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Sunday School Banner.

W. H. WITHEROW, D.D., Editor.

TORONTO, MAY, 1886.

Reading Unions.

We were greatly interested in the report we heard of the marked success of the Reading Unions organized in the State of Illinois by the Rev. Horace Reed, a presiding Elder of the Methodist Church in that state. We therefore wrote Mr. Reed for information as to the nature of these unions and his method of establishing them. He has kindly responded, and we have pleasure in placing the information received before our readers in the hope that in connection with many of our churches or schools similar unions may be established:

"Reading among the masses," says Mr. Reed, "is the most potent factor to-day in the formation of character. The books, magazines, and newspapers in the library and on the centre table as a rule correctly interpret the degree of mental culture and the moral qualities of the members of the household. As an educating influence, next to the advantages of the college or university, is a well-selected library with a wisely formed habit of systematic reading. Dr. Lyman Abbott well says, 'The home ought no more to be without a library than a dining-room

without a kitchen.' Ruskin says, 'To be without books is the abyss of penury; don't endure it.'

"A suitable library, containing histories, biographies, travels, scientific works for young people, and devotional books, can not be found in one-tenth of the homes in our country. While Methodists have been as zealous as any other denomination in the dissemination of good literature, still there are many societies containing from twenty-five to one hundred members with so few attractive and useful books for general reading in the neighbourhood that a man could carry them all on one arm. So great is the preponderance of trashy literature in many public libraries that it can hardly be questioned that they are in many cities more of a curse than a blessing. Every man and woman in our country, with few exceptions, should read not less than from ten to twenty dollars' worth of books each year, besides one or two good newspapers. But there are large numbers who are not able to expend ten dollars annually for literature, and a still larger number who do not sufficiently appreciate the value of reading to expend that amount for books and papers.

"How to secure the circulation among the people of the numerous valuable books now piled upon the shelves in our publishing houses and depositories is one of the most important questions to be solved by parents, ministers, and teachers. The methods of the early itinerant preacher will hardly be restored to any great extent. The modern book agency system does not solve the problem. But I can certify from personal knowledge that the following plan, if generally adopted, would go far in answering the question, how to circulate our literature. Let each society organize a Reading Union wherever twenty-five persons or more will unite by the payment of one dollar each. On account of the liberal discount the Book Concern* will give on books for Reading Unions, the money to accompany the order, twenty-five dollars, will purchase about thirty good volumes. Any person, by taking one share and paying one dollar, secures the privilege of reading thirty choice books; if fifty members are secured, the reading of sixty books; if one hundred members, the reading of one hundred and twenty books, and so on, by only paying one dollar. The best qualified member for librarian should be selected for that position. The books should be kept at the church, unless a more suitable place can be secured. A good form for constitution can be found in the appendix of our new Discipline. The following are some of the advantages of this plan:

HOW TO ORGANIZE A READING UNION.

"1. A Reading Union is easily organized. If a minister [or S.S. superintendent] at a quarterly meeting will talk fifteen minutes in relation to the evil effects of pernicious literature, and the blessing of systematic reading of good

* Our Methodist Book Rooms at Toronto, Montreal and Halifax will do the same.—E.P.

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