



# The Sunday-School Movement: And the American Sunday-School Union (Classic Reprint)

*Edwin Wilbur Rice*

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Excerpt from *The Sunday-School Movement: And the American Sunday-School Union*

This work was not written to order; it has been a growth. My researches into the origin and principles of the modern Sunday-school began as a college graduate student in a pioneer service, about 1854. These researches have continued for an exceptionally long period of personal observation and service, in about every form and phase of the institution in America and Europe. Rare opportunities were providentially offered for years, especially by becoming the custodian of probably the largest and choicest collection of first-hand documents and material relating to the origin and early development of the movement that is to be found anywhere in America or the world.

It is significant that the greatest growth of the modern Sunday-school has not been where it started, but in America. The membership in the United States is easily double that of Great Britain, and equals that in all the other countries of the world.

A mass of historical material has been examined in collections in libraries and historical societies in the United States and Great Britain, and the important facts sifted for the benefit of the reader. Legions of excellent works have been issued on phases of the institution and along various educational, denominational, and other lines. These fragmentary treatises have increased the demand for a general work giving a comprehensive view of the institution: (1) as a great laymen's movement, (2) as promoting a spirit of Christian unity for service, and (3) as a great missionary agency for the universal spread of the gospel of Christ - making it a remarkable phenomenon in the progress of Christianity.

The modern Sunday-school was not new in its teaching, but was so new in form as to require a long campaign of education and a practical test of its value for a generation before it won the confidence of the public and of the churches. From the first, however, it was advocated by Christian laymen of different creeds, aided here and there by clergymen who had the grace to perceive, and the grit and greatness to declare, that Christ's kingdom was larger and more important than any one or a score of sects into which Protestantism had divided. Its success in any community depended upon uniting existing Christian forces in its support. The founders were forced, therefore, to seek a basis of unity in Christian service. They found it in declaring for a positive teaching of the essential truths of the Bible as held by all Christians, and in a neutral attitude on those doctrines upon which they differed. The majority of the modern Sunday-schools in the early days were formed on this basis.

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