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THE FOUNDER OF SUNDAY-SCHOOLS.

On a grave in the old English city of Gloucester, is an inscription which reads thus:—"When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me; because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me; and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy." The grave is that of Robert Raikes who, just one hundred years ago, started the first Sunday-school.

Gloucester, on the Severn, is a very old city, its history being traceable to a very remote antiquity. The Britons, the Romans and the Saxons all gave it a name. By the last it was called *Gleau Ceaster* which has been shortened into Gloucester. The scene of a celebrated single combat between Edmund Ironsides and Canute is said to have been there. It was repeatedly visited by William the Conqueror; there Henry III. was crowned and in it Parliaments were held under Richard II. and Henry IV. It sided with the Parliament in the successful contest with Charles I.; it was the birthplace of George Whitfield, the scene of one of the experiments of Howard the Philanthropist in prison reform and, perhaps, most honorable of all, the birth place and home of Robert Raikes, the founder of Sunday-schools.

Robert Raikes was known amongst his neighbors as "Raikes the printer," he at the age of twenty-two years succeeding to the proprietorship of the *Gloucester Journal*, which was founded by his father. He was a successful editor and printer, and through the force of character and prosperity became one of the most influential citizens of Gloucester. He was not one of the angular men whose edges cut whomsoever they touch. He was gentle, courtly, studious of pleasing and continually on the alert to promote good-will among his neighbors. His vocation as printer and editor brought him into contact with all classes of society; shrewdness of observation was as decided a trait of his character as business tact. Withal, he was a devout member of the Church of England, and a regular attendant upon its services.

England a hundred years ago was very different from the England of to-day. Public education for the lower classes scarcely existed. Manufactures were growing, and producing a distinct class of population as yet wholly neglected. The prisons were filthy and crowded; the debtors confined in them had no public provision for their maintenance, and often died of neglect and starvation. The first philanthropic efforts of Robert Raikes were directed to the relief of the

prisoners in the Gloucester jails. He was before Howard in the field, and used his paper effectively in appealing for food and clothing to be given to the "poor wretches" as he called them. These gifts entrusted to him he distributed with his own hands. In addition he supplied the prisoners with books, appointed the most competent amongst them readers to others and encouraged the readers by gratuities.

Robert Raikes' work of charity in the prisons of Gloucester prepared him for his greatest achievement—the founding of Sunday-schools. His own account of the first step taken, as given in a letter to a friend, is very simple: "Some business leading me one morning in the suburbs of the city, where the lowest of the people (who are

read. I presently was directed to four. To these I applied, and made an agreement with them to receive as many children as I should send, whom they were to instruct in reading and the church catechism. For this I engaged to pay them a shilling each for their day's employment. The women seemed pleased with the proposal. I then waited on the clergyman, the Rev. Mr. Stock, and imparted to him my plan. He was so much satisfied with the idea that he engaged to lead his assistance by going round to the schools on a Sunday afternoon, to examine the progress that was made, and to enforce order and decorum among such a set of little heathen."

This was the germ of the Christian Sunday-school system, which has in one hundred

The effect of Raikes' well-directed energy was prodigious. The streets of Gloucester became quiet and peaceable on Sundays, and the same change for the better was effected throughout the country. In 1786 the Gloucestershire magistrates passed a resolution declaring that "the benefit of Sunday-schools to the morals of the rising generation is too evident not to merit the recognition of the bench and the thanks of the community to the gentlemen instrumental in promoting them." In 1783, after three years' experience, Raikes ventured to speak of the schools in his paper. Enquiries for information began to pour in upon him. His letters in reply found their way into the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the *European Magazine*, and Wesley's *Arminian Magazine*. Adam Smith, the author of the *Wealth of Nations*, was so much impressed with the utility of the schools as to say, "No plan has promised to effect a change of manners with equal ease and simplicity since the days of the Apostles." John Wesley thought there was more in Sunday-schools than appeared on the surface, and wrote in his journal, "Perhaps God may have a deeper end therein than men are aware of." Bishops noticed them in their charges to the clergy. Teaching poor children for a time became the fashion. Even the Queen, wife of George III., sent for Robert Raikes, when he chanced to be at Windsor, to learn from his own lips of his work among the poor. She wished to know "by what accident a thought which promised so much benefit to the lower orders of people as the institution of Sunday-schools was suggested to his mind."

At first there was no Sunday-school Society, and the teachers were paid. Without organized support, and dependent upon paid labor, the Sunday-school must in a very few years have proved a failure. The suggestion of using the services of unpaid teachers is said to have originated among the Wesleyans. By 1785 several schools were managed on this plan; the idea was not adopted, however, in Gloucester, till 1810, a year before Raikes' death.

Full of honors, after reposing for eight years from the toils of business, Robert Raikes died in 1811, having reached the ripe age of seventy-five. The commemoration of the centenary of the establishment of Sunday-schools in London on June 26 and the following days, is planned on a large scale. There will be gatherings in St. Paul's and the Guildhall, processions, and the unveiling of a statue placed on the Thames Embankment. But there can be no monument to Robert Raikes greater than the thousands of Sunday-schools scattered through the whole world amongst heathen as well as Christian peoples all actuated by the one grand object of leading the young to Jesus.



ROBERT RAIKES, THE FOUNDER OF SUNDAY-SCHOOLS.

principally employed in the pin manufactory) chiefly reside, I was struck with concern at seeing a group of children, wretchedly ragged, at play in the streets. I asked an inhabitant whether these children belonged to that part of the town, and lamented their misery and idleness. 'Ah, sir,' said the woman, 'could you take a view of this part of the town on a Sunday, you would be shocked indeed, for then the street is filled with a multitude of these wretches, who spend their time in noise and riot, playing at "chuck," and cursing and swearing in a manner so horrid as to convey to any serious mind an idea of hell rather than of any other place.'.....I then enquired of the woman if there were any decent well-disposed women who kept schools for teaching to

years spread over the whole world. In all he did Raikes showed the good sense of the hard-headed, practical Englishman. The only condition of admission to the schools was cleanliness. "All that I require," said the philanthropist to parents, "are clean hands, clean faces, and their hair combed." To some one who tried to beg off from attendance he replied, "If you have no clean shirt, come in that you have on." The excuse of another he adroitly parried by saying, "If you can loiter about without shoes, and in a ragged coat, you may as well come to school, and learn what may tend to your good." He soon acquired such an influence over the little ragamuffins that his displeasure was feared, and his approval greatly desired.