

THE Union Seminary Magazine.

Vol. XIII

FEBRUARY—MARCH, 1902.

No. 3.

I. Literary.

ORIGIN AND PROGRESS OF THE SABBATH SCHOOL.

BY REV. J. W. ROSEBRO, D. D.

I SUPPOSE most of us would say the Sabbath-school had its origin in the work of Robert Raikes in 1781, in Gloucester, England. Moved by the need of the poor and ignorant children, he employed "four decent, well-disposed women" to gather and teach these boys and girls; for this labor each received a "shilling a week." He is called, therefore, "the founder of Sabbath schools."

But this is true only of the modern work. Raikes was unwittingly restoring the "old paths." He was undoubtedly led of the Spirit of God to bring the church back to God's statutes, in which he had commanded Israel to teach his laws to their children. Dr. Trumbull, in his lectures on the Sabbath-school at Yale, shows conclusively that in each synagogue there was a school for the young. Philo states that "the Jews were by parents and teachers instructed in the law from their earliest youth." Josephus corroborates this by showing it was not new in his day. About 80-70 B. C. Simon ben Shetach reestablished the system of schools in every synagogue in all Palestine. Edersheim states that "there is no reasonable doubt that such schools existed in all the synagogues, and that up to ten years of age the Bible was the only text-book." There was also such a school in the temple. In this Jesus was found asking and answering questions when twelve years of age.

THE COVENANTERS; A PASTOR'S VIEWS.

BY REV. RUSSELL CREIL, D. D.

SOME six years ago God put it into the heart of a Christian young lady, a member of the Second Presbyterian church of Richmond, Va., to undertake a work in behalf of the boys of that church and congregation. Accordingly she set on foot a movement which took permanent form in the organization of the first company of Covenanters in March, 1896. The inception of this movement, originating as it did simply in the desire to interest the boys in spiritual matters and to do something for the promotion of Christ's kingdom, was modest in the beginning; but its success, both in the character of the work done and in its growth in popular favor, has been remarkably encouraging and prophetic of an ever-widening influence in the future. Already more than fifty companies of Covenanters have been organized in as many congregations of the Southern Presbyterian Church, and there is reason to believe that as the advantages of this organization become better known among our people, it will commend itself to their judgment and find a hearty welcome among them. It is organized strictly under the control of the session, and, for loyal and conservative Presbyterians, we know of nothing so well adapted to the cultivation of spiritual life and usefulness among the boys and young men of our churches.

The Covenanters is essentially a missionary society—"formed to aid Home and Foreign Missions in the Southern Presbyterian Church." It has a brief constitution and by-laws to regulate the conduct of business and a missionary creed for frequent use in its religious services. By the constitution the society is divided into two sections, Juniors and Seniors; the Juniors consisting of boys between the ages of eight and sixteen, and the Seniors of young men sixteen years of age and over. The society has adopted various simple devices which are useful for binding them together and for cultivating a proper *esprit de corps*.

The Covenanter *badge*, or *pin*, is designed after the old battle-flag of the Scotch Covenanters, and is a diamond-shaped

blue enamel ground, with a white enamel St. Andrew's cross upon it, the back and hasp being made of sterling silver.

The Covenanter *banner* is of blue silk, with a St. Andrew's cross of white ribbon upon it, and a fringe of silver cord. The Covenanter *sash* is of blue ribbon, three inches wide, and passes over the right shoulder, fastening under the left arm, with the company number painted in white upon it at the point where the ribbon crosses the chest.

The *Colors* is the organ of the Covenanter movement. It is a small monthly paper, filled with interesting reading matter and information about the various companies, and is issued from the general office.

The *Mizpah* is a simple and sweet musical composition sung by the Covenanters at the close of their meetings.¹

Company No. 1, of the Second Presbyterian church of Richmond, Va., is especially fortunate in having a Covenanters' Home, consisting of a small building adjoining the church. The rooms are provided with a well-selected and continually-growing library, with a museum of curiosities from heathen lands, and with a variety of innocent games for the entertainment of the members.

The advantages arising from this organization can be easily noted.

It gives the boys a vital interest in the work of the church. They become acquainted with missionary enterprises, and with the lives and labors of great missionary leaders. They grow up in the conviction that the task of paramount importance in the church is the fulfilment of our Lord's last commission to make known the gospel to all men. The most serious difficulty heretofore has been to induce multitudes of mature Christians to believe that the Saviour was in earnest in the command to his disciples to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," and much of the time and energy of the church has been expended in teaching the members "what be the first principles" of missionary enterprise. If the children can be trained up with right views upon this subject, much has been

¹ Copies of the constitution and by-laws, and all information relative to the organization of Covenanter societies, may be had by writing to The Covenanters, 422 East Franklin street, Richmond, Va.

gained. They will become more intelligent and useful Christians, and the missionary cause, both at home and abroad, will be strengthened by many enthusiastic and efficient helpers. It is to be hoped that the day is not far distant when it will be impossible to find in the bounds of evangelical Christendom a professing disciple of Christ who is antagonistic or indifferent to missions.

The Covenanter boys also do some valuable work in the collection of pictures and newspaper clippings, and in making scrap-books for distribution among the patients in city hospitals and for sending to missionaries to aid them in their work. They are thus brought in contact with human suffering, and are taught to express their sympathy in a practical way. When Thanksgiving Day comes they visit the city markets in company with their leader, and purchase turkeys and baskets of good things, which they then distribute among the families of the poor. For weeks before Christmas there is great activity among the boys at the rooms, making useful and beautiful articles, which are sold for presents. The annual sale, when these articles are offered to purchasers, is an exciting day for the boys, and large crowds of their friends visit the rooms in search of Christmas-gifts.

The Covenanters in our church have a chorus choir, and they practice singing regularly every week. They are becoming quite familiar with many church and Sunday-school hymns, which they render with fine spirit and effect. They are proving themselves very useful in leading the singing in the Sunday-school, and frequently in meetings of various church societies. They practice Christmas carols, also; and they have a beautiful custom of visiting the pastor on Christmas Eve, each boy with a wreath of holly or other evergreen upon his arm, and of singing their carols, and of leaving their wreaths for the decoration of the manse. This is a touching incident, which draws the pastor and the Covenanters very near together.

The Covenanters also have charge of the flowers in the church-yard, and it is their duty and pleasure to keep them in good condition.

Such employments as these interest the boys in the active life of the church, and bring the church into the every-day life of the boys, and must be productive of beneficial results. They

cultivate a spirit of church loyalty, which is "a long-felt want" among many of our young people. Next to desiring for our children a vital interest in Christ, nothing is better for them than a faithful and affectionate regard for the church. We wish them to love the church, its services and its work, and to grow up with a consecrated devotion to its highest and best interests. This desire is more nearly realized in the Covenanters than in any other organization with which we are familiar.

The society also stimulates the desire to be useful. The time-honored watchword, "For Christ's crown and covenant," cannot fail to make a deep impression upon the young hearts of the boys and to stir them up to deeds of usefulness. If it fired the souls of the Covenanters of old, who shed their blood on Scottish soil for the cause of civil and religious liberty, why should it not be productive of good effect upon the Covenanters of to-day? Our boys are not lacking in spirit and energy, and these qualities should be enlisted in Christ's cause now, as in days gone by.

The Covenanters are under a wholesome influence. They are prevented from wasting their time in the streets and in evil company. High ideals are constantly set before them. Good books are placed in their hands. Useful employment is given them. The gospel of God's grace is taught them, and they are encouraged to give their hearts to Christ and their lives to his service. The pastor learns to know them well; he is kept informed in regard to their spiritual needs, and the way is open for him to approach them and direct their young minds to the Saviour.

We heartily commend this society to pastors and sessions who are seeking to interest the boys and young men in the work of the church. They will find it free from many objections which lie against other such organizations, and possessed of many virtues and advantages all its own.

Richmond, Va.