

The Origin of the Y.M.C.A.

By I. Macdonald.

One of the great institutions which have marked the growth of city life is the Y. M. C. A. With the industrial revolution in England, toward the middle of the last century, there sprang up the urgent need for a foster parent that would care for the moral and spiritual welfare of the youth of the nation in its migration from rural to city life.

Foremost among the men to grasp this situation was George Williams, a young man engaged in the drapery business in London. Williams was a native of Dulverton in Somerset. At the age of sixteen he became converted, and four years later, in 1841, he took up his abode in London, where he gained employment as a clerk in a dry goods establishment facing St. Paul's Churchyard. After a few years diligently spent in seeking the spiritual welfare of his fellow workers—some eighty in number—he organized in 1844 a society known as the "Young Men's Christian Association," the name being suggested by his room-mate, Christopher Smith. This association was designed to be "A society for improving the spiritual condition of young men engaged in the drapery and other trades."

The constitution of the Association provided that its membership should be composed of those who gave decided evidence of religious conversion, and to this end prayer meetings and Bible classes were established in fourteen different business houses in the city and in January, 1845, a special missionary was appointed to young men.

Thus at its inception the Y. M. C. A. was essentially a religious organization. Young men of no religious profession might enjoy the privileges of the institution upon payment of a small fee, but were barred from any participation in its management.

One year after its organization, in 1845, apartments were rented which included a library, reading-room, restaurant, social parlors, etc. Educational classes were provided and a lecture course established which became in time the most important lecture platform in London.

In 1894, on the occasion of the Association's jubilee, Williams was knighted. Though he is generally credited with being the organizer of the first Y. M. C. A., the idea of such an institution seems to have originated with David Naismith who at an earlier date had founded city missions in London and Glasgow and in 1824 established the Glasgow Young Men's Society for Religious Improvement, "a movement which spread to various parts of the United Kingdom, France and America: later the name was changed to the Glasgow Young Men's Christian Association."—(Enc. Brit.)

Whether because of its twenty years' start or not, the institution appears to have taken a greater hold in Scotland than elsewhere in Britain, as in 1910 there were two hundred and twenty-six associations there as against four hundred in England, Ireland and Wales.

It was not until 1851 that the work of organizing the Y. M. C. A. commenced in North America, the first association of the kind being established in Montreal and later in Boston and New York. The association was destined to meet with spectacular success in America.

"North America contains approximately one quarter of the total number of associations in the world, one half of the total number of employed officers, and three quarters of the total value of buildings and equipment."—(The Enc. of Social Reform).

Although Germany lays claim to more associations than any other country, the Y. M. C. A. has admittedly reached its greatest development in the United States where "the associations have been built on a broad basis and worked with enterprise and business skill. Thus they have been able to se-

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