

ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY

It Was First Established in This City
in the Year 1876.

PROSPEROUS BRANCHES IN EUROPE

Some of Its Many Charities—Its
Lecturers in This Country and
Abroad—Prof. Adler and
His Work.

The movement of ethical culture, now so prominent in all sections of the United States and portions of Europe, had its origin in this city, where the first Ethical Society was founded in 1876. The attitude of the New-York society has been from the first neither irreligious nor anti-religious. In the opening address, which Prof.



Prof. Felix Adler.
Lecturer, New-York.

Felix Adler delivered on May 15, 1876, the watchword which he suggested for the new movement was: "Diversity in the creed, unanimity in the deed." He also emphasized in those remarks that belief in any of the received doctrines of religion should not hinder any one from joining the new organization. Neither should a negative attitude toward the current religious teachings be a hindrance.

Those who aspire to become good men should be welcomed to the new fellowship, no matter what their opinions might be on questions of theology or philosophy. Prof. Adler stated at that time. All that was expected was a sincere interest in the moral improvement of the individual and of society, and a willingness to waive points of difference and to come into fundamental agreement with others animated by the same desire.

These views had been known by a number of Prof. Adler's friends for some years prior to the organization of the society. Prof. Adler was at that time Professor of Oriental Literature at the Cornell University, and when a number of friends of the cause of ethical culture were prepared to form a society he resigned from the Faculty of the university and entered the field in which he had long been desirous to labor. It was a labor of love for him from the beginning, and still is such.

At first the new society was the target for much hostile criticism and even bitter persecution. Like all new movements, it required time to be correctly appreciated, and in the beginning it was misinterpreted. The fact that the Ethical Society did not affirm any religious belief was regarded as positive proof that its members and its leaders were at heart hostile to religion. But this was a mistake, and as time went on it was perceived to be such. The prejudice which the society at first excited has abated from year to year. Some of those who were its most pronounced antagonists



William M. Salter.
Lecturer, Philadelphia.

have become its well-wishers and supporters. The change of attitude against the society is shown by the fact that the Legislature of the State of New-York has conferred upon Prof. Adler legal authority to perform the marriage ceremony.

Prof. Adler has also frequently been asked to speak in Christian churches, and the press of the city has given him the friendliest support in his public undertakings. Besides, there is a constantly-increasing demand for the establishment of ethical societies in all the larger cities of the United States. The tendency in this regard has been to hold its growth so as to avoid anything but a wholesome development. The design is to perfect the organization inwardly and to discourage rather than encourage rapid extension.

It is claimed by those at the head of the organization that the society has lived down to a very large extent the hostile feeling which it created when it first came into existence, nothing having aided in this so much as its works in the different fields. The various branches encompass the fol-

lowing: The ethical platform; the educational branches; the charities; the women's conferences; the section for the study of child nature, and the ethical classes.

The first of these was the ethical platform. The public meetings of the society take place Sundays at the Carnegie Music Hall, where the attendance taxes usually the full capacity of the large auditorium. Not infre-



W. L. Sheldon.
Lecturer, St. Louis.

quently hundreds are unable to gain admission to these meetings. The subjects discussed here range over the entire field of practical ethics. The labor question receives much attention, and at the time when advanced utterances on this subject were few it took the lead in enforcing on public attention the duties which society owes to the working class. In this agitation the elevation of the laborers has never been treated as it were the sole or special interest of a particular class, but rather from the point of view of the general interest, and stress has been laid upon the idea that the rich need to be saved quite as much as the poor.

The subject of the conjugal relations has been frequently treated, especially in view of the increase of divorce in the United States and all other civilized countries. The best methods of child education have been discussed, as well as methods of moral self-education for adults. The duties of the citizen to the State are frequently analyzed, and an attempt has been made to give to the idea of the State a sanctity and grandeur which it often lacks in democratic communities.

To stimulate and inspire by noble examples has been deemed another function of the ethical platform, and to this end the biographies of great teachers and leaders of mankind have been set before the audiences. Another class of subjects treated is drawn from religious history. Although the society does not commit itself for or



S. Burns Weston.
Editor of Magazine, Philadelphia.

against any religious system, it conceives it to be its duty to examine the religious teachings both of the past and of the present, with the view of ascertaining their purely ethical value. The great ethical ideas that are wrapped up in religious symbols are duly appreciated, and a spirit of respect and reverence for the religious past is cultivated. Raw radicalism is absolutely eschewed.

The ethical platform has endeavored to correct one-sided views, and while generating a spirit favorable to progress aimed to combine with it a sense of gratitude toward its predecessors on the path of moral endeavor. Lectures have been delivered from this point of view on "The Hebrew Prophets," on "Jesus," on "Paul," on "Luther," on "Calvin," &c. The lecturers have likewise been instrumental in the cause of public reform. The appointment, for instance, by the Legislature of the first Tenement-House Commission was a direct result of these lectures.

In a few years after the first society—the New-York society—had been successfully launched the movement began to spread to other cities. The first to follow in the footsteps of this city was Chicago, where a society was founded in 1880. Philadelphia shortly afterward took up the movement and organized a society. Next came St. Louis, and in all these cities the movement is meeting with success. In addition to these, there is a flourishing society established by the students of Cornell University. Quite a number of other cities have expressed a desire for organization.

The initial step in Europe was taken in London, where in 1886 a society was formed. Although this organization did not affiliate directly with the main branch in America, it was suggested by it and patterned after it. A second London body was established some time later in direct connection with the movement in this country. It is known as the West London Ethical Society. Another, the East London Ethical Society, has enjoyed a successful career with the others in the English metropolis for some years.

Germany was the next to take steps in the movement, where a society was founded in Berlin in 1892 after an address on the subject by Prof. Adler, who was invited to the German capital by some of the most prominent members of the Faculty of the Berlin University. Since then associations have been formed in Magdeburg, Frankfurt, Freiburg, Breslau, Munich, Strasburg, and branches at Koelnigsberg, Muhlhausen, Kiel, and Obernigk. These German societies have a membership now of over 1,500 active workers. The first impetus to the movement in Germany was given by the translation and publication of William M. Salter's "Book on Ethical Religion." The translation was by Prof. Georg von Glzycki of Berlin, and enjoyed wide distribution.

The next country where ethical culture was taken up was Austria, and recently an organization was formed in Italy. In Bucharest, Roumania, and in Ghent, Belgium, much interest is displayed, and before many months associations will be called into life in these cities.

The men at the head of the movements in the different cities are among the most prominent in their respective countries. Prof. William Foerster, who is of the Faculty of the Berlin University, is one of the foremost astronomers of Germany. He is the lecturer of the Berlin society, and with

Prof. Georg von Glzycki, also of Berlin, promulgate ethical culture through the medium of journalism.

Stanton Coit, Ph. D., is the principal mover in ethical culture in London. He is a graduate of Amherst College.

Prof. Felix Adler of this city is too well known to require any comment, he being really the founder of the movement in its present form, and having attained worldwide renown in connection therewith.

William M. Salter, the lecturer of the Philadelphia society, is the son of a Congregational minister and studied for the ministry. He was prominent in the movement when it first was advanced in Chicago and is entitled to the credit of bringing about the conferences of capital and labor after the Anarchist riot in Chicago.

Dr. M. M. Mangasarian, the brilliant orator now in charge of the Chicago society, is a graduate of Princeton, and formerly was a Presbyterian minister.

W. L. Sheldon, the lecturer of the St. Louis society, is a graduate of Princeton, where he studied for the Presbyterian ministry.

S. Burns Weston of Philadelphia is the editor of the quarterly review and magazine, International Journal of Ethics. He was educated in the Divinity School, Cambridge, for the Unitarian pulpit.

In the field of education and charity the societies have accomplished much that is of



Stanton Coit.
Lecturer, London.

great value to humanity. The members of the New-York society have formed a separate organization for the operation of the various philanthropic enterprises. This incorporation is entitled "The United Relief Works of the Society for Ethical Culture," and maintains the following institutions in this city: The Workingman's School and Free Kindergarten with which are connected a normal department and library, a fresh-air fund, a district nursing department, and the organization headquarters.

The first of these to be put into practice was the free kindergarten, which was started in 1878, and was one of the first of the kind in the United States. Two years later the Workingman's School was started. It now occupies the well-equipped building at 109 West Fifty-fourth Street, and is an exemplary institution. This school was the first to introduce manual training for children between the ages of six and fourteen years, and its methods have since been adopted by other schools throughout the Union. It has a scholarship of over 400 boys and girls, nine-tenths of whom are the children of poor parents. The school has an excellent corps of teachers under the superintendency of Maximilian P. E. Groszmann, Ph. D.

Another worthy charity which the society has instituted is the District Nursing Department. This branch of the relief section sends trained nurses into the homes of the sick poor to nurse the sick, take care of the rooms, and prepare proper food; such nurses are provided for the Demilit and New-York Dispensaries, where application is to be



Wilhelm Foerster.
Lecturer, Berlin.

made. The Fresh-Air Fund provides excursions for the children of the poor during the heated term.

The united relief works in this city are sustained by annual dues and voluntary contributions exclusively, and expend between \$25,000 and \$30,000 annually.

In St. Louis the local society has started several "Workingmen's Self-Culture Clubs," which are being successfully operated.

In London "the Neighborhood Guild" is being earnestly pushed. The idea of the guild is to form clubs of men, women, and children in each street or small number of streets forming a guild for each district. Their object is to carry out all the reforms, social, industrial, and educational, which the social ideal demands.

One of the latest and most popular adjuncts of the American associations is the School of Applied Ethics, which meets every Summer at Plymouth, Mass. Its founder, Prof. Felix Adler, having been educated to be a moral and religious teacher, felt the need of a school which should help such teachers to deal with the practical social problems in a more thorough and effective way. The first sessions were held in the Summer of 1891. The school consists of three departments, namely: Economics—Prof. H. D. Adams of the University of Michigan, director; Ethics—Prof. Felix Adler, director; History of Religions—Prof. C. H. Toy of Harvard University, director. Leading professors from the following colleges and universities lecture before the school: Amherst, Andover Theological School, Boston University, Bryn Mawr, Brown, Buchtell, Cambridge Episcopal Theological School, Catholic University of America, Clark, Columbia, Cornell, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Michigan University, Princeton, University of Pennsylvania, Yale, and Manchester College, Oxford, England.

The session this Summer will continue for five weeks, beginning the second week in July.

The headquarters of the society in this city, at 669 Madison Avenue, are the meeting place and social centre of the organization. New-York now has an active membership of over 800, while there are thousands who are friendly to the cause who are not on the rolls.