowledged by the Church as a whole that youth should be instructed in the Christian Faith. But for the most part it was carried out perfunctorily by the Parish Priests or not at all. There were certainly Charity Schools and Grammar Schools and the Monastic Schools for the training of Monks, but all these were limited to a very select few.

Individual enthusiasts saw the need for a more wide and thorough teaching of children in order to reclaim them from the ignorance and loose living among which they were growing up. But the movements which they inaugurated were scattered, spasmodic and shortlived.

In the year 1780 there came a turning-point, and it is at this time that the history of Sunday Schools as we know them really begins. In fact it may be justly claimed that it is through the Sunday School movement, started by a consecrated servant of God, that the great increase in education in the last century originated.

There was at that time in the city of Gloucester a clergyman named Thomas Stock, Curate of the Church of St. John the Baptist. He took into collaboration Robert Raikes, son of the proprietor of the *Gloucester Journal*, who afterwards inherited that business. Thomas Stock and Robert Raikes together opened four schools in Gloucester for instruction on Sunday of children who would otherwise be roaming the streets and getting into mischief. Although the Rev. Thomas Stock appears to have been the prime mover, he was survived by Robert Raikes who, through his connection with the press, had a wide influence and was able to inaugurate a national movement which led to the establishment of the National Sunday School Union.

The first object of the Sunday Schools was religious and moral instruction, for which purpose reading lessons formed a part of the curriculum, the New Testament being the customary primer.

It is surprising to find that the first Sunday School teachers were paid, and we may still read the contracts made between the promoters and the teachers stating the terms of the agreement and the salary paid, sometimes reaching the figure of £6 a year.

The reason why the schools were started on Sunday was a very simple one, namely that nearly all children went to work in field, factory or mine, almost as soon as they could walk. But Sunday was a free day, the only free day in fact, and doubtless the youngsters, having no organizations or recreations to keep them employed, except the revels of the street corners, caused no little concern to the more sober inhabitants by their effervescence of animal spirits which had been tightly suppressed for six long days.

The need of some such movement for the improvement of the mental outlook of children was pressing in the extreme. The state of England at the end of the eighteenth century can only be described as rotten. There were no roads, no sanitation, no police. The military were used to quell riots or disturbances on a large scale, and minor delinquencies, however numerous, were carried

on with impunity. The Parliament was a farce, Local Government did not act, and society as a whole was corrupt. A great need called forth a great remedy, of which the Sunday School Movement formed no unimportant part.

The rapid growth of the new movement may be traced to at least three causes which are here mentioned in order from the more remote to the more immediate.

First, there was the solemn warning presented by the French Revolution. The Bastille fell in 1789 and France went shuddering through the Reign of Terror. The whole of Europe reverberated with the mutterings of the distant storm. A wave of revulsion swept over England amounting in some cases to fear. Something, it was felt, must be done to reclaim the masses, to educate the "lower orders," and the Sunday Schools were greeted by many as a means of preventing a catastrophe such as our neighbours were experiencing.

The Industrial Revolution in England had brought about a great change in the social conditions in that it had swept great numbers of people from rural districts into the rapidly growing towns, where mills, factories and mines were calling for more "hands" to meet the demands of a swiftly growing trade. England was fast gaining that monopoly of the world's trade in coal, iron, cotton and textiles, which it held for nearly a century, and the price it paid was fast-growing towns, over-crowding of new populations attracted from the country, child labour, in fact a rank growth of slums and all the evils which the word suggests. Thinking people and all interested in the welfare of their kind were deeply concerned at the increasing menace, and especially at the prospect of the children growing up among such evil conditions. Naturally enough these people welcomed the opportunity which the Sunday Schools afforded of improving these conditions.

Above all other causes which increased the growth of Sunday Schools was the great revival known as the Evangelical Revival. This movement, if not the Mother, was certainly the Foster-Mother of the Sunday Schools, adopting with whole-hearted devotion a child so much after her own heart. An awakening not only of faith but of practical service had followed the work of John Wesley. Earnest Christians, with a newly born zeal and devotion, were looking round for outlets in practical service for their newly awakened fervour. As Lord Shaftesbury said, "I am satisfied that most of the great philanthropic movements have sprung from them" (the Evangelicals). For the Evangelicals faith became a great dynamic with an unceasing energy devoted to human betterment. Their love to God was expressed in their love and service for their fellow-men.

Among the many names of the early supporters of this movement is that of Mrs. Sarah Trimmer, a woman of outstanding gifts and dominating personality, who devoted herself to the cause of reclaiming the child, and education among "the lower orders." Being herself the mother of twelve, she may be expected to know

something about children. Mrs. Trimmer edited a magazine called *The Guardian of Education*, and wrote numerous books for and about children with the aim of promoting their general welfare and education. It happened that Mrs. Trimmer was a personal friend of Queen Charlotte, and she was enabled to enlist the Queen's enthusiastic patronage in this cause, which in its turn, led to the interest and support of many people in the highest circles of society.

Time will not allow us to mention more than a few of those whose interest and devotion helped in the growth of the Sunday School movement. One little incident, however, which introduces two most important personalities may not be omitted.

The first is Hannah More, who was at one time the mistress with her sister of a private school in Bristol. A visit to London and a seat at a theatre led to a close acquaintance with David Garrick, the famous actor. The friendship led on to an introduction into the literary circle of which Dr. Samuel Johnson was the central star, and Hannah More became one of the much talked of "Blue Stocking Circle." The death of David Garrick, and afterwards of her father, led to Miss More's return to Somerset, where she became settled at her charming cottage "Cowslip Green" in the Mendips. At this delightful home Hannah More one day entertained visitors, no less than the great William Wilberforce and his sister. The proposal was made that William Wilberforce should visit the famous cliffs of Cheddar, and in the afternoon he set out on his journey. Late in the evening he returned, saddened and oppressed. A meal could not tempt him to eat and the enlightening conversation of his hostess could not cheer him. It transpired that he had not visited the beauty spot he had been asked to see, but had spent many hours among the villagers and mining people of the places he had passed through, noting with deep distress the squalor, ignorance and viciousness of their environment. After describing his experiences of the afternoon he exclaimed, "Something must be done for Cheddar." A further consultation led to the plan being formed of starting Sunday Schools, which, be it noted, were almost unheard of and certainly a new thing in Somerset at that time. "Madam," said Mr. Wilberforce, "if you will be at the trouble, I will be at the expense."

Hannah More and her sister set to work in this thankless task, meeting with equal courage the scoffs of society and the scowls of the poor.

Within ten years they had established Sunday Schools in 12 villages where 30 teachers were at work teaching more than 3,000 children the elements of religion, reading, sewing and spinning. In the course of twenty-five years' steady work more than 20,000 children had passed through the schools organized by these two consecrated women.

John Wesley has already been referred to and the great impetus given to Sunday Schools by the Revival connected with his great name. There was one occasion when John Wesley and William Wilberforce met in Hannah More's cottage, and the tale that the

walls of "Cowslip Green" could unfold would have much to do with the Sunday Schools which were rapidly increasing in number and usefulness.

It must not be imagined that Sunday Schools were welcomed by the country. There was strong opposition on the part of employers and even from the parents of the very children they were designed to help. Many were the difficulties which the pioneers had to face.

Here, for instance, is an extract from a letter which Hannah More wrote to William Wilberforce:

"A great many refused to send their children unless we would pay them for it, and not a few refused because they were not sure of my intentions, being apprehensive that at the end of seven years, if they attended so long, I should acquire a power over them and send them beyond the sea."

Again, in one parish this was the obstacle:

"A farmer of £1,000 a year let us know that we should not come there to make his ploughmen wiser than himself. He did not want saints but workmen. His wife, who, though she cannot read, seems to understand the doctrine of philosophical necessity, said, 'The lower classes were *fated* to be poor, and ignorant and wicked, and that, wise as we are, we could not alter what was decreed!'"

The difficulties were somewhat overcome when it was clearly understood that there was nothing to pay and that no ulterior motives were at work.

In the early part of the nineteenth century the Sunday Schools were a recognized part of the education (such as it was) that was provided for the children of the country, and the figures relating to Sunday Schools were included in the statistics of the nation's education. The Report of the Manchester Statistical Society (1834–5) states that "the number of children attending these (Sunday) schools is very considerable, being half as many more as those attending all the other schools put together. That, taking into account the miserable state of dame and common day schools which are attended by two-thirds of all the children of the lower orders who are under course of daily instruction, it may be well doubted whether the instruction at Sunday Schools, inadequate as it may appear, and as it really is, be not yet the most valuable that at present exists in the Borough for the children of the lower classes of the people."

The Day Schools of that time were for the most part a scandal, doing more harm than good. Here for instance is a description of a school of that time:

"There is a school in the court, attended by about fifty scholars, held in a room twelve feet square and eight and a half feet high, which is the sole dwelling of the schoolmaster, his wife and six children. The unwholesome condition of the air under these circumstances may be easily conceived. The mode of payment to the teacher of this school is remarkable and characteristic. A kind

of club, which does not consist exclusively of the parents of the scholars, meets every Saturday evening at a public-house, when, after some hours spent in smoking and drinking, a subscription is raised and handed over to the schoolmaster, who forms one of the company and who is expected to spend part of the money in regaling the subscribers."

Mill-owners and factory employers often maintained Sunday Schools for their child-workers.

The Supplementary Report of the Factory Commissioners tells of one employer who has built a school in which 640 children are instructed on Sundays in reading, writing and arithmetic, with a library attached to it, where the operatives read after the conclusion of their work.

For the most part such a proceeding was excellent. It was generally approved and applauded. But here is another aspect of the question in a letter from Robert Southey to Lord Shaftesbury written in February, 1833:

"MY DEAR LORD ASHLEY,—

"There is one thing connected with these accursed factories which I have long intended to expose, and that is the way Sunday Schools have been subservient to the merciless love of gain. The manufacturers know that a cry would be raised against them if their little white slaves received no instruction and so they have converted Sunday into a SCHOOL DAY, with what effect may be seen in the evidences.

"This is quite a distinct question from that of the good or evil to be expected from Sunday Schools as originally intended and existing in most places . . . but the Sunday School of the factories is an abomination and is an additional cruelty, a compromise between covetousness and hypocrisy."

It was reported authoritatively in 1836 that in Birmingham "Sunday Schools have to this day been the principal means of diffusing education." In Stockport there was a great Undenominational Sunday School with four auxilary schools which gave religious instruction and teaching in the three R's to 5,000 boys and girls.

As time went on and schools increased under private and philanthropic effort the Government was led to take a first step towards providing a National System of education. The first step was a great one for those days though it seems small enough now. A Government Grant of £20,000 was made towards the funds of the two Societies which were responsible for the majority of schools for the poor. As child labour was more and more restricted and the national conscience more and more aroused to the needs of childhood, the National System increased, until in 1870 the Education Act was passed, bringing the "School Boards" into being and making some sort of education compulsory for every child. Since that time Sunday Schools have come to be regarded as a kind of superimposed system, as a voluntary addition to a compulsory education. But let it not be forgotten that the Sunday Schools

were the root, the original stem, from which the elementary education of to-day has sprung forth.

The National System has tended more and more to become undenominational, even with a tendency towards resentment of Church influence in any official way, and with growing inroads of secularism and socialism. But this system has had the advantage of large Government grants, first-rate and up-to-date equipment, modern and beautifully designed buildings, and thoroughly well-trained teachers.

On the other hand the Sunday Schools, speaking generally, have had to be content with cast-off, or condemned buildings, inferior equipment, curtailed finances and voluntary teachers with little or no training. Yet the Sunday School movement has grown, not only in England but in other lands. In 1924 at the World Conference of Sunday Schools it was reported that there were then 29 million children attending the Sunday Schools of the World with three and a half million teachers. Twelve thousand new schools are being opened every year and half a million new scholars admitted annually.

Sunday School teachers have, therefore, nothing to be ashamed of. The Past awakens pride in the achievements and thanksgiving for the devotion of the founders of this movement. The Future calls for deepened consecration to our Lord and a fuller concentration on all that can add to the efficiency of the Sunday School.

In the past the Day Schools were inspired by the Sunday Schools. Now it is time for us to take a lesson from them. No pains are spared to make the buildings bright, cheerful and healthy. The books and equipment are such as to awaken the happy interest and comfort of the children, while the teaching is based on the study of the child, his nature and his needs. All that Froebel, Montessori and other leaders have contributed to teaching method is brought to bear on this important subject, and changes, with the hope of improvement, are continually tested.

All these are things which we cannot afford to leave out of our Sunday School System. The future of the Church depends largely upon the Sunday Schools of to-day, while from the point of view of Evangelism, it must be borne in mind that more than 52 per cent. of all the conversions that take place occur between the ages of 12 and 17, the age when the Sunday School should be doing its best work in the child's life.

There can be no such thing as mass-production in Sunday School, or any other spiritual work. It is a matter depending entirely upon personal influence. The School is the teacher. The personality of the teacher, his earnestness, conviction and devotion are the most important contributions that he can bring to the success of this work, and, given these, the material surroundings are certainly of minor importance. The good teacher will not be so good as to regard such things as regularity, punctuality and attendance at the Preparation Class as unimportant, but will regard these as essential parts of the work of a teacher.

As it has been in the case of all great teachers and all good educational systems, so in the Sunday School all our methods must be based on a careful and sympathetic study of the child, and not merely of " The Child " in a theoretical sense, as of some general but unreal being. The teacher must study that particular child in his or her class which he desires to win. Child study is carried out best, not in the study, but in the home, the playground, or the class-room when the school is not in session. Here personal contacts are made and influences forged closer and stronger than those made in the teaching of the lesson. Lessons will then be chosen and prepared with the child who is to listen always in mind, and systems of grading carried out to meet the needs of the child and not the convenience of the system.

As to buildings and equipment, it is easy to set up ideals, but not so easy to realize them. Most Sunday Schools at present have to make shift in unsuitable buildings, and through lack of funds have to do without the equipment which is regarded as necessary. At any rate the ideal must always be kept in mind as an attainment to be sought, and no means neglected which can help towards the healthiness, beauty and comfort of the room and its furniture. We dare not be content to allow the teaching of the love and goodness and beauty of God to be permanently connected in a child's mind with dinginess, discomfort and dullness.

All that can be done by bright music, pictures, flowers and tidy arrangements must be done to bring about an atmosphere of happiness, reverence and spontaneous worship in the school.

DISCUSSION. QUESTIONS AND FINDINGS.

1. Have the provisions of State Education fulfilled the aims of the early promoters of Sunday Schools ?

No. The Sunday Schools were founded for the teaching of Christianity and in the schools of the National System there is not enough definite teaching of Christianity.

2. What justification is there for continuing Sunday Schools in modern times ?

1. To make up the deficiencies (from the point of view of Christian teaching) and counteract the bias of the day schools.
2. To make up for the lack of teaching in the homes of the children.
3. To provide for the moral and spiritual welfare of children.
4. To bring the children into PERSONAL touch with Christ and to lead them to definite conversion.

3. What are the special needs of Sunday Schools in view of modern progress in Education ?

1. Personal conviction in the teacher.
2. Careful training in teaching.
3. Attractive surroundings in school.
4. Suitable Lesson Books.
5. Insistence on attendance at preparation classes.
6. Equipment must come up to highest modern standards.

4. How can deficiencies of equipment be overcome or counteracted ?

There was not time to discuss this question. Hints as to an answer will be found in the paper.