V. SERVING THE SUNDAY SCHOOL CAUSE: 1829-1834

The American Sunday School Union was one of the giants in the American benevolence system. Together with the American Bible Society and the American Tract Society, it drew support from a wider variety of denominations than most other benevolent societies; it therefore quickly became a keystone in the evangelicals' ecumenical campaign of spiritual and cultural conversion. All three societies were organized on the same principles, at about the same time.

Sunday schools predated the American Sunday School Union. They were practically as old as the American experience itself. Roxboro, Massachusetts, had a "Sabbath school" attached to its Congregational church as early as 1674, in which boys and girls were taught the Scriptures and catechisms by men and women of the congregation.[1]

The Sunday school movement, designed systematically to introduce moral and religious instruction among the children of the poor, was, however, a British innovation. Robert Raikes, a pious printer of Gloucester, Scotland, was generally considered the movement's founder. He opened his first school in 1780, in "Sooty Alley," one of Gloucester's worst districts. His pupils were an unlikely group of ragamuffins. Sweeps and pin-makers during the week, they were most unwilling scholars on Sunday. Some had to be hobbled with

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[1] "Sunday-Schools and the American Sunday-School Union," American Journal of Education, XV (December, 1865), p. [705].

wooden logs and driven to class like cattle. Once there, they received doses of religion intermingled with training in good grooming and other social graces. Raikes himself supplied the discipline, taking the strap and cane to the boys and subduing the girls "in other ways."[2]

By 1785 news of Raikes' successful experiment had spread as far as London. William Fox, a Baptist merchant of that city, corresponded with Raikes concerning his school, and determined to establish a society which would promote the teaching of all poor children to read the Bible. Members of other denominations joined with him in organizing "The Society for the Support and Encouragement of Sunday-Schools in the Different Counties of England," popularly known as the "Sunday-School Society." By 1808 it had supported 3,730 schools and educated, after its fashion, 303,781 children.[3]

The first American association devoted to promoting Sunday schools was organized six years after the British Sunday School Society. In 1791, a group of philanthropists and clergymen organized the First Day Society of Philadelphia, electing Episcopal Bishop William White president. The society required that the schools it aided teach the young "from the Bible" and "from such other moral and religious books as the society might, from time to time, direct," yet it was broadly non-denominational. The Universalist Dr. Benjamin Rush and the

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[2]Edwin R. Rice, The Sunday School Movement and the American Sunday School Union, 1780-1927 (Philadelphia: The Union Press, 1927), pp. 14-15.

[3]Ibid., pp. 21-22.

liberal Roman Catholic social reformer Matthew Carey were among its founders. The Society opened several schools for girls and for boys in the Philadelphia area. Unlike later practice, the schoolmasters earned a regular salary. They worked from eight o'clock to ten o'clock in the morning and from four to six o'clock Sunday afternoons for their eighty to one hundred twenty dollars a year.[4]

Several other Sunday education societies were founded during the next two decades. Benevolent women in Philadelphia formed a "Union Society" dedicated to the "education of poor female children" in 1804. The Evangelical Society, organized by Archibald Alexander, later of Princeton, commenced teaching adults and children in 1816. New York received its first Sunday School Union in 1816. Eleazer Lord and Mr. and Mrs. Divie Bethune share credit for its organization. The Bethunes became interested in Sunday schools during a visit to England in 1801 and 1802. They founded schools in New York City upon their return. In 1815 Lord spent two months in Philadelphia, where several schools were experimenting with volunteer teachers, returning full of enthusiasm for the voluntary system. A public meeting was held February 26, 1816, and the New York Sunday-School Society came into being.[5]

A little more than a year later, Bethune travelled to Philadelphia, where he placed the benefits of large-scale cooperation before several small Sunday school societies. As a result of his efforts,

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[4] Ibid., pp. 44-45, 47. American Journal of Education, XV, p. 707. The practice of paying teachers was discontinued in 1819.

[5] Rice, The Sunday School Movement and the American Sunday School Union, pp. 56-57.

several of the societies amalgamated to form the Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union.[6] It soon became the largest of the unions which had sprung up in various locations in the United States. The first few years, however, were difficult. Clergymen were distrustful of the union, since it afforded a means for laymen to exercise considerable and sometimes challenging power in the management of church affairs. The Union's directors were hard-pressed to find a clergyman willing to address the public on its behalf.[7]

Gradually, ministers found that Sunday schools offered more than youthful instruction; it encouraged adults to take greater interest in the church and its expanding activities, and insured that parents attended services more regularly. By 1824, 723 schools with 7,300 teachers and 46,619 pupils had affiliated with the Union, and its sphere of influence extended throughout eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Reflecting its widespread concerns and its aspirations as well, the society changed its name to the American Sunday School Union in 1824. The Union's national ambitions were evinced when Managers from New York City and other centers of Sunday school interest were elected to run its affairs.[8] In the following years, practically every local and state association recognized its dominance by joining it as an auxiliary.

The schools organized on Union principles were often

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[6]*Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

[7]*Ibid.*, p. 62.

[8]*American Journal of Education*, XV, p. 708.

vigorous institutions, against which twentieth century Sunday schools seem pale reflections. While spiritual and moral education were the prime goals of such schools, elementary instruction was often a necessary first. Most schools offered instruction in reading at the minimum. Many taught in writing and arithmetic as well.

Volunteers staffed the Union's schools. In many instances the teachers were not themselves "professors of religion," but recognized that Sunday schools were worthwhile civilizing forces.[9] Frequently earnest seekers were converted during the course of their ministrations to the young.

Leaders of the Sunday school movement were concerned that their institutions taught according to the latest pedagogical theories. The Union therefore often found itself in the forefront of educational

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[9]Sometimes the Union was embarrassed by its non-religious friends. A Fredell County, North Carolina, man took a great interest in Sunday schools, teaching a class and donating eye-glasses to his myopic students. Unfortunately, the man was not a professor of religion and had a violent temper to boot. J. B. Ballard, the local Sunday school missionary, sorrowfully reported that the anonymous "Sabbath School Friend" became enraged during a political campaign, mounted the platform to remonstrate with the speaker, and was thrown off, breaking both arms in the process. Such were the dangers of politics. J. B. Ballard to F. W. Porter, Fredell County, North Carolina, September 16, 1835. American Sunday School Archives, the A-C volume for the year 1835, number 41.

The manuscripts of the American Sunday School Union are not catalogued. They appear in sewn volumes and the scheme of organization varies from year to year. The papers were stored for almost seventy years and have not yet been released to general research. They contain a wealth of information on the social and religious conditions in America. I was the first researcher to receive permission to use them and the third to see them. Hereafter, references to this collection will be noted in the following order: ASSU Archives (volume identification) and letter number, where appropriate.

innovation. It abandoned the lecture-recitation method with its emphasis on the memorization of endless numbers of Bible verses in favor of a quasi-socratic method, wherein all students were given a short Scripture text to learn, followed by a list of questions with references locating the answers. The cycle of lessons took the student through the entire Bible in five years. While the new system hardly encouraged independent thinking, it represented a major advance from the "parrot teaching" and "parrot reciting" techniques still employed in many common schools. In order that teachers might properly apply the new techniques, the Union took some pains for teacher education--offering "teacher's helps" and a Sunday school teacher's magazine.[10]

In a model school, classes were divided according to age and "capacity." Girls and boys met separately, usually taught by a teacher of the same sex.[11] The school opened with prayer, then

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[10]Rice, The Sunday School Movement and the American Sunday School Union, pp. 102-03.

[11]Most of the benevolent organizations were strictly segregated by sex during the early years of the movement. The major societies were controlled by men and employed men in their services. The participation of women was confined to organizing "cent societies" and the like in their support. Women who wished to exercise their charitable impulses more directly were reduced to organizing societies of their own, and in general, were allowed to minister only to their less fortunate sisters, through such agencies as "The Female Association for the Relief of the Sick Poor, and for the Education of such Female Children, as Do Not Belong to, or Are Not Provided for by Any Religious Society, of New York." The American Sunday School Union offered women a chance to participate on a more equal basis, at least at the level of Sunday school teacher. Mary B. Treudley, "The 'Benevolent Fair': A Study of Charitable Organization Among American Women in the First Third of the Nineteenth Century," Social Service Review, XIV (September, 1940), pp. 509-22, especially p. 512.

divided into classes, usually around six to eight to a teacher. The teacher questioned each student on the week's lesson, using the Union Questions and "such other questions as he may think useful, and calculated to lead to a more perfect understanding of the subject." Further work was assigned to be completed by the following Sunday. After an hour or so of such instruction, the children were allowed to visit the Sunday school library and withdraw such books and pamphlets as interested them. The superintendent would then say a few words on the "importance of the truths" the lesson contained, after which remarks the school would close with prayer and a song or two.[12]

The impetus behind British Sunday schools was a desire to redeem the children of the "wretched poor." The American Sunday School Union began its career by imitating the British Union's example, but soon changed its emphasis. American Sunday schools were benevolent and charitable organizations, but they also served as equalizing institutions as well. American evangelicals had a healthy dislike for European class distinctions. They wished to bring all classes under their aegis. Sunday schools, like the public schools developing concurrently, fell under the influence of the common school philosophy. Sunday schools also sought to dismantle class barriers by providing common educational experiences to all American children.

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[12]Robert Baird, Religion in the United States of America, Or an Account of the Origin, Progress, Relation to the State, and Present Condition of the Evangelical Churches in the United States, with Notices of the Unevangelical Denominations (Glasgow and Edinburgh, Scotland: Blackie & Sons, 1844), p. 344-45. I have used the first edition of Baird's famous history throughout this study. Henry Martin Baird helped him with the 1856 revision.

The shift in emphasis from pauper to common education in the Sunday school movement seems to have been instigated by the same group of Princeton evangelicals that participated in New Jersey's common school campaign. Harvey Fisk wrote the Rev. Howard Malcom, a Sunday school missionary, that he and his Princeton friends found the Union's pauper approach was "a few months behind the spirit of the age." He argued that the Union should embrace "every son or daughter of Adam who has a soul to love or save, whether they be rich or poor, high or low." He was aghast when the Union's Board recommended against "mingling the children of different ranks in the same school." Such an opinion offended the Princeton minister's spiritual sensibilities and his middle class antipathy to rigid class lines as well. "By all means the children of the rich should be brought into our schools," he wrote, "first, because the majority of them do not receive so much religious instruction at home as do the poor, and second, because their influence is to be much greater in the world."[13] Fisk was the leading advocate of Sunday schools in Princeton and Robert Baird's good friend.

It cannot be determined with any accuracy when Robert Baird first came in contact with Sunday schools. It is not impossible that he may have attended one as a child: the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania area experienced a systematic Sunday school campaign as early as 1809.[14] By the time Baird reached Princeton, however, he was deeply

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[13]Harvey Fisk to the Rev. Howard Malcom, Princeton, March 26, 1827. ASSU Archives (January-March, 1827), 287.

[14]Marianna C. Brown, Sunday School Movements in America (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1901), p. 28.

committed to the Sunday school cause. He taught or superintended Sunday schools throughout his Princeton years, specializing in classes for Negroes, "bond or free." He proudly claimed to have taught at least three hundred of them to read, meeting with groups of them in "a large kitchen attached to a farm-house."[15]

Baird was in contact with the Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union as early as 1821. In that year he wrote two letters to Alexander Henry, the Union's President, urging him to persuade his organization to undertake the publication of materials in German.[16] The Princeton Sunday School Union was very active, and it is certain that Baird was well aware of developments emanating out of Philadelphia.

In 1828 Harvey Fisk first recommended Baird to the American Sunday School Union, as editor of a proposed weekly paper. "Perhaps his style of writing may not be exactly suited to an editorhsip," wrote Fisk, "but he is a man of more general religious information than any in my acquaintance. His heart is truly warm in the cause of Sunday Schools and his style would soon be good if not immediately." Fisk added that among Baird's qualifications were "fervant piety," "prudence and meekness." "Though from Princeton, he is well received by Methodists and other denominations abroad," a connection that would well be needed if the Union was to thrive as a nonsectarian

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[15]Robert Baird, The Progress and Prospects of Christianity in the United States of America; with remarks on the Subject of Slavery in America; and on the Intercourse between British and American Churches (London: Partridge and Oakey, 1851), p. 34. Religion in America, p. 344.

[16]R. Baird to Alexander Henry, Princeton, June 25, 1821 and August 1, 1821. ASSU Archives (1817-1821), 183, 185.

and national enterprise.[17]

Frederick W. Porter must have found Fisk's suggestion attractive, for shortly afterwards Baird received an invitation to join the staff at Philadelphia and to edit the paper.[18] Contingencies delayed the proposed journal, however, and the opportunity passed.[19] Another offer later in the year reached him, but he was in the midst of the common school campaign and the position the Union offered was not appealing enough to lure him away from the New Jersey Missionary Society. Baird was, however, careful to keep the door open for further negotiations, writing, "I look forward now with anxiety to the time when I can help you and I think that it will be more pleasant and more useful than teaching Latin and Greek."[20]

Throughout the period of negotiations, Robert Baird kept hoping that the editorship he craved would fall to him. He was extremely disappointed when the Union appointed Frederick A. Packard (who later achieved minor notoriety for his battles with Horace Mann over Sunday School Union books in common school libraries) instead. Baird wrote Porter that he could not understand why the Board had not

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[17]Harvey Fisk to Frederick W. Porter, Princeton, August 4, 1828. ASSU Archives (July-September, 1828), 114.

[18]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Princeton, September 11, 1828. ASSU Archives (July-September, 1828), 222.

[19]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Princeton, October 8, 1828. ASSU Archives (October-December, 1828), 22. Baird tried to urge the Union into making a decision, holding the appointment as Professor of Language at Jefferson to their attention.

[20]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Princeton, December 5, 1828. ASSU Archives (October-December, 1828), 225.

given him the appointment. He professed to be "extremely discouraged by everything," finding "but little cordial cooperation among those who profess to be friendly to good objects." Regardless of the Board's opinion, Baird was confident of his own abilities. He felt certain that he was "better fitted for that work than any other."[21]

The door to an editorship being shut, Baird found the possibilities of an agency more intriguing. He continued to bargain with Porter, suggesting, for example, that he take an agency in western Pennsylvania, near where he had been born. Porter thought that the possibility merited further discussion, and invited Baird to visit Philadelphia and continue the negotiations in person. Baird visited him in early April, 1829. Toward the end of the month, the Board reached a decision and offered Baird his appointment. Baird accepted, May 5, 1829, proposing to enter their service the first of July.[22]

At the time Robert Baird entered into its service the American Sunday School Union was undergoing a tremendous expansion. Like its sister benevolent societies, it was preparing a mass assault on the trans-Appalachian west. The work of the Union had two distinct, but complementary aspects. The society published a large number and variety of Sunday school materials, and it worked to create, revive, and maintain the Sunday schools which consumed them. Cynics might

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[21]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Princeton, December 5, 1829. ASSU Archives (January-March, 1829), 372.

[22]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Princeton, March 14, 1829; April 24, 1829; May 5, 1829. ASSU Archives (January-March, 1829), 382; (April-June, 1829), 119, 116. Harvey Fisk to F. W. Porter, Princeton, April 5, 1828. ASSU Archives (April-June, 1829), 21.

accuse the Union of worrying about the latter only to provide a market for the former, and indeed, the Union did suffer criticism from booksellers and others about its business methods. Private business operating on a profit motive could not match the Union's prices. Competing publishers complained that the Union deliberately undercut them in order to drive them out of business. Such criticisms were hardly valid, however, for the Union, or at least its parent organization, the Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union, had been publishing children's books years before other publishers sought to enter the market. In fact, the Union could be said to have created the market for such children's books as the Peter Parley series by creating large numbers of reading children.

The kinds of materials produced by the Union have been severely criticized as well, as the productions of "conscious cultural custodians and ambassadors for the adults," written by "counseling clergymen, 'scribbling women,' education-minded reformers, reform-minded educators and pamphleteers for the puerile."[23] Criticisms of this nature bear much truth. Yet the productions of the American Sunday School Union were, by and large, not a whit worse than those of their secular competitors. Many of the works of the Union were clotted with cloyingly sentimental moralisms and effulgent piety. Yet some of the works did have educational value. Calvinist respect for the intellect assured that practically any liberal discipline

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[23]John C. Crandall, "Patriotism and Humanitarian Reform in Children's Literature, 1825-1860," American Quarterly, XXI (Spring, 1969), p. 4.

which could be even remotely connected with Biblical studies would be included among the Union's publications. Thus, works on geography, natural history, and "antiquities" (i.e., the manners and customs of the Hebrews, etc.) were found in the Union's catalogues. Persons undergoing a full course of Sunday school study would receive elements of a liberal education, in spite of, if not because of, the program's stated purpose.[24] The Union's publications were designed for the schools, and not vice-versa. Created to fill a void, they represent a pioneer effort to create a literature designed for children.

As an agent, Robert Baird had little or nothing to do with the publishing end of the society's business. His primary concern was the mission field--the erection and supplying of Sunday schools. He took little interest in the general affairs of the society, at least as far as home office problems were concerned. For instance, a political controversy concerning the Union's application for a charter of incorporation to the Pennsylvania Legislature arose. A rather boisterous outcry was raised by Jacksonians and others, convinced that the society aimed at political control. Baird did not participate in the debate. Working in the field, keeping touch largely by letter, he was happy to keep out of the problem.[25]

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[24]Other examples could be mentioned. The Union published dictionaries of the Bible (and of the natural history of the Bible!). If hymns were to be sung properly, the children had to be taught how to sing. The Union published three different sets of singing lessons. Among the "visual aids" it produced were maps and wood cuts illustrating Bible themes. See the Union's _Descriptive Catalogue of Books, and other Publications, of the American Sunday School Union, designed for Sunday Schools, Juvenile, Family, and Parish Libraries, and for General Reading_ (Philadelphia: The Union, 1835). See also _Lessons for Infant Schools_ (Philadelphia: The Union, n. d.).

[25]It was quite natural for Robert Baird, the man in the field,

The theater of operations with which Baird became most concerned was the trans-Appalachian west. Eastern evangelicals looked westward with a mixture of pride and apprehension. They had visions of empire and fears of barbarism associated with the vast, rapidly settling territory. Missionary activities in the western territories began as early as 1788; about the time of the election of Andrew Jackson efforts were redoubled, as evangelicals turned their attention to the problem of western conversion. All the major benevolent societies took a part in the resurgence of missionary spirit which focused its attention on the valleys of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. The first of them to devote special efforts to the territories was the American Tract Society. In 1828 it undertook to evangelize the Northwest, setting a short period of time in which the work was to be accomplished.[26]

About the same time, the American Sunday School Union caught

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to be relatively untouched by the financial concerns of the men in the home office. After all, a possible bankruptcy of the Union did not threaten him with personal responsibility for the Union's debts as it did its managers. As far as Baird was concerned, the charter issue was irrelevant. Sunday schools would not be founded any faster if the society possessed one. Baird mentions the charter in only two letters and in both instances assigns a reason for its defeat in the Pennsylvania Legislature which has not received much attention from historians. Baird thought that much of the opposition to the Union came from Germans, who resented the kind of "cultural imperialism" the Union practiced. Baird once more urged that the Union undertake the publication of German language materials. Such a course had been urged on him by the governor and other politically important German-Americans. Feeling ran so high that Baird thought the only solution would be the establishment of a separate German auxiliary which would publish its own materials and employ its own missionaries. R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Princeton, September 28, 1829; November 9, 1829. ASSU Archives (July-September, 1829), 428; (October-December, 1829), 150.

[26]Elizabeth Twadell, "The American Tract Society, 1814-1860," Church History, XV (June, 1946), p. 123.

the spirit. At the 1828 Annual Meeting, the officers proposed to "take immediate steps to establish, or cause, or procure to be established, Sabbath Schools in every place in the United States and Territories, where there is a sufficient population."[27] The American Bible Society was not far behind, and its goal was no less grandiose. Its managers proposed to supply Bibles to "all the destitute families of the United States." Furthermore, they allowed only two years to complete the project.[28]

The twin menaces which seemed to threaten Protestant dominance in the West were infidelity (a general designation that included Universalism and indifference as well as outspokenly anti-Christian rationalism) and Roman Catholicism. In 1832, one writer estimated that there were fifty thousand organized skeptics in the United States.[29] Roman Catholics were making inroads into the Mississippi Valley as well. Three out of the four schools in Lexington, Kentucky, were Roman Catholic in 1834.[30] The evangelicals in the East thought the danger was compounded by a general prevalence of ignorance throughout the Valley. "Superstition and infidelity" preyed upon the undereducated. A proper evangelical education was a potent antidote--perhaps the surest protection for the "moral principle, patriotism, and property of the nation."[31]

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[27]J. Orin Oliphant, "The American Missionary Spirit, 1828-1835," Church History, VII (June, 1938), p. 133.

[28]Ibid., p. 131.

[29]Post, Freethought in America, p. 193.

[30]Foster, Errand of Mercy, p. 206.

[31]Beecher, Plea for the West, p. 50.

Eastern evangelicals were not the only individuals worrying about the safety of American institutions in the 1820's. Transplanted easterners registered equal concern. A resident of Ohio wrote the Union in 1828, pleading that it send missionaries west. "In most townships they never have had a Sunday school," he complained. "Many men of easy circumstances and some of handsome property cannot read and many neglect sending their children to public schools where the opportunity is offered them." From the correspondent's point of view, the situation was made more critical by the fact that Catholics had invaded the area and were establishing schools. "I am credibly informed that Protestants patronize their schools where every effort is employed to instill their sentiments in the minds of their pupils and not without an alarming degree of success," he wrote in dismay.[32] Such appeals indicated that the Mississippi Valley was ripe for a Sunday school crusade.

The American Sunday School Union made valiant attempts to answer such pleas. Robert Baird made the New England circuit, seeking to stir up interest in the needs of the West, but results were not very encouraging. The Sunday school cause had not completed its eastern organizing and was not ready for a concerted attack in the western valleys. Baird was able to convince the Hartford, Connecticut Union to pledge $400 in support of a missionary for the Mississippi, but with the exception of that happy note, his report was a sad song.[33]

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[32]Herbert C. Thompson, Jr. to Dr. Hallock, Hillsboroug [sic], Highland County, Ohio, September 18, 1828. ASSU Archives (July-September, 1829), 245.

[33]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Northhampton, Connecticut, August 4, 1829. ASSU Archives (July-September, 1829), 188.

One of the problems was that the American Sunday School Union was late in the field. Everywhere Baird went, he found himself preceded by agents of the other benevolent societies, also promoting Mississippi Valley projects! The fledgling agent was much discouraged. He wrote of his discontent to Abel Vinton, chairman of the Committee on Missions and Agencies:

> What then is to be done? Are we forever to wait until every body else is served? . . . Dear brother, let us pray more, obtain more religion. I have not got enough to be General Agent. If the Lord does not help us, vain will be all our plans. But He will help us, I am sure. Let every thing then be done with the utmost integrity & with an eye single to the glory of God.[34]

The Valley plan was on the verge of collapse; it almost seemed that a minor miracle was necessary to revive flagging interest. Strangely enough, an unexpected change of fortune did occur in the spring of 1830. A financial "angel" did appear in the form of Arthur Tappan, the most generous and consistent contributor to organized benevolence in the early 1830's. This New York Merchant took seriously the possibility that the New England culture and religion he knew as a youngster might be defeated by competing ideologies in the Mississippi Valley. Tappan donated to all the societies conducting Valley campaigns, and the amount of his contributions in behalf of their efforts amounted to at least $10,000.[35]

Perhaps more important than the gift itself was the dramatic

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[34]R. Baird to Abel Vinton, Princeton, September ?, 1829. ASSU Archives (July-September, 1829), p. 407.

[35]Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1969), pp. 49-51.

challenge which accompanied it. Tappan proposed that the society pledge itself to establish a Sunday school in every town in the Mississippi Valley, and that it raise $100,000 over a two year period to finance its campaign. As an incentive, he offered them the proportion of $2,000 equivalent to the portion of $100,000 the society raised. He also pledged an additional $2,000 for Sunday school libraries. The amount was to be doled out in five dollar sums to every "Sabbath school" in the Valley raising a matching amount.[36]

The managers of the Union lost no time in accepting Tappan's offer. Tappan was so pleased with their enthusiastic response that he removed all strings from his $4,000 donation.[37] The society adopted a resolution embodying Tappan's proposal at their Annual Meeting. If the proposed campaign excited the governors of the Union, it positively thrilled Robert Baird. He could hardly contain his enthusiasm. "No time is to be lost! No expedient which is lawful and promises success is to be left untried," he wrote Frederick W. Porter in his excitement. He threw himself into the work of arranging public meetings in Philadelphia and New York. He arranged for a circular letter on the project to be sent to the "clergy of the land" and initiated a flury of other publicity projects. It was as if he could hardly keep still: "If the Board wish me to go westward, let them direct and say when; and I go as speedily as I can pack

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[36]Arthur Tappan to F. W. Porter, New York, May 17, 1830. ASSU Archives (April-June, 1830), 234.

[37]A. Tappan to F. W. Porter, New York, May 24, 1830. ASSU Archives (April-June, 1830), 260.

up," he wrote.[38]

Robert Baird ached to go west. At first he planned to take a common agency in western Pennsylvania, working the neighborhoods around the town of his birth. He proceeded so far as to prepare to move his family west of the mountains, soliciting the Union for a $500 loan to settle his debts.[39] The Board had other plans for him however. Much work remained to be done in the East. The outstanding successes of the meetings he had arranged demonstrated that the General Agent they had hired was a valuable asset--too valuable to squander on a backwoods agency. Baird would get his chance to go west later. For the first few weeks he would organize the campaign in the East. Thus Baird cancelled his plans for moving his family to the West, and instead moved them to Philadelphia.[40]

The tasks which fell to Robert Baird while organizing and supervising the Mississippi Valley Enterprise revolved around four areas of responsibility--promoting favorable public relations, securing capital, recruiting, training, and organizing a staff, and

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[38] R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Philadelphia, May 27, 1830. ASSU Archives (April-June, 1830), 275. The meetings Baird organized were eminently successful. Between 500 and 1,000 had to be turned away from the first New York meeting. A second was held less than two weeks later, and a third in Brooklyn shortly thereafter. The amount raised in Philadelphia and New York during the first flury of enthusiasm was in excess of $30,000. R. Baird to F. W. Porter, New York, June 12, 1830; June 22, 1830. ASSU Archives (April-June, 1830), 345, 349. Wyatt-Brown, Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery, p. 50.

[39] R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Philadelphia, July 9, 1830. ASSU Archives (July-September, 1830), 511.

[40] R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Philadelphia, July 13, 1830. ASSU Archives (July-September, 1830), 531.

distributing supplies. The problems facing the Union were not unlike those facing a business undergoing expansion as it sought to penetrate a new market. In a sense, the American Sunday School Union _was_ a business, recording its profits in converted souls rather than accumulated cash. The benevolent societies were the first national businesses in the United States. It is not improbable that the eastern merchants and capitalists which supported and operated the societies gained experience which was valuable to them in conducting their secular affairs.

Each of the tasks falling to Baird had its own particular problems, but there were general problems as well which manifested themselves in every area. Most of them were peculiar to the territory and market the Union sought to penetrate. In many ways the Mississippi Valley was a reluctant market. While certain elements in western communities welcomed the ministrations of eastern evangelicals, other elements resisted them adamantly. The sources of antimission sentiment were bewilderingly diverse. An amalgam of theological objections, regional biases, cultural resentments, and economic differences provided ample fuel for antimissionism.

Hyper-Calvinistic sects objected to all mission activities on theological grounds. Home-grown western evangelicals resented the invasion of smooth-cheeked Doctors of Divinity from the East, consciously or unconsciously flaunting airs of educational, theological, and cultural superiority wherever they went, and at the same time demonstrating an almost total ignorance of the realities of life in the West. Citizens in western regions resented the

implication that they were numbered among the heathen in need of salvation by imported means. They also reacted to snobbish eastern accusations of moral laxity and cultural barbarism.

Western capitalists saw the fund-raising activities of the agents of benevolent societies as yet another instance of coastal economic imperialism, draining capital from the local economy and siphoning it eastward, enforcing the hinterland's economic subordination. In the South, slaveowners and their cultural allies thought that the interest of benevolent societies in Negro education disguised abolitionist plans of subversion.[41] In many western communities, combinations of these forces made agents of benevolent societies about as welcome as prohibitionists at a distillers' convention. Robert Baird was aware of western resentments and sought to conduct his operations in a way that could soothe hurt feelings as much as possible.

Baird recognized that support in the evangelical centers of the East was crucial to success in the West. First it was necessary to create interest in Sunday schools, and then to convert that interest into moral and financial support. Immediatedly upon entering the Union's service, he consulted with such leading eastern

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[41]Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Antimission Movement in the Jacksonian South: A Study in Regional Folk Culture," Journal of Southern History. XXXVI (November, 1970), pp. 501-529. Nothing discovered in the course of research for this study contradicts Wyatt-Brown's analysis. All that might be added is that the archives of the American Sunday School Union contain evidence that similar combinations of forces fostered antimissionism in certain northern communities as well, especially in cultural and economic backwaters in Appalachian Pennsylvania, upstate New York, and rural Maine. Comparison of northern and southern anti-mission activities might prove interesting.

evangelicals as President Francis Wayland of Brown University and Chauncy Goodrich, President of Yale, soliciting their ideas and urging them to write articles in the Union's behalf.[42]

Baird's rapid survey of the East convinced him that the public was far from adequately informed about the Union's operations. Many thought that the society earned huge sums on the sale of its publications and needed no financial support. Ignorance about the society's operations was not confined to the outlying districts. Even in the Union's home city

> the mass of the Christian community . . . which is favourable to Sunday Schools & to the American Sunday School Union are far from having much knowledge of the subject. Their attention has not with few exceptions been much directed to the subject in a definite manner. They have heard many allusions to Sunday Schools & take it for granted that they are good things, but their vast importance in a literary, moral, civil, & religious point of view has been far from appreciated.

Believing this to be true, Baird conducted a concerted public education campaign, endeavoring "to show the value of this institution & to lay a foundation for the benevolence of the people in a solid and permanent and deep conviction of the importance of Sunday Schools, & that nothing but this institution under God will save us from the general prevalence of infidelity."[43] He set out to sell Sunday schools as one might sell calicoes or hats, the main difference being that he probably was more convinced of the truth

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[42]R. Baird to F. A. Packard, Boston, July 29, 1829. ASSU Archives (July-September, 1829), 141.

[43]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Philadelphia, March 8, 1830. ASSU Archives (January-March, 1830), 367.

of his hyperbolic statements than commercial advertisers were of theirs.

A part of any good advertising campaign is the testimonial. Baird made certain that the Union received its share. Francis Wayland wrote to assure his fellow Baptists of New England of the worthiness of the cause at Baird's instigation. Archibald Alexander of Princeton was persuaded to influence Presbyterians in the same way. Baird knew who the men of influence in each denomination were, and worked with them directly. The negotiations often proceeded delicately. The officers of the Union demanded final approval of anything published under their auspices, in order that damaging sectarian sentiments might be expunged. While a necessary precaution, the Union's censors often exceeded their charge and corrected for style as well as content. Anonymous authors of the Union's juvenile books might not be offended, but when prominent clergymen found that their prose had been altered, there were sometimes hot words exchanged. Archibald Alexander threatened to refuse to let the essay he wrote appear under his name when the Committee on Publications tampered with his style without his approval. Baird knew that Alexander's name was more important to the Union's cause than the smoothness of the essay. After all, 500 Presbyterian ministers had once been Alexander's students. Baird complained to Frederick A. Packard about the committee's indiscretion and gave him explicit instructions on the proper way to salve Alexander's injured vanity.[44]

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[44]R. Baird to F. A. Packard, New York, July 14, 1829. ASSU Archives (July-September, 1829), 67.

Once testimonial essays had been solicited, Baird directed his efforts toward assuring that they received as wide a distribution as possible. He importuned the editors of religious and secular newspapers and journals to publish them. When all other forms of persuasion failed, he quietly arranged for the Union to subsidize the issues of the periodicals in which complimentary articles appeared. Not only did such a course assure wide distribution, it also went a long way toward assuring a favorable review of the Union's publications in the periodicals' pages.[45]

Baird's New Jersey experiences had taught him the value of the press. He sought to teach the Union what he had learned, urging that the materials in the Union's journal be varied as much as possible in order that a wide readership be attracted. He reminded Packard that Presbyterian and Congregational newspapers alone had weekly circulations of 50,000 copies, and warned him that if the Union's paper concentrated exclusively on Sunday school news, other papers might be driven "off the ground." Such a circumstance would be a "calamity." He also suggested that Packard make a more determined effort to get Sunday school publicity included in the "more than 100 common papers" which might be expected to be friendly to the cause. He thought that Packard might send an extra

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[45]R. Baird to F. A. Packard, Princeton, July 11, 1829. ASSU Archives (July-September, 1829), 53. Baird persuaded Packard to contribute thirty-five dollars to Charles Hodge, in order that Archibald Alexander's essay might appear in Hodge's influential but struggling Biblical Reportory and Princeton Review. From that time onward, the Review gave the Sunday School movement enthusiastic support. Baird himself published articles on Sunday schools and the American Sunday School Union in its 1830, 1831, and 1836 volumes.

town's leading citizen (if pious or at least friendly to the cause) would preside, while the pastor of the host church acted as the meeting's secretary. After the meeting opened with prayer, Baird would give a fifteen or twenty minute speech, explaining the Union's methods and purposes and presenting reasons why Sunday schools were social and spiritual necessities.[49] Following Baird's speech, one of the friends of the cause would introduce resolutions supporting the Union's Valley Enterprise and urging subscriptions be entertained in its support. A subscription list would be posted, and during the course of the canvass, ministers and local worthies would give short addresses urging their fellow citizens to commit themselves to the effort. Following the taking of subscriptions, an anthem and prayer closed the meeting. The procedure was typical of most benevolent agencies, and, in a sense, it became almost a national institution in itself, **in many locations enlisting entire communities in the furtherance of some good work or another.**

If the meeting proved successful and interest seemed high, Baird would remain in town, preaching, collecting payments on subscriptions, and visiting among the town's substantial citizens. In

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[49]The arguments Baird offered in behalf of Sunday schools did not differ significantly from those he used to further common schools. Although the religious intent is more overt, the civilizing and culture-bringing attributes receive their share of attention. Baird considered Sunday schools supplemental to common school education in places where it was available, and the only alternative form of mass education in the many locations where it was not. "The Seventh Annual Report of the American Sunday School Union," Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review, III (July, 1831), pp. 398-407, passim. "Descriptive Catalogue of Books, and Other Publications of the American Sunday School Union, designed for Sunday Schools, Juvenile, Family, and Parish Libraries, and for General Reading," Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review, VIII (January, 1836), pp. 96-114. Henry M. Baird attributes both these anonymous review articles to his father, Robert Baird.

some instances a second meeting was held a week or so after the first, in order to "complete the gleaning." If, on the other hand, it seemed "nothing much could be done," Baird would proceed to the next stop on his itinerary, preaching on the Sabbath and hoping for better success.

Under favorable circumstances the meetings could be highly successful. During the summer of 1830 Baird visited Cincinnati, Ohio, and collected subscriptions for donations totalling more than $2350 at two "very interesting" meetings.[50] Donations came in all denominations. At one meeting Baird reported contributions as small as twelve and one-half cents and as large as twenty dollars. Nor were all contributions in hard cash. One enthusiast donated 100 copies of _The Life of Catherine Brown_ to the cause, and a music teacher in Cincinnati donated "the profits of 1/4 tuition of a singing school each year." Other unusual gifts included a shawl donated by a Hartford, Connecticut woman, a watch given by a gentleman of New Haven, and $1,000 worth of temperance tracts contributed by the friends of that cause in Albany, New York.[51]

Baird conducted several fund-raising meetings as successful as those in Cincinnati. Frequently the results were less encouraging. Circumstances came up over which Baird had little control. Sometimes the "leading men" were out of town. More than once Baird ran into

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[50] R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Lexington, Kentucky, August 18, 1830. ASSU Archives (July-September, 1830), 766.

[51] R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Philadelphia, January 11, 1830. ASSU Archives (January-March, 1830), 66; Lexington, Kentucky, August 18, 1830. ASSU Archives (July-September, 1830), 766; Philadelphia, June 21, 1833. ASSU Archives (1833, A-B), 175; Albany, New York, November 6, 1832. ASSU Archives (1832, A-B), 242.

epidemics of cholera which effectively closed down the affected area's benevolence interests. Another problem was sectarian squabbling among the denominations. Baird deplored sectarianism, of course, but he often managed to work around it, finding himself able to further the cause of Sunday schools even while frustrated in his attempts to promote the Union spirit.

Baird's solution to sectarian rivalry and dispute was simple. If a denomination or congregation refused to support the Union's efforts, he would help raise money for a Sunday school plan of its own. He felt it important that all denominations take part in the community appeal, no matter how the spoils were divided. Thus he willingly acceded when the Episcopal Bishop of Richmond, Virginia, demanded that "the Episcopalian subscription at Richmond should be appropriated to the aid of Episcopal schools in Ohio or any other Western State & to furnish such books as they desire."[52] In consequence of Baird's cooperative attitude, the Bishop agreed to chair the meeting.

The Managers of the American Sunday School Union might have displayed some annoyance at the thought that the agent they were paying was aiding others who refused to cooperate in their efforts, and indeed, Baird was more oriented to the cause than to the organization. Yet Baird realized that aid to <u>any</u> Sunday school organization ultimately aided the Union. Once Sunday schools had become established institutions in an area they tended to generate

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[52]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Philadelphia, November 27, 1830. ASSU Archives (October-December, 1830), 328.

other Sunday schools, as groups of Christians sought to emulate their success. If the Episcopalian Sunday school refused to use Union materials, a neighboring church might do so.

Sectarianism seemed to cause Baird far less trouble in his fund-raising efforts than the competition of the agents of other benevolent societies did. During a New England tour Baird wrote Porter, "There is now no place of any great importance where I can do much at present in this region owing to recent applications for other societies."[53] Similar complaints filled his letters to the Union's headquarters in Philadelphia. He visited Rochester in the summer of 1833, only to find that agents representing Lane Seminary and the South Carolina Seminary as well as those of the other benevolent organizations had preceded him. Rather than annoy people who were being constantly dunned, he made no attempt at presenting the Union's cause. His reticence must have disturbed the Union, for he felt it necessary to defend his course, writing,

> I will not force an effort at the wrong time or any time. It only prejudices the cause & gains no equivalent. The Committee & the Board know me to be anxious enough to promote the cause & too much so to neglect any proper opportunity of advancing it.[54]

Baird understood that benevolence could go to the well once too often. Churches were beginning to resent the persistent appeals from importuning benevolence agents. The over-exuberance

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[53]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Boston, September 26, 1832. ASSU Archives (1832, A-B), 238.

[54]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Rochester, August 28, 1833. ASSU Archives (1833, A-B), 182.

of some was turning opinion against the rest.[55] Some churchmen were reduced to drastic measures in order to curb the incessant pleas of organized benevolence. The pastors at Albany, New York, under the leadership of the Rev. Albert Barnes, closed their churches to all outside charities, organizing instead an annual canvass. Churchgoers were asked to subscribe "what they will give to such objects," followed by "an annual division of the spoils." While Baird did not like the system, he appreciated the contingencies which forced men "friendly to benevolence" into adopting it.[56]

Baird came to doubt the wisdom of continually resorting to special appeals as the prime source of income for benevolent societies. Even an agent as successful as he was could only visit a few places each season, and the amount of time his schedule allowed him to spend in each place did not permit coverage in a very thorough manner. A siege of bad weather or illness could ruin a campaign in an area usually receptive to it. Artificially generated interest had a way of dying as quickly as it was born. The solution to the problem, as Baird saw it, was a vastly expanded agency system, systematically visiting all the churches at least once a year. Such a policy would fully exploit the giving potential of evangelical Protestantism in a way no other could. Baird could visit a region like upstate New York once a year at the most, yet he felt certain

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[55]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Boston, December 21, 1831. ASSU Archives (1831, A-B), 221.

[56]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Albany, October 29, 1832. ASSU Archives (1832, A-B), 241.

that the region could support no less than three Sunday school men full time. The donations such men collected would make up in consistency what they lacked in magnitude.[57]

Continued interest at the local level was the only assurance of the ultimate success of the Sunday school cause. Borrowing an idea from Jeremiah Evarts of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Baird urged the Managers of the American Sunday School Union to make a concerted effort to turn every congregation in which there was any interest at all in Sunday schools into a miniature Sunday School Union, complete with all the organizational trappings. Each such "mini-Union" would be enrolled as an American Sunday School Union Auxiliary. He suggested further that each "Union" be encouraged to elect a full complement of officers, for that would give "the whole more dignity and permanence." Baird understood the status hunger of "classless" Americans and sought to capitalize upon it. Baird assured the Union that if such a plan were inaugurated, an annual visit by a competent local agent would obviate the need for special appeals, in most instances.[58]

Although Robert Baird was a fund-raiser without peer, the needs of the Union always exceeded its means. Baird taxed his imagination thinking of ways to increase donations. He even suggested that the Union give copies of its publications as premiums for donations in excess of five dollars. Problems of finance and staff

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[57]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Utica, New York, September 2, 1833. ASSU Archives (1833, A-B), 183.

[58]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Huntingdon, September 9, 1829. ASSU Archives (July-September, 1829), 337.

recruitment were interrelated. Money was needed to pay men in the field; men in the field were needed to raise money. As the Union expanded rapidly in the 1830's, the interrelationship caused considerable strain on the organization, and made Baird's job more difficult.

Baird dabbled in missionary recruitment in the months following his appointment to the staff of the American Sunday School Union. As his responsibility for the Mississippi Valley Enterprise grew, he began to consider the matter more seriously. The problem of missionary development had two aspects: first, men with the proper qualifications had to be located and enlisted in the organization's service; second, the work of the missionaries and agents had to be systematized.

Benevolent societies traditionally drew most of their laborers from among eastern evangelicals. The system seemed to work well, as long as the primary mission field lay in the East. When the societies tried to penetrate west of the mountains, however, they noted with dismay that their ministrations were often coldly received. Lacking any insight into the reason, easterners could only attribute the unfriendliness of their reception to the moral and spiritual degeneracy of the western population.

Baird came from the West himself, and if he had lost his insight into western attitudes during his years among eastern evangelicals, he quickly regained it on his first trip west of the mountains under Union auspices. In the late summer and early fall of 1830, Baird visited the Ohio Valley, stopping a good portion of

the time in the rural environs of Pittsburgh, where he had been born. Talking with old friends, he obtained insight into western anti-missionism, determining that eastern attitudes were much to blame. For all their education, eastern missionaries knew "nothing about the West." If they were to be any use to benevolence they had to be "taught everything." The trouble was that few were willing pupils. In their ignorance, such men, out West, did more harm than good. The Union could make better use of them back East, raising money for the Valley Enterprise.[59]

As Baird understood the situation, the key to winning the West was to use western men. Baird knew that eastern fund-raising and western missionizing required different sorts of men. Like all efficient personnel managers, he tried to fit the man to the job. The Rev. William C. Boardman, for example, seemed to have all the characteristics of a successful fund-raiser, for he was an "active, driving man," and perhaps more important, "a good beggar."[60] Such a man was ideally suited for a New England agency. Baird doubted that such men would have much success in the West, however, for many westerners already suspected that missionaries from the East were little more than self-interested mendicants. A different sort of personality was needed for the West. Among the attributes Baird saw in successful western missionaries were piety, an ability to preach well

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[59]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Pittsburgh, September 15, 1830. ASSU Archives (July-September, 1830), 942.

[60]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Salem, Massachusetts, September 20, 1832. ASSU Archives (1832, A-B), 228.

in the popular style, judiciousness, and perseverance.[61]

Baird recognized that eastern missionaries could not simply be sent home. Some of them were not beyond saving, and with proper training, would be kept from offending western feelings. He determined that most new recruits for the Valley Enterprise would be local men, however, conducting their missions in the neighborhoods with which they were most familiar. Until such men could be recruited, Baird felt that the prudent course would be to put all missionary operations in the West under the control of a Western man who knew the field intimately. Baird suggested that the Board appoint the Rev. Alexander Logan of Pittsburgh to the position, but the description of it and the qualifications he considered its occupant to need suggest that Baird thought that no one was quite as qualified for the position as he was himself.[62]

Baird thought that no single step would do as much to expedite the Valley Enterprise as rationalizing the missionary system would. In their hurry to get operations under way, the managers had allowed missionary work to develop haphazardly. Some areas were oversupplied with agents, while others were destitute. What was worse, the program had grown so rapidly that no one, from the top to the bottom, knew the state of the operations with any precision. Baird set out to create some semblance of order. Much

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[61]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, "Steamboat Statesman," March 30, 1832. ASSU Archives (1832, A-B), 228.

[62]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Baltimore, November 18, 1830. ASSU Archives (October-December, 1830), 284.

as a business executive would organize a hierarchy of salesmen, district managers, regional managers, and sales manager, Baird proposed a new scheme for the Valley Enterprise.

At the top of Baird's pyramid was the General Agent. It was his task to

> correspond with our agents and missionaries in the West, apportion the work among them, and give them each advice as they need (and they truly need a great deal), suggest the best modes of doing work [and] caution them against the prejudices they are likely to encounter . . .[63]

Under the General Agent would be Regional Agents, "a common agent in each state" and, at the bottom, such missionaries "as might be needed."[64]

The choice of the term "missionary" as the title for field workers was unfortunate. It carried with it paternalistic overtones and conjured up visions of the superior few ministering among the inferior many. Many westerners saw an inference in the term that they were considered by easterners as little better than the dark-skinned heathen of foreign lands. The title had little specific meaning, and its application was somewhat arbitrary. Usually, but not always, the term "missionary" was reserved for those men who served the Union for small periods of time in limited geographic areas. Otherwise, missionaries labored much as agents did. Baird recognized that the use of the title injured the cause. James E.

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[63]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Baltimore, November 8, 1830. ASSU Archives (October-December, 1830), 223.

[64]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Salem, Massachusetts, September 20, 1832. ASSU Archives (1832, A-B), 237.

Welch, a Baptist minister and Sunday school man who often travelled with Baird, wrote Porter in both their names, outlining their objections:

> The name "Missionary" is in itself very unfortunate in the West, owing to the course pursued by many well-meaning brethren who have, in that Character, visited this Country, and who, making a too liberal use of Bunyan's "Muck-rake," have scraped together every unfortunate circumstance of character or conduct of the people and then have filled their letters with tales of woe. And I know not who acts most unwisely, he who writes or he who prints them, and thus sends them back to the incalculable injury of the cause of benevolence and to the high offending of the people.[65]

Unfortunately, the term was traditional in the movement, and no suggestion from Baird or Welch could persuade the evangelicals back in Philadelphia that it was harmful enough to change. Aside from enlisting the aid of a few men who were unwilling to perform holy work without a sanctified title, it profitted the Union little. Baird's use of local men in the position whenever possible probably mitigated its worst evils. A "missionary" who was also a neighbor and social equal could not be nearly as objectionable as an outsider with educational and social pretensions.

Western resentment of eastern social pretensions was one of the two major difficulties Baird sought to overcome. The other was rampant sectarianism. The gentle influences of urban ecumenicism had not penetrated into the wilder sections of the Valley states. Men took their theoretical differences seriously, and seemed to relish theological bickering as much as they did backwoods brawling. In the

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[65] James E. Welch to F. W. Porter, New Orleans, February 11, 1831. ASSU Archives (1831, T-W), 4340.

best of times relations between the denominations were formal and restrained. In the worst of times the struggles could be vicious and bitter.

In some instances large regions of states became religious battlegrounds. Throughout much of the Valley campaign large areas of Kentucky were closed to Union efforts because of the Campbellite disruption. Welch, who was travelling with Baird at the time, wrote, "but little good can be done by visiting the Baptist Association this fall for they are so busy killing Campbellites that they have no time to listen to me."[66] Even where the denominations were not hotly engaged, skirmishes between local congregations often disturbed the peace. Sometimes these rivalries created strange theological bedfellows. Welch summed up the situation in Shelbyville, Kentucky, in four trenchant sentences:

> The Baptists and the Methodists have had a prodigious quarrel.
> The Methodists and Presbyterians have had a most bitter quarrel.
> The Baptists and Presbyterians agree.
> Miserable state of things![67]

In the face of these troubles Baird adapted his principle of using local men to fit such situations by appointing several missionaries to work the same area--each confining his operations

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[66] J. E. Welch to F. W. Porter, Frankfort, Kentucky, August 23, 1830. ASSU Archives (July-September, 1830), 803. Welch seems to have been a man of great good humor. Unfortunately, none of it seems to have worn off on Baird. His letters make interesting and entertaining reading.

[67] J. E. Welch to F. W. Porter, Shelbyville, Kentucky, September 2, 1830. ASSU Archives (July-September, 1830), 879.

to his own denomination. Contrary to the experiences (or excuses) of others, he had little trouble finding local men willing to serve the Sunday school cause. Practically every letter Baird sent to Porter contained the names of several appointees. The denominations they represented reflected the population characteristics of the area concerned. Thus in Kentucky and Tennessee Baird appointed few Old or New School Presbyterians, preferring to recruit Methodists, Baptists, and Cumberland Presbyterians. The men whose names Baird forwarded were generally middle-aged, well-established, and well-known members of their respective communions. Baird attracted them to the Union's service by offering good salaries and independent working conditions, trusting that they knew the territory better than he did.[68]

Baird chose his men with care, appointing none without a personal interview and strong recommendations from others in the area. He chose them for their effectiveness, rather than their possession of any abstract qualifications. Some of the qualities eastern evangelicals associated with the Union values were ignored. Baird appointed the Rev. Simpson Shepherd, a Methodist minister, State Agent for Tennessee, even though he had been bankrupt and lacked a classical education. Baird had to insist upon Shepherd's appointment, because the Committee of Missions and Agencies looked askance at men of this kind. All Baird noticed was that Shepherd had established seventy-nine Sunday schools and raised $1,400 in

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[68]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Nashville, April 12, 1832. ASSU Archives (1832, A-B), 230.

support of Sunday school libraries in only a nine-month period. On top of that, he was a Sunday school Methodist in a state where Methodist influence merited a Methodist State Agent. According to Baird's pragmatic standards, he was just the man for the job.[69]

In an even more pointed instance, Baird appointed John Beard, a nearly illiterate Cumberland Presbyterian minister, missionary in the area around Nashville, Tennessee. At a time when Cumberland Presbyterian ignorance was the butt of evangelical ridicule, Baird selected him because he was "zealous, deeply interested in the work, pious, and conscientious." Nor was Beard the only member of that denomination Baird appointed. Cumberland Presbyterians were thriving in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Arkansas Territory. Baird defended his appointments to Porter, pointing out that

> their ministers are very illiterate but driving, thorough-going preachers, perfect tornadoes & they carry every thing before them in many places. And it is saying much for them that they are considered fully equal if not superior to the Methodists in zeal and powerful action.

It was politic for the Union to cultivate the friendship of such men, and impolitic to "look too high in seeking qualifications among them, for many of their ignorant men who can hardly write at all, who have perhaps never written a letter in their lives, are very efficient men of action."[70] Baird watched the progress of his home-grown

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[69] R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Nashville, August 17, 1831. ASSU Archives (1831, A-B), 212.

[70] Ibid. Baird appointed at least six Cumberland Presbyterians in the years 1831-1832. He even was successful in attracting local Baptists to the Union's standard. One of Baird's recruits, the Rev. John F. Muse, had previously been a leader among the antimission Baptists in middle Tennessee. R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Nashville, April 23, 1832, ASSU Archives (1832, A-B), 231.

missionaries with satisfaction. The success they had in planting Sunday schools convinced him that eastern social attitudes and not eastern cultural institutions were being rejected in the West. If the institutions survived, the attitudes would appear in time, as indeed they did. In fact, the values and traditions evangelicals transplanted to the South and Middle West were to last much longer in their conservative soil than in the region of their origin.

Eighty to one hundred missionaries busily established more than 4,000 Sunday schools during the height of the Mississippi Valley Enterprise.[71] Most of the missionaries participating had been selected by Robert Baird, and many of them had been trained by him. Choosing and training men seemed to be the part of his job he enjoyed most. Schools once established had to be maintained. The local missionaries remained on the field to assure that the schools were conducted properly. Local "friends of schools" willingly volunteered to teach, but books and other classroom materials had to be supplied from outside. Baird probably never dreamed that expediting the distribution of Sunday school materials would be one of his major concerns: it turned out to be his most persistent problem.

With the exception of isolated pockets of resistance, the West enthusiastically adopted the Sunday school institution. The settlers migrating from the East had left their cultural and educational institutions behind, and many of them felt the lack. They rightly resented being called "barbarians," but they feared barbarism

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[71] Rice, The Sunday-School Movement and the American Sunday-School Union, p. 201.

nevertheless, and despite all their defensiveness about eastern criticism, it surrounded them. Frontier schools and academies were erected as soon as community means allowed. In the meantime, Sunday schools filled the gap between aspirations and capabilities. Consequently, schools opened faster than the system of supply could meet their needs. In 1831, Baird wrote the Union's managers, desperately urging them to expedite shipments of books. Fifty schools in east Tennessee alone were "languishing" for want of teaching materials.[72] The same need was felt in nearly every western state. Schools were ready, teachers willing, but the American Sunday School Union seemed unable to meet the demand its efforts had created.

The problem was essentially one of logistics. The society could easily produce the books, but lacked any experience in distributing them nationally. Abysmal transportation conditions from the coast to the interior compounded the problem. It took a minimum of forty days to ship books by land from Philadelphia to the Knoxville area. The time required to process orders extended the period between order and delivery to two months--if the weather was good.[73] Robert Baird felt his honor was committed to fulfilling the hopes his actions had stimulated. He turned his attention toward creating a rational distribution system for the society's materials.

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[72]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Knoxville, Tennessee, July 25, 1831. ASSU Archives (1831, A-B), 208. William S. Potts of St. Louis complained bitterly of the situation. The Union had come in, made brave promises, solicited funds, and left the local forces high and dry with less than $25 worth of books on hand for all the Sunday schools in Missouri. W. S. Potts to F. W. Porter, St. Louis, Missouri, July 11, 1831. ASSU Archives (1831, N-R), 3512.

[73]*Ibid.*

The American Sunday School Union had been using book agencies or depositories to distribute their materials since the early 1820s. In 1827 there were 67 of them, all in the East. In 1829, a western depository was established in Cincinnati, as an adjunct of the society's first permanent agency. But at the beginning of the Valley Enterprise it was the only distribution center west of the mountains.[74] To describe the Union's neglect of the problem of distribution as an oversight would be an understatement. It threatened the enterprise with chaos. In defense of the Union, it must be said that they were attempting what no other organization had tried before. No other institution, religious or secular, had yet sought to establish a national market on as wide a scale. Building upon the society's experience with the depository system, Baird attempted to rationalize the distribution of the Union's materials--with only partial success.

The depository system which was used by the Union prior to the Valley Enterprise was hardly a system at all. There was little or no inventory control. No two depositories were run exactly alike. In some instances the Union rented a room and hired an agent. In others, they rented the space necessary from a merchant and payed him a small stipend to manage the materials. In yet other instances jobbers took books on consignment, receiving a percentage of the gross profits for their labors. None of those methods seemed to be precisely what the western campaign needed.

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[74] American Journal of Education, XV, pp. 712-13.

Baird had no authority over the matter. He could only make suggestions, which the Depository Committee could accept or reject at its pleasure. The extent to which the committee accepted his recommendations indicates the value they placed on his judgment.

Baird's first concern was that the western depositories be systematically organized. Problems associated with the uncertainties of transportation forbade relying on the kind of random growth which characterized depositories in the East. Baird proposed that major distribution centers should be located in such sizeable towns and cities along the Ohio and Mississippi river systems as Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Louisville, St. Louis, Memphis, and New Orleans. These were to be stocked with books valued from $3,000 to $4,000 each.[75] Each distribution point would serve as a regional warehouse and supply branch depositories in the secondary towns in their vicinities. In turn, the subregional auxiliaries would supply even smaller branches. Baird envisioned Knoxville, for example, as a branch depository supplied by either Louisville or Cincinnati, and supplying in turn five to ten local depositories scattered throughout eastern Tennessee. The small depositories were to be capitalized at rates of from fifty to two hundred dollars.[76]

The last position in the distribution chain was occupied by

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[75]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, "Steamboat Argus," September 12, 1831. ASSU Archives (1831, A-B), 214. Considering that some of the most popular Sunday school books sold for as little as three dollars per 100, a $4,000 inventory included a sizable number of books.

[76]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Nashville, August 17, 1831. ASSU Archives (1831, A-B), 211.

the local missionary, who was to carry a basic library with him on all his visitations. Thus no school would lack materials even a single day.[77] Baird sought to make his system even more flexible by recommending a free exchange of stock and unlimited credit between depositories. Thus inventories in the West would have remained fluid, ready to be redistributed to meet fluctuations in demand.

Had Baird's program been implemented in full, the Union's distribution problems would have ended. The plan had a major drawback however, in that it cost more than the society could bear. Printing costs represented the society's only fixed expense. Officers and agents could be employed or released in accordance with the rate at which donations flowed into the society's coffers. Books once ordered had to be paid for, and froze capital until sold: the Union did not have resources great enough to invest in the amount of stock Baird's plan would have required them to maintain. As it was, depositories represented a considerable drain on the society's resources. Local groups usually provided one-fourth to one-half the capital necessary to maintain a depository. The rest was supplied by the Union out of its general funds. Receipts from orders, together with donations to the cause, did not cover the expenses of the Mississippi Valley Enterprise. At its conclusion the Union was $75,000 in debt.[78] Considering that the absence of a charter made the managers personally

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[77]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Frankfort, Kentucky, August 23, 1830. ASSU Archives (July-September, 1830), 797.

[78]Rice, <u>The Sunday-School Movement and the American Sunday-School Union</u>, p. 320. Baird was well aware of the tremendous expenses involved. He suggested that the Sunday School Union, American

responsible for that sum, they acted bravely extending themselves as far as they did.

Even without the full implementation of Baird's plan, distribution problems began to ease by 1833. He had succeeded in establishing depositories throughout the West, and raising funds to stock them. Even if they were not run as systematically as Baird wished, they filled the Union's needs quite admirably. Managers of the depositories did cooperate with each other in most instances. In cases where they failed to show the proper spirit, Baird did not hesitate to suggest that they be removed from the position. When the keeper of the depository at Louisville refused to give "three of the most respectable men in Bolling Green [sic]" short-term credit, Baird immediately suggested that it be moved from his dry-goods store to the emporium of the local apothecary, a less tight-fisted man.[79]

With all its shortcomings, the Mississippi Valley Enterprise was still a considerable success. Friends of benevolence contributed

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Bible Society, and the American Tract Society maintain joint depositories in order that expenses be reduced to a minimum. The tract society seemed to endorse the proposal, but the Union did not act upon it, indicating that the benevolent societies were not quite willing to practice the cooperation they preached. R. Baird to F. W. Porter, St. Louis, January 14, 1831. ASSU Archives (1831, A-B), 191.

[79]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Cincinnati, May 10, 1832. ASSU Archives (1832, A-B), 232. Baird and the Union learned from the mistakes they discovered in the way the Mississippi Valley campaign had been conducted. He sought to have the depository system established and paid for before missionaries were sent into the field, which partly explains why so few schools were established. The money for the campaign ran out, partly because of the 1837 financial crisis, before the missionary phase of the five year campaign got fully underway. R. Baird to F. W. Porter, "Steam Boat John David Mungin from Savannah to Charleston," March 9, 1834. ASSU Archives (1834, A-C), 195.

over $60,000 in its behalf and thousands of Sunday schools were organized. Baird's only regret was that the Managers of the Union turned their attention elsewhere after the allotted two-year period of the Enterprise had expired. He felt that the first years had done little more than lay the groundwork for the real good which still remained to be done. During the course of the campaign he had travelled 19,000 miles,[80] raising money in the East and helping spend it in the West. He was justly proud of the results of his efforts.

In 1833 the Union attempted another "great object," supplying the South with Sunday schools in the same way it had supplied the West. The project was not successful. Baird had little part in it, for he left the Sunday School Union in 1834. He made tours of the deep South in 1831 and 1834, without much success, the single exception being in New Orleans, where he was able to raise $1,000 for a depository, in spite of the fact that one of the city's Presbyterian churches was in the throes of division.[81]

Baird seemed reluctant to attribute his southern failures to antimission sentiments. Perhaps he was unwilling to consider the possibility that any major section of the country could fail to

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[80] R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Philadelphia, June 2, 1832. ASSU Archives (1832, A-B), 234.

[81] R. Baird to F. W. Porter, "Steamboat Mt. Vernon on the way from New Orleans to Mobile," February 15, 1831. ASSU Archives (1831, A-B), 193. Baird's New Orleans success might be partly explained by the sizable contingent of wealthy ex-Yankee merchants living there. Jules Koch, "Origins of New England Protestantism in New Orleans," South Atlantic Quarterly, XXIX (January, 1930), pp. 60-76.

respond to the appeal of organized benevolence. Instead, he blamed a host of other causes. In Raleigh, North Carolina, nothing could be attempted because the leading ministers and wealthy men were out of town. Norfolk, Virginia, was in the midst of a financial crisis. The weather was too bad to attempt anything at Columbia, South Carolina. Four banks had closed in Washington, D. C. He was successful, to a degree, in Augusta, Georgia, where about $470 were subscribed for the establishment of a local depository, but even in that instance Baird felt it necessary to offer an excuse. More would have been raised, he claimed, it there had not been extreme pressure on the money market. In only one instance did he refer directly to sectional antagonisms. Charlestown was unpromising because "_Nullification_ and the dissensions which it has created . . . have embittered every thing. You can have no idea of the great evil which these political difficulties have occasioned. Families, churches, and neighborhoods have been rent asunder by them; and every thing good is prostrate."[82] Otherwise, Baird took little interest in the effect of political affairs upon religious expansion.

Enthusiasm for the Southern Enterprise was fairly high in the North. Meetings in Hartford, Boston, and New Haven subscribed funds which approached a total of nearly $3,000. But even in circles where benevolent objects received their friendliest hearings the Southern

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[82] R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Raleigh, March 26, 1834; Norfolk, April 10, 1834; Washington, D. C., April 15, 1834; Augusta, Georgia, February 26, 1834. ASSU Archives (1834, A-C), 172, 191, 190, 196. H. M. Baird, _Robert Baird_, p. 81.

Enterprise attracted far less support than the Valley Enterprise, partly because northerners were more eager to help their friends and relatives in the West than the relative strangers in the southern regions. Also, many thought that the second appeal lost some of its effectiveness because it followed the first too closely. Overstimulation led the public to yawn at even the most breathless requests for aid.[83]

Benevolence agents like Robert Baird led exhausting lives. On the road constantly, they plied their trades under the most adverse conditions. Transportation was notoriously poor, accommodations uncomfortable, and companionship of the right sort a rarity. Baird recorded matter-of-factly that he was forced to borrow a horse for a 120 mile journey over wet and muddy roads, when ice floes kept him from reaching St. Louis by water.[84] He had no private life. His one daughter and an infant son died while he was in the service of the Union. He stopped his ceaseless travelling only long enough to bury them decently, then proceeded on to his next engagement.

With all its hardships, it was a career Baird seemed to enjoy. He was a proficient agent and knew it. He never neglected

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[83]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Hartford, June 12, 1833; Providence, June 4, 1833; New Haven, June 17, 1833. ASSU Archives (1833, A-B), 173, 171, 174. While the Southern Enterprise was no great success, North or South, Charles I. Foster greatly overemphasizes its lack of appeal in the North. He claimed that "New York showed its massive indifference with $172.57; Massachusetts, $25.00," Errand of Mercy, pp. 202-03. His source must be suspect. Baird collected more than seven times that amount in cash in a single trip.

[84]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, St. Louis, January 13, 1831. ASSU Archives (1831, A-B), 190.

an opportunity to press for an increase in his authority and often pushed beyond the bounds of his commission, for his self-assurance knew no bounds. When the Committee of Missions and Agencies presumed to pursue a course he thought unwise he offered his resignation.[85] They demonstrated how much they relied upon him by rewarding his insubordination with an appointment to a higher position--Secretary to the Committee of Missions and Agencies, and gave him wide discretionary powers.[86]

As Secretary of the Committee, Baird conducted its business with unusual dispatch. Once he had determined his course of action he brooked no delay. The Committee had tried to maintain a safety reserve in the Valley fund, amounting to seven or eight thousand dollars. Baird would have none of it. The money had been donated for missions--for missions it had to be spent: "It is vain to ask the public for money when they do not appropriate that which is given for the specific object for which it is given," he wrote.[87]

Baird was proud of his accomplishments and not a little vain about them. He, like all evangelicals, donned a properly pious humility from time to time, but never convincingly. More true to his character was his response to an imagined injury occasioned by remarks of Frederick A. Packard in the society's journal. Feeling

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[85]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Philadelphia, July 31, 1832. ASSU Archives (1832, A-B), 235.

[86]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Philadelphia, November 27, 1832. ASSU Archives (1832, A-B), 245.

[87]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Princeton, January 21, 1833. ASSU Archives (1833, A-B), 162.

that his contributions to the society had been underrepresented before the public, he protested indignantly,

> I want a paragraph, by Mr. Packard, in the Journal, setting this matter right & doing that justice to me, & my efforts, which is due. I have not spared myself & I can truly say, that I have done all that I could to promote the interests of the A. S. S. U. I do think it hard, very hard that such a course has been pursued in this matter. I don't wish to be held up as a complainant before the public, but simply to have the true state of the cause presented, and this Mr. Packard can do . . .[88]

As good an agent as he was, Baird's co-workers must have often found him a trial and a burden. He developed an imperious attitude which many found offensive, and he did not soothe matters by his congenital dislike of explaining his actions. As a result, his decisions sometimes seemed capricious. Even James E. Welch's good nature was strained, coping with Baird's vagaries. He was led to complain when Baird changed his plans without notice and left him standing in Pittsburgh, waiting for a meeting which never happened.[89]

Baird's letters to Welch read like Chinese puzzles. In his eagerness to cover every possible contingency, they contained "so many provisions and plans and other plans," that Welch was unable to "determine exactly what course he will certainly pursue."[90]

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[88] R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Boston, November 14, 1831. ASSU Archives (1831, A-B), unnumbered.

[89] J. E. Welch to F. W. Porter, Pittsburgh, August 2, 1830. ASSU Archives (1830, A-B), 651.

[90] J. E. Welch to F. W. Porter, Lexington, Kentucky, December 14, 1830. ASSU Archives (1830, A-B), 424.

Difficult as Baird could be, his co-workers seemed to like him. Travelling with him was considered something of a privilege, perhaps because he so often enjoyed success. Simpson Shepherd, who often accompanied Baird on his travels through Tennessee, remarked, "Brother Baird is a man of deep piety, great sincerity, and resistless attractions."[91] The Union missed him after he was gone.

The importance of the American Sunday School Union in the establishing of a national religious consensus merits a full-length study. For many years, its publications could be called America's only national literature. Children and adults throughout the land read them and absorbed their ideas. Sunday after Sunday, thousands of them studied the same portions of Scripture in the same ways. The Union was the only benevolent agency which attempted to maintain continued contact with those to whom it ministered. Its influence extended beyond its own schools. Denominations with their own Sunday school departments copied Union materials and techniques.

A generation of Americans reached maturity between 1820 and

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[91]Simpson Shepherd to F. W. Porter, Huntsville, Tennessee, n.d. (1831, S), 3812. The exceptional growth of the American Sunday School Union during the years 1829-1834 firmly established it among the leaders of American benevolence. It continued to grow in the years following Baird's resignation. It received its charter of incorporation in 1845, and by 1855 was employing 324 men, 256 of whom were students. It continues to enjoy a robust maturity today. In conversation with Paul E. Carlson of the Union Staff, I was informed that the Union presently employs a full-time staff of over 200. While no longer as prominent on the religious scene as it was 100 years ago, its operations are greater today than at any time in its history. Interestingly, its field staff are still designated "agents," and "missionaries."

1850, many of whom received religious and ethical training in Sunday schools affiliated with the American Sunday School Union. There can be little doubt that it helped produce a homogenized ideology in the United States, and helped provide an atmosphere in which American Protestants in the evangelical denominations came to appreciate their spiritual and cultural affinities and aspire to closer Christian union.