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Origin

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of the

Organized Woman's Work

of the

Southern Presbyterian Church

by

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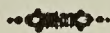
Origin and Growth

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EW PEOPLE have any conception of the immensity of the change that has taken place in the last seventy-five years in the status of women. While many of the so-called stronger sex are still unreconciled to the change, yet we are disposed to believe that in the far future, when another Buckle sits down to write the history of civilization, he will see as the outstanding fact of our present era not the Great War, but the coming of women into their own.

NOR have preachers been the only sinners in this matter, as some cynical sisters would have us believe. Most illuminating and amusing are some features of the early history of the National Educational Association which was organized as far back as 1857. The Constitution provided that any "gentleman", a teacher or superintendent, could join. About ten years later somebody moved to strike out "gentleman" and put in "person". But this was defeated by a more than three to two vote. However, women teachers in attendance were allowed to write papers, provided the secretary read them. Finally a certain lady, whose name alone would suggest her leadership, a Mrs. Mary Howe Smith, was permitted to read a learned paper on oral instruction, its philosophy and methods. Shortly after, by a majority vote, the word "person" was substituted for "gentleman".

A MOST interesting proof it is of the excessive, or, as some would say, the admirable, conservatism of our Southern Presbyterian Church that this question of whether a woman may

read her own report came up in our own General Assembly more than half a century after it had been settled in the National Educational Association, and ran precisely the same course. After fifteen years of mild but persistent agitation, during which the Auxiliary Superintendent's report was read to the Assembly by a secretary, she was at last permitted to present her report herself in this present year of our Lord, 1928.

IN REVIEWING the work of the women of our Church, we are indebted for nearly all our facts to three admirable histories written by women, each one of whom could truly say "quorum pars magna fui". I refer to "PIONEER WOMEN OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, U. S." (1923), by Mrs. Mary D. Irvine assisted by Miss Alice L. Eastwood; "THE HISTORY OF THE WOMAN'S AUXILIARY", by Miss Jennie Hanna, given at the second annual meeting of what was then known as the Woman's Council at Kansas City, Mo., in 1914; and "THE WOMAN'S AUXILIARY, PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH U. S." (1927), by Mrs. W. C. Winsborough.

VARIOUS ancient records and minute books, yellow and moth-eaten, make it plain that in many places in the South, Presbyterian women in local churches were organized for many forms of Christian work as far back as the first quarter of the nineteenth century. By the time the Southern Presbyterian Church was organized and the Civil War ended, the majority of our churches had some form of local woman's organization, and many of them had three or four, all born of a desire to meet local needs or to carry the Gospel to the heathen world.

AS PROSPERITY slowly returned to the stricken and devastated South, these societies of godly women continued to multiply, and to enlarge and diversify their activities. Of the good they accomplished no adequate account has even been given or can be given. Their record is on high. They aided the pastor in numberless ways, they looked after the furnishing and equipment of the church building, they helped in the care of the sick and the poor, they searched out and visited the new families, they supported young men through college and seminary, they helped the mission work in congregation, Presbytery, Synod, and Assembly, and many a time the Woman's Society was the only

agency that kept some weak and discouraged little church alive and functioning. What the prayer life of these societies, "*where two or three are met together in My Name*", has meant in the life of the Church, the State, the Nation, God alone knows. In a church of which I was pastor, there suddenly developed a deep and genuine revival, resulting in many conversions. As it was in the heat of summer, with no special meeting in progress, I was as much surprised as delighted, until I discovered that for some weeks previous, without any public notice given, one of the women's societies had been meeting daily to pray for an outpouring of the Spirit.

BUT the chief interest of these societies, the purpose for which most of them were organized, was Foreign Missions. In hundreds of churches where the men seemed as a rule indifferent to this cause which was declared by our first General Assembly to be the very object of the Church's existence, the missionary fires were kept alive and glowing on the altar of our women's hearts, as they met weekly or monthly to hear about, and pray for, and give to, often out of their pitifully small means, that great cause which lay so near our Master's heart and formed the burden of His last command. How our Church's Foreign Mission work would have fared during those years without these societies of devoted women it is painful to contemplate.

WHY this cause seems to make a peculiar appeal to women has been a frequent subject of inquiry. May not the answer lie in two characteristics of hers, which, though a snare and a curse when misdirected, are yet her distinctive strength and glory. The first is the simplicity and directness with which she sees her ends and moves toward them. Precisely this is what Kipling emphasizes and illustrates in that famous poem of his with its startling refrain, "*For the female of the species is more deadly than the male*". When this simplicity and intensity of aim are focussed not on deadly but on heavenly ends, she sets us a glorious example. What in human language could be plainer or more emphatic than our Lord's missionary command with its two tremendous adjectives, "*Go ye into ALL the world and preach the gospel to EVERY creature*"? It is the woman's glory that

with the same simplicity and intensity with which our Lord uttered this command, she accepts it and moves to its accomplishment.

THE other distinctive characteristic explaining her Foreign Mission zeal is the unusual measure in which she possesses that divinest of all God's attributes, compassion. This it was that impelled the first missionary, the Son of God Himself, to leave His Father's House and come down to our sin-cursed, suffering race to bring us the glad news of Redemption and Life Eternal. And the measure in which we yearn to carry the glad tidings to the suffering darkened millions of heathendom is the measure of our likeness to Him.

BUT in the work of these various church societies one serious lack was felt. While nearly every church of any size had its women's organization, and often three or four in the same church, of course under sessional control, working along different lines to different ends, yet among these societies there was no uniformity of organization, no systematic way of getting together for conference, no educational policy for training these groups of earnest women in the whole work of the Church or promoting efficiency by a wide study of the best methods. There was no department in the Church for handling such matters. Indeed, so conservative was our Southern Church that there was much opposition to any organization above the local societies.

IN 1884 the effort to supply this need began to take definite shape. In that year Miss Jennie Hanna, of Kansas City, Mo., a woman in delicate health, but of rare gifts, of apostolic vision, and of heroic faith and energy, published an article advocating the bringing together of the societies of each Presbytery into a Presbyterial Union, after the plan in use in the Northern Presbyterian Church. Stirred by this article, Mrs. Josiah Sibley, of Augusta, Ga., a much older woman of similar spirit, seconded Miss Hanna's efforts, and two years later these two devoted women, in the face of determined opposition from many ecclesiastical leaders and innumerable other obstacles, succeeded in transmitting to the women of our 2,000 churches the plan for

Presbyterial organizations. These efforts bore fruit. Our women began to see and feel the necessity of further organization. In May, 1888, were organized the two Presbyterial Unions of East Hanover, Va., and Wilmington, N. C., at first for Foreign Missions only. Before the close of the year eighteen more were in existence. The next year saw others formed, despite the strenuous opposition of prominent ministers. By 1912 the women of all the Presbyteries except two were organized.

IN 1904 were organized the first Synodicals, those of Virginia and Texas, thus uniting the extremes of our Church's territory. In 1908 Alabama was organized at Birmingham, in 1910 Missouri at Kansas City, and Georgia at Atlanta, and in 1911 Kentucky at Louisville.

BUT as yet there was no general overhead organization to unite these six Synodical and eighty-odd Presbyterial Unions. The opening of 1911 saw such consummation apparently as far distant as ever. The waste of power and opportunity due to the units remaining scattered was widely realized among the Presbyterial and Synodical leaders. The loss of strength and inspiration from lack of concentration was keenly felt. But the faith of many was weak, and apprehension was felt regarding the possible effect of even the bare mention of a central organization.

WHEN the wave of enthusiasm swept the country from ocean to ocean as the Jubilee was celebrated in 1910 and 1911, when Women's Boards of all denominations were having conferences, enjoying fellowship, reporting progress, comparing and exchanging plans for larger efficiency, the Southern Presbyterian Church was the only evangelical denomination in the whole country which had no central organization of its women, and therefore no adequate records and no accurate reports of their splendid work.

TO A CERTAIN busy mother in Kansas City there came a clear realization of the significance and exigency of the situation. In her veins was the blood of pioneer home mission-

aries. She herself had helped to found city missions for Slavs and Italians. As a college graduate she had been Valedictorian of her class. During the spring and summer of 1911 the necessity of uniform organization under a single leadership so impressed her that one hot morning, when the children had all gone to school, this busy housewife dropped the breakfast dishes and wrote out "SOME REASONS WHY A WOMAN SECRETARY IS NEEDED". The name of this lady, heretofore unconnected with the movement, was Mrs. Winsborough.

SHE sent the paper to Mrs. D. A. McMillan, President of the Missouri Synodical, who heartily approved it, and who wrote Mrs. Winsborough to make the acquaintance of Miss Jennie Hanna, also of Kansas City, whom she would find a kindred spirit. This was the beginning of the closest friendship and cooperation between these two remarkable women. Mrs. McMillan submitted Mrs. Winsborough's paper to her Executive Committee, and with its endorsement forwarded it to the Presidents of the five other Synodicals, Mrs. J. Calvin Stewart, Virginia; Mrs. Chris G. Dullnig, Texas; Mrs. W. C. Fritter, Alabama; Mrs. C. P. Crawford, Georgia; and Mrs. M. D. Irvine, Kentucky. Receiving their unanimous approval, it was revised and reshaped by its author into the form of an overture and unanimously approved on November 2 by the Synod of Missouri.

WITH a view to the presentation of this Overture to the Assembly of 1912, an unofficial group of women representing eight Synods met in Atlanta in February to arrange for an Educational Campaign throughout the Church, with Mrs. Winsborough and Miss Hanna as a Committee on Organization, and Mrs. A. M. Howison, of Staunton, Va., as Treasurer. The Systematic Beneficence Committee, in session in Atlanta at the same time, gave its hearty approval to the women's plans. The extraordinary success of the campaign proved the time ripe for the new organization. Of this memorable campaign Miss Hanna says:

"THERE was never at any time or under any circumstances what might be called smooth sailing, though the Overture found many strong champions. Against it great theological

guns 'volleyed and thundered'. With Paul we could say, '*A great door and effectual is opened*', and '*there are many adversaries*'. Following his example we tarried right there at Ephesus!

"**O**F COURSE any new movement is sure to encounter unfavorable criticism and severe judgment. Much of it came from misapprehension and partial information, but no matter how conservative the man, no matter how annihilating his disapproval, he was almost without exception courteous. Indeed, we found many who were past masters in the art of being charmingly courteous while conceding absolutely nothing!

"**F**ORTUNATELY for the workers in the strenuous campaign, there were occasional humorous incidents to relieve the strain. The titles of 'limited pope' or 'woman bishop' even yet are sometimes heard, while it was astonishing how many far-sighted eyes could catch a glimpse of the cloven hoof of 'woman suffrage'. The name of 'militant ecclesiastical suffragettes' stuck for a long time to the Missouri women, but never was used again by any one who once met Mrs. Winsborough or Mrs. McMillan in their essential and gracious womanliness."

THE Overture was presented to the Bristol Assembly from the Missouri Synodical, with the approval of the five other Synodicals, forty-one Presbyterial Unions, the Synod of Missouri, and four Presbyteries, while three Presbyteries sent up overtures of protest against the women's overture. It was understood that the women would ask no financial support for the new department for two years, or until it had proved its value to the Church.

ON UNANIMOUS recommendation from its Standing Committee on Women's Societies the Assembly adopted the Overture without argument and with no audible dissenting vote. The last paragraph of the Assembly action is as follows:

"**T**HAT the four Executive Committees be directed to select a woman possessing suitable gifts, who, under their direction, shall give her whole time to the work of organizing our women into Synodical and Presbyterial Unions and local

societies under control of Synods, Presbyteries, and Sessions, respectively; coordinating Woman's and Young People's Societies now organized; stimulating interest by gathering and disseminating needed information in order that this mighty Auxiliary in our Church's life and growth may become even more fruitful of good than in the past."

THE four Executive Secretaries, who, at the request of the women, had been appointed the Supervisory Committee of the Auxiliary, met by direction of the Assembly the following summer at Montreat with the Synodical Presidents to outline and erect the new organization.

FOR months Mrs. Winsborough and Miss Hanna, with the Synodical Presidents, had been diligently searching for the proper woman to head the new organization and had secured the consent of a gifted Georgia woman to undertake the arduous task. But, just before the Montreat meeting, circumstances over which she had no control compelled her to decline the proposed office. Immediately after the Assembly, both Executive Secretaries and Synodical Presidents had urged the office upon Mrs. Winsborough as the woman preeminently best qualified for it, but for personal reasons she had positively declined to consider it. When, however, no other woman was in sight, and the laborious and prayerful planning of years seemed doomed to failure for lack of a leader, Mrs. Winsborough reluctantly and at great personal sacrifice consented to accept office for six months until some one else could be found. She was accordingly elected by the Supervisory Committee, not as Secretary, that name having aroused opposition, but as Superintendent of "The Woman's Auxiliary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States", that being the official designation adopted. Temporary headquarters were fixed at Kansas City, and Mrs. A. M. Howison was elected Treasurer. The Presidents of the Synodicals were constituted an Advisory Committee.

BEFORE the meeting of the next Assembly nine months later, every Presbyterial and Synodical in the Church was organized, and at the expiration in 1914 of the two probationary

years the value of the new organization was formally and warmly recognized by the Assembly and its budget ordered furnished by the four Executive Committees.

IN 1913 the faithful and efficient Treasurer, Mrs. Howison, was forced by ill health to resign, and Mrs. D. A. McMillan, one of the most loved and trusted leaders of the movement from its beginning, was made Treasurer, and for fifteen years has discharged the duties of her office with eminent success.

IN 1918 the headquarters of the Auxiliary, after two years in Kansas City and four in Atlanta, were permanently located in St. Louis.

IN 1923 the Woman's Work of our Church was given a further proper and logical development by the appointment by the Montreat Assembly of three women on each of the four Executive Committees. This action was taken, though in the face of strong opposition, by a decisive vote. At the following Assembly efforts made to rescind what had been done were overwhelmingly defeated. Experience had abundantly demonstrated the wisdom of the Assembly's action.

IN 1927, when the Committee on the Assembly's Work was created, it was decided that eleven of the forty-four members should be women, a proportion that will no doubt be increased before many years. The supervision of the Woman's Auxiliary, exercised since its organization by the four Executive Secretaries, was transferred to the Committee on the Assembly's Work, by which it was specifically assigned to Sub-Committee on Woman's Work, composed of five of its woman members. On recommendation of the Committee on the Assembly's Work, the official title of the chief executive of the Woman's Auxiliary was changed from Superintendent to Secretary, the name originally desired by the women.

THE very latest development in our Woman's Work has already been referred to, namely the gracious permission granted by the Assembly to the Secretary of Woman's Work to

present her report to the Assembly instead of having it presented for her by some other Secretary.

IN CLOSING this survey it may be well to signalize some of the providential developments and unique features that mark the history and organization of this truly remarkable movement, in many respects the most noteworthy in the annals of our Church. Born in prayer, cradled and nourished in prayer, carried forward against difficulties and obstacles innumerable by the heroic faith and zeal of many of the noblest women that ever a Church was blessed with, we should naturally expect to find in it features both providential and unique.

1. Who could have foreseen that God would call to the leadership of a movement making such demands upon time and strength a busy housewife, the mother of six children, whose family responsibilities were already taking full toll of time and effort? She consented only to step into the breach till the right woman could be found. How the way was opened for her to continue, and the work made possible that seemed humanly impossible, is but another illustration of that divine Sovereignty which answers the cry of His people, whether they be oppressed Israelites or perplexed Presbyterian women, and gives them the leadership they need and that He Himself has chosen. That this selection was of God no one can doubt who has eyes to see the difficulties and problems through which the work has been guided or the shining success it has already attained.
2. The most characteristic phase of our woman's organization, and its strongest point, is its inclusion of the whole program of the Church in its study, prayers, and gifts. In this it is, I believe, absolutely unique, pioneering the way which the woman's organizations of other Churches are beginning to follow.
3. At a time when practically all the woman's church organizations were "Boards", more or less independent, our Southern Presbyterian women decided that their organi-

zation should be only auxiliary and promotional to the regular work of the Church. Though many other denominational Women's Boards were collecting and administering their own missionary money, our Auxiliary felt it wiser to unify the work of the local Church by sending its Auxiliary gifts through the local Church Treasurer to the places for which they were intended.

4. It is noteworthy that, as a consequence of "2" and "3", when the Assembly added women members to its Executive Committees, and when its supervision was transferred from the Executive Secretaries to the Committee on the Assembly's Work, no change was involved in the Woman's Auxiliary, nor any plan disturbed which was then in operation. Whatever expansion of Church life and work may hereafter take place, the Auxiliary is so organized as naturally and easily to expand with it.
5. All the women of the Church are expected to contribute weekly through the duplex envelopes as members of the Church, the Auxiliary receiving no report of these gifts. Each Auxiliary has its own "over and above" budget which includes gifts for all the causes of the Church, and also for the support and promotion of the Presbyterials and Synodicals and other departments of Woman's Work.

The Birthday Offering, commemorating the birth of the Woman's Auxiliary, is "over and above" all other budgets, a happy freewill offering, given to Home or Foreign Missions, or some other Assembly cause, to supply some sorely felt equipment need for the uplift and training of women and girls.

The gifts of the Auxiliaries last year, aside from their contribution through the Church budget, reached the amazing total of \$1,716,281.

6. The Auxiliary Circle Plan, officially adopted in 1917, has proved itself, in the Auxiliary's own experience and in the judgment of leaders of other denominations, the most

efficient plan of women's church organization in use today. These circles embrace all the women of the Church, since no woman joins the Auxiliary, but all are members of it by virtue of their church membership. In addition to various other excellent results, this plan is a most powerful, and indeed the only systematic agency for reaching the "indifferent" women in the Church. It places definite and constant responsibility upon the active missionary women for reaching and interesting these indifferent ones, and has been markedly successful in solving this most difficult problem.

7. From the very beginning of the Auxiliary, paramount emphasis has always been placed upon the spiritual, and as a direct means thereto, the educational elements of its work. The training of the women in all departments of Church work through the Year Book of Programs, of which 38,000 were sold last year, and through the promotion of special seasons of study and prayer for all the causes, has gone forward by leaps and bounds. Home and Foreign Missions had each last year some 2,400 Study Classes, each of these causes enrolling some 47,000 students. Increasingly has the Word of God focussed the minds and hearts of the women through the Bible Studies in the Year Book, additional Bible Studies by gifted teachers printed each year by the Auxiliary, special Studies of the Gospels, and the like, this steadily mounting effort to have "*the word of Christ dwell in you richly*" being partially indicated by last year's figures of 3,840 Bible Classes with an enrollment of 56,935. Accompanying this has been the ever-growing emphasis on Tithing, on Stewardship, on Family Altars, and especially on Prayer, last year's 5,611 Prayer Bands enrolling 59,216 members.

OF THE Auxiliary's White Cross work, its Training School work, its work for Young People, its Conferences for Colored Women, and various other activities, I have not space to speak. Yet I should not fail to say that daughter Auxiliaries are multiplying in Korea, Mexico, Brazil, and will soon be found

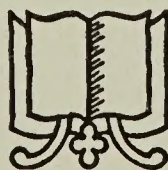
in all our foreign fields. I attended for two days a Presbyterial at Varginha, Brazil, representing eighteen local Auxiliaries, conducted almost wholly by Brazilian women, and in a manner that I have not seen surpassed anywhere in the home land.

THE fame of our Woman's Auxiliary is growing. Scores of churches in other denominations are copying it in whole or in part. Very recently the Methodist Protestant denomination officially adopted our plan of organization and is installing it in all its churches.

LET me close with a few sentences from Miss Jennie Hanna, whose sainted spirit we may trust still follows with pride and joy the ever-widening fruitfulness of this vine whose seed she planted in faith and watered with her prayers. They were written some months after the Auxiliary had been organized.

“THE results of these few months show to a marked degree the power of the Holy Spirit, without which neither administrative ability nor perfected organization would have availed anything. The outlook is a call to renewed faithfulness. The Woman's Auxiliary will come far short of its high calling if it forgets it must be more than an organization. It must be an organism indwelt by life, the Life which is life indeed. We are part of His body and apart from Him we can do nothing. Our passion, like our Master's, must be for souls, not forms nor machinery. Only so can we exalt Him who said, ‘I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me’.”

*“He hath sounded forth the trumpet
Which shall never call retreat
Oh, be swift my soul to answer Him,
Be jubilant my feet!”*



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