

The Ministry of Education

The early Methodists had, as a rule, few educated members or pastors and this lack of college-trained men characterized the church for at least half a century. A Methodist writer said in 1845: "While we constitute one-fourth of the population . . . yet scarcely one in fifty of the public functionaries and the professional men in the country is a Methodist." Many Methodist leaders of the time had but little formal education, nor did they consider it essential to salvation. As one writer expressed it, "Gaining knowledge is a good thing; but saving souls is a better [thing]." But from the beginning the Methodist Church has realized that it must have some form of religious training for its young people and better trained pastors and preachers if it hoped to hold its membership in the settled communities.

Teaching the children has largely been the responsibility of the church school, usually the Sunday school. In the beginning, these schools, sponsored by Robert Raikes and other public-spirited men in England, had been organized to teach poor children to read and write. With the beginning of the industrial age thousands of children were employed long hours in the mines and

factories. There was no time for them to attend school except on Sundays even if day schools were available.

By the time Iowa was settled, Sunday schools had become an integral part of the Methodist Episcopal Church. They were no longer expected to teach children to read; that responsibility had been assumed by day schools. But they did give practice in reading the Bible and they emphasized learning hymns and Bible verses, thus training the boys and girls in the dignified English of the King James translation.

The first Sunday school in Iowa was organized in Dubuque in March, 1834, by Mrs. Susan A. Dean, a Methodist, although other Protestant denominations were represented. A report given at the first meeting of the Iowa Conference at Iowa City in 1844 listed 27 Methodist Sabbath schools, with 181 officers and teachers, and 1,811 pupils. These schools had few books, except the Bible, and no lesson helps. Two years later an Iowa Conference committee commented: "We view the Sabbath school as a most powerful and efficient auxiliary . . . and we deeply regret our past remissness in this most important work."

Beginning in the sixties, the Methodist churches began to provide helps for the harassed teachers in the form of Serial Lesson Leaves, published by the Sunday School Union. Modern education and psychology have now joined with religion to pro-

vide materials for Sunday school class work, but Peter Cartwright would no doubt have looked upon them with disdain and suspicion. Each age must provide its own tools.

The need for trained ministers and Christian leaders presented another problem. "Book learning" was not always held in high esteem on the frontier, and men could preach and practice medicine or law without much formal education. Everywhere men turned their hands to new work under new conditions, confident that they could learn the necessary skill to carry on.

This was true, to a large degree, in early Methodism. Its converts often came from the underprivileged classes, and many of the Methodist circuit riders had attended school for only short periods, although regular study of the Bible and other prescribed books was an obligation second only to prayer. Other denominations, especially the Presbyterians and Congregationalists, had already made provision for academies, colleges, and seminaries, and their ministers were usually college men. The Methodist leaders soon realized that their church must meet this competition. One writer commented in 1845, that "three-fourths of all [Methodist young people] who have been educated in colleges not under our direction are lost to our cause." The church leaders recognized that the Methodist Church must provide educational institutions to furnish an educated ministry and

to train Methodist young people to be teachers, professional men, and government officials in their communities.

When the Iowa Conference met at Iowa City in 1844, two embryo colleges sought its favor and support. One, the Iowa City College, had been incorporated by act of the territorial legislature in February, 1843. The founders had visions of a college rising at the eastern end of Iowa Avenue to match the stately stone capitol on the hill above the Iowa River. The second educational institution to bid for Methodist sponsorship was Mount Pleasant Literary Institute begun in 1842 and incorporated in 1844, to be "kept open for the education of all denominations of white citizens." The Iowa City College was the first and favored applicant, but it closed in 1847. In September, 1849, the Iowa Conference adopted a resolution that it "do gratefully receive the proposition on the part of trustees of the Mount Pleasant Collegiate Institute to donate the said institution to the control and patronage of the Iowa Annual Conference." The conference added the provision that no funds were to be spent on the institution; the college profited from the association, by the publicity given it in the churches, and from gifts by relatively wealthy church members.

In 1855 the name was changed to Iowa Wesleyan University, possibly because the State University was then at low ebb, and plans were made

to provide courses in medicine, law, and theology at Mount Pleasant. Hard times soon came, however, and the new "University" was satisfied to do college work. In 1912 the institution became Iowa Wesleyan College.

It was George B. Bowman, a frontier preacher and circuit rider, who had visioned a Christian college at the eastern end of Iowa Avenue in Iowa City. That college failed, but Bowman carried his vision with him as he rode across the hills of northeastern Iowa. One day in 1851 Bowman stopped his horse upon a hill near Mount Vernon and gazed across the prairies and forests stretching away in all directions. In his mind's eye he saw a college rising on this hill; dismounting, he knelt in prayer, dedicating the site and himself to Christian education. On July 4, 1852, Elder Bowman called a public meeting at the chosen site, and James Harlan gave the address on "Education." Then Bowman broke ground for the first building of Cornell College — Science Hall.

Institutions are often started "on a shoestring," but Elder Bowman had not even that. He had no money and neither he nor the church he represented owned the land. His faith was rewarded, however, and in September, 1852, the Iowa Conference, meeting at Burlington, accepted fifteen acres of campus upon which a building was then being erected. Bowman also helped to plat the town of Mount Vernon. The school was first

called Mount Vernon Wesleyan Seminary. In 1854 it was incorporated as the Iowa Conference Seminary, and in 1855 it was rechristened Cornell College in honor of William W. Cornell of New York City, a contributor. Reverend George B. Bowman is commemorated by Bowman Hall to which he contributed some \$10,000, a princely gift for an itinerant Methodist preacher.

As the population moved north and west there was a demand for new schools to serve new communities. Fayette Seminary was organized in 1854 and was accepted by the Iowa Conference the following year, but with the division of the conference in 1856 it became the ward of the Upper Iowa Conference. In December, 1857, it was renamed Upper Iowa University. When the Upper Iowa Conference was asked to undertake a campaign to raise \$1,200,000 for the two colleges then under its wing, it decided to unite Upper Iowa University and Cornell College at Mount Vernon. The trustees of Upper Iowa refused to agree, and since 1928 Upper Iowa University has carried on as an independent college, outside the circle of Methodist-sponsored institutions.

The fourth Methodist college in Iowa is Simpson College at Indianola. In August, 1860, the Western Iowa Conference agreed to accept a "Male and Female Seminary" as soon as the people of Indianola should erect suitable buildings valued at not less than \$3,000 and debt-free; but

it was agreed that the Conference would "not be responsible in any way for funds necessary for the future prosecution of the enterprise." Thus, with purely moral support from the church, the Indianola Male and Female Seminary was incorporated on September 10, 1860, and opened its doors that fall, only to close them almost immediately. Local supporters came to the rescue and soon raised \$5,315.50, thus permitting the institution to reopen in temporary quarters. It was soon housed in a substantial brick building painted blue and nicknamed "Old Bluebird."

In 1865, after the reorganization of the annual conferences, the Indianola Male and Female Seminary was adopted by the Des Moines Conference and renamed the Des Moines Conference Seminary. By 1869 the seminary was offering work of collegiate grade and was rechristened Simpson Centenary College in honor of Bishop Matthew Simpson. The "Centenary" was dropped in 1885.

A Negro boy, born in slavery, was once a student at Simpson College before going on to complete his graduate studies at Iowa State College. In recalling his college days, George Washington Carver wrote: "I managed to get to dear old Simpson with ten cents in cash, and every opportunity was given me to pursue my most cherished desire." In 1941, just two years before his death, Carver was invited to return to Simpson College to deliver the baccalaureate address. "It

was at Simpson," Carver said, "that I first realized I was a human being."

Latest-born of Iowa Methodist colleges is Morningside at Sioux City. Plans for a college in this area where prairies and plains meet were started in 1894 by the Northwest Iowa Conference. For thirty years the churches in this area had been supporting colleges outside the conference boundaries. Morningside, a suburb of Sioux City, was chosen as the site, and in December, 1894, Morningside College received its charter. The new college was to take over the University of the Northwest, a private institution with only one building and, apparently, no funds. When Morningside College opened its doors on September 11, 1896, it had a campus of sixteen acres, one four-story building, and the foundations laid for a second building. The first president was the Reverend George W. Carr, who served two years in this capacity. The principal founder and second president was the Reverend Wilson Seeley Lewis, who was elected as a Methodist bishop in 1908. In 1914 the Charles City College, founded by the Northwest German Conference, was incorporated with Morningside College at Sioux City.

There were also a number of local secondary schools started and maintained for a time under the wing of the Methodist Church. This was natural since public high schools did not come into general service until after the decade of the seven-

ties. There was at one time, too, a more or less serious proposal to establish a Methodist State University at Des Moines. In 1888 the city offered financial aid in the establishment of a graduate institution, but the supporters of the struggling Methodist colleges realized that it would be a formidable competitor both for students and for contributions, and the university never materialized. Some of the proffered aid probably went later to Drake University.

Another problem for the Methodist Church was presented by the Methodist young people in the three state-supported institutions. Here the future teachers, physicians, lawyers, nurses, engineers, and other leaders were being prepared for life in Iowa communities. The first recognition of the responsibility of the church for Methodist young people at the state institutions came in 1910, when an Inter-Conference Commission was named to consider the problem. The members of the Commission were the Reverend Elias Hardy, pastor of the Methodist Church at Grinnell, Dr. Charles N. Pace, later President of Hamline University, and Joe R. Hanley, later Lieutenant Governor of New York. These men considered the various possibilities, and the Reverend L. F. Townsend was sent to the State University of Iowa in the fall of 1913 as the first student pastor. At the same time the Reverend William Hints initiated the work at Iowa State College at Ames. The stu-

dent work used convenient centers with student pastors or counsellors working in connection with the local pastor. Since 1917 the governing body of the student work has been termed the Wesley Foundation.