



MR. WANAMAKER LEADING BETHANY SUNDAY-SCHOOL

The hardest and bravest man in Philadelphia in those days shrank from exposing himself to the hostility of the thugs among the "Schuylkill Rangers." It was their pastime to set fire to houses in order to bring out the volunteer firemen and force a riot on the streets; the police often quailed before them, and they held the whole southwestern outskirts of the city under a reign of terror. It was in this dismal region that the enthusiastic young Presbyterian volunteered to pioneer the way for a mission. And so one Sunday



FAN CONTAINING ORDER OF SERVICES

afternoon in February, 1858, he trudged over the snow-covered ground to a little house near the suburbs, and in a back room attempted to teach a few children. The proceeding had not escaped the attention of the thugs. They went to the house, broke up the little class, and with clubs in their hands drove them out into the streets, warning them never to return. The delicate lad was scared and discouraged, as he admitted in after years, but it was not for long.

Before the week was out he had hired a room away on the extreme edge of the populated lines of Philadelphia, amidst brick-yards and ash-heaps. Thus and there it was that John Wanamaker was first tested in the mettle which has since made him a millionaire, the foremost merchant of the United States, a Cabinet member, and the founder of what is believed to be the most interesting Sunday-school in America.

On the first Sunday, the fourteenth day of February, 1858, in the shoemaker's house, there were twenty-seven children who were taught by young Wanamaker

THE MOST INTERESTING SUNDAY-SCHOOL IN AMERICA

By William Perrine

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

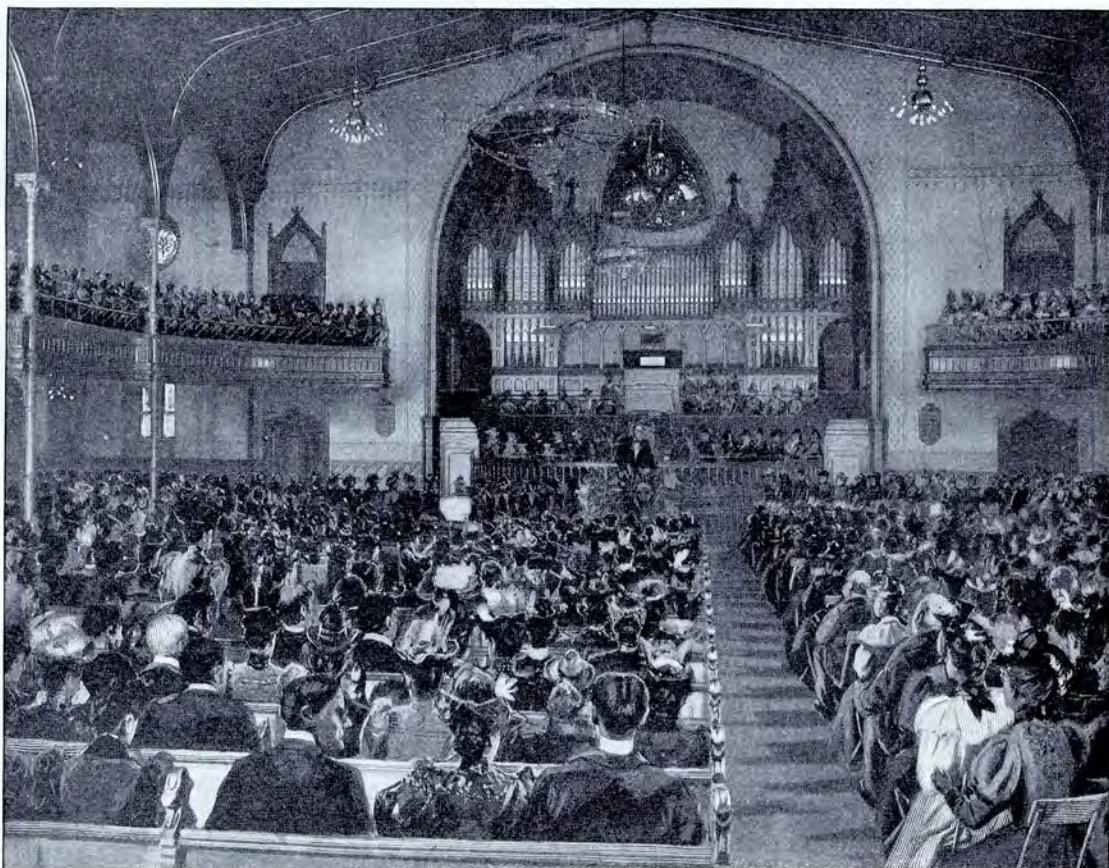


JOHN WANAMAKER

FORTY years ago the Presbyterian church of the Rev. John Chambers, of Broad and Sansom Streets, in Philadelphia, was widely noted for the vigorous influence which that earnest pulpiteer, long known as the "war horse" of his faith, exerted over the religious life and morals of that city. Among his younger followers no one was so active

as a slender, pale-faced, gray-eyed lad of nineteen, with thick, dark hair, who was earnest in speech, and quick to make friends. Born in the swampy rural region of the city known as "the Neck," with little education except such as he had acquired after his working hours as an errand boy in a clothing house at a dollar and a quarter a week, he early attracted attention by his obliging ways and his ambitions in the cause of religion. He had gone with his parents to the Indiana wilderness around Fort Wayne, in 1853, to help better their humble fortunes. There they lived in a log house for the winter, near the boy's grandfather, tasting the hardships of the struggles of a new settlement, until they came back to their home in Philadelphia.

In Doctor Chambers' church the success of the youth in leading and organizing young men was soon noted. Indeed, it was so marked that it caused George H. Stuart—then conspicuous in both the mercantile and religious



MR. WANAMAKER'S FAMOUS BIBLE CLASS IN BETHANY

life of Philadelphia, and honored in after years by General Grant with an offer of the Treasury portfolio in his first Cabinet—to propose him as Secretary of the local Young Men's Christian Association before he was out of his teens. In fact, he was the first officer of any of these associations in the United States to make himself so valuable as to justify the payment to him of a salary.

During the great revival which swept over the country after the panic of 1857 the lad was foremost in the movement led by the Rev. John Chambers. It was decided that a mission school should be established by the church in a quarter of the city given over to turbulence, and which was generally shunned as the abode of dangerous characters.

and his associate in the movement, E. H. Toland, an energetic missionary of the American Sunday-School Union. So meagre was the outfit for the undertaking that the children could be seated only by bringing up bricks from the cellar, arranging them in piles a foot or two high, and then forming a square with rough scantling boards for benches. But the ruffians in the region of "The Devil's Pocket" had still to be appeased. They snowballed the plucky superintendent, threw rotten eggs at the children, and set up scarecrows. He made up his mind at once to master the disturbers. He went to the firemen and begged them to listen.

"**N**OW, boys," he said, "I have simply come down here from Doctor Chambers' church to start a Sunday-school mission, and to do some good for the neighborhood and for you. We have your interests at heart, and we want to help you. Why, then, do you allow us to be molested? Is it fair? Come and join us, but if you feel that you can't, see that we have fair play. You ought to be protecting our children from the bouncers."

The men were abashed, but one of them spoke up: "Well, I guess we have a better opinion of you since we know you, and we'll see that you do get fair play."

And they were as good as their word. Some of them would even insist on guarding the school when the worst of the roughs would threaten it; in time some of them went into the school, and from that winter dated the



THE JUNIOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL

gradual decline of the fiercest and most dangerous of the lawless bands that were then the curse of Philadelphia. Among the farms and brick-yards the house where Mr. Wanamaker was born might be seen across the fields in the distance; to-day the whole territory is filled with many miles of streets and homes; and throughout the population there may be found the sense of thrift, order, responsibility and decent living which his school, not simply as a religious, but as a social and educational, beneficence, has spread among them.

YOUNG WANAMAKER CLEARING AN ASH-LOT

THE superintendent's extraordinary power as an organizer was speedily put into full play. In a few months he had the shoemaker's little house filled with children, and classes were taught sitting on the steps of stairways. More room must be found for them. But where should they be put? Next door was a vacant lot covered with ashes and rubbish. When warm weather came it was proposed that a tent be placed there. A good old man in the parent church went about on the wharves for old ship sails. As soon as young Wanamaker had the assurance that enough of them had been collected, he put himself at the head of the large-sized boys in the school, with shovels in their hands, one midsummer Monday morning.

They proceeded to clear the lot of the ash-piles and to make it level. All that week until Saturday night they labored at the erection of the tent under a July sun. There were taunts that a circus was to appear; there were threats that the canvas would be ripped up, and a big Irish woman living in the rear of it swore that she herself would burn it down. The superintendent's tact appeased the excitement and opposition, and the tent was filled time and again during the summer and autumn with hundreds of both the young and the old. As the winter came on the Sunday-school met in the stable sheds of a horse-car railway and in a public schoolhouse. Yet when it was only a year old, and when the superintendent had not yet reached his twenty-first birthday, it had three hundred and twenty-seven scholars and seventeen teachers, meeting in a brick building of its own, dedicated not only by Presbyterian, but also by Episcopalian, Methodist and other denominational ministers.

A SUNDAY AFTERNOON AT BETHANY

AND now, after forty years, let us look into what has come out of this creation, chiefly of one man's brain. Within a few hundred feet of the old house and the ash-piles of 1858 now stands a large brownstone structure known all over Philadelphia as "Bethany." It is a great hive of spiritual, educational and industrial culture. Nowhere else in the United States is there to be found the practical spirit of religious zeal which prevails there on a Sunday; nowhere else a scene so inspiring and impressive.

Half an hour before the beginning of the afternoon service the doors are opened, and in a few minutes the galleries are filled with a thousand men and women. On the red-carpeted floor below in the aisles, among the horseshoe benches of the classes, in the glass-partitioned rooms on the sides, around the fountain of splashing water in the centre, or on the steps of a platform big enough to hold an ordinary Sunday-school, are gathered teachers and scholars, smiling, shaking hands and chatting. All over the auditorium there is a buzz of cheerful sounds. In the atmosphere is something like a buoyant expectation of pleasant things to come. Only here and there in garb or person is there visible the mark of poverty.

A glance over the multitude of bright-faced youth leaves at once the impression of thrift and self-respect. Many of them are errand boys or apprentices, or clerks, or saleswomen, or factory girls; very few, if any, the sons or the daughters of the rich. It is a genuine picture, indeed, of the best results of American self-culture among substantial, home-loving and God-fearing families. There is no stiffness nor depressing solemnity in the scene, no symptom of weariness among the gathering classes, nor of sleepiness in the galleries. Suddenly the compact figure of a man in his sixtieth year, but looking quite ten years younger, somewhat tall, a trifle stout, with well-poised head and cleanly shaved face, emerges through a side door and advances briskly up the steps of the platform. Like a flash runs around the school the whisper: "Mr. Wanamaker has come."

HEARTILY GREETED BY TEACHERS AND PUPILS

MR. WANAMAKER proceeds at once to a little reading-desk in the centre of the school, opens his copy of the Bible and lays his notes upon it, and quietly taps a bell. In less than a minute the rustle and hum of the swarms of scholars has died away into almost perfect silence, and each is in his seat. The superintendent, with his quick, searching eye, glances up and down, over and across the solid ranks of the classes. Then a smile of satisfaction sweeps over his face, and bending forward he greets the school in a clear, kindly voice, which penetrates the remotest corner of the building: "Good-afternoon, dear scholars and teachers."

In every eye below dances a gleam of recognition as two thousand voices in cheery unison and with the cadence of courtesy reply: "Good-afternoon, Mr. Wanamaker." Then the building is filled with a flood of melody like the very sunshine of sound, as the young voices join in the first hymns of the day to orchestral music tuneful and inspiring.

The superintendent, his face now aglow with the radiance of one who loves music, has stepped back a little, while the leader of the orchestra, with his baton, comes to the front. The precision with which his lead is followed is unusual. Trained choruses of professional vocalists sometimes do not sing with so much of this splendid swelling unity.

"Now, the boys," says Mr. Wanamaker, and the fresh, strong voices of the lads ring out true and vibrant, and next, "The girls, please," and their beautiful tones float over the school in a silvery tenderness, and, "Now the infants," and afar off there arises the sweetest concord of hundreds of the little voices of childhood that touch old hearts in the galleries to the melting mood. Now every one in the school must have a Bible. It must be produced and raised aloft. In the superintendent's sight its absence is as serious an offense as the appearance of a cadet at West Point on drill would be without his musket. "Hold up your Bibles," he exclaims to the various classes as he rapidly inspects the show of uplifted hands, giving

a compliment here or a word of warning there, as the number of copies of the Scriptures may be either full or lacking. Then he proceeds to the reading of the lesson of the day by verses, the school responding as he divides a sentence alternately; announcements are made, the first half hour is over; the superintendent steps from the platform; the teachers turn to their classes, and soon they are intent in discussions of the lesson of the day.

HIS FAMOUS TALKS TO THE BIBLE UNION

MEANWHILE, in the church auditorium adjoining have assembled two thousand men and women—the members of the famous Bible Union. They are awaiting the appearance of Mr. Wanamaker from the school. A spirited tenor sings a hymn that is a reminder of Sankey in his early days. The church pastor, Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman, is called upon to give some words of advice, and does so with a virile, stirring eloquence. And then Mr. Wanamaker comes forward to perform what has become to him, perhaps, the chief pleasure of his later years—his weekly teaching of the Bible lesson, accompanied by a homily befitting the mature minds before him. There are few clergymen who surpass him in this style of discourse. Indeed, his natural gifts for it were so obvious in his youth that at one time he was induced to consider seriously the question of studying for the ministry. It is fresh, breezy, practically suggestive, brightly and sometimes eloquently expressed, accompanied by anecdotes and also by striking images or metaphors in which lately his mind seems to have become luxuriant.

His comment bears the marks of painstaking study and preparation; his talk, smooth, easy and yet earnest, rising at times to the enthusiasm of a real eloquence. His hearers do not nod nor watch for a chance to sidle out before the service is over. Some personal experience—how, when he was a boy, he bought a dictionary to learn the Bible words he could not understand; some breezy anecdote—how, when he began the Sunday-school, he had to wash the faces of the children of the slums; some bit of advice—how his hearers should carry a notebook and jot down their thoughts and impressions from day to day; some rule of his own personal self-government—how one ought, even when the life shadows deepen, to get more and more out of his time by resolving not to pick over and at things, but by doing them at once; a striking simile—how a man may have the Ten Commandments frescoed on his face, or one painted on each finger, and yet not be a Christian; some story of his travels—how, when he stood on Mars Hill and peopled it with the multitude of Athenians that listened to the mighty words of Paul; some gentle strain of pathos—how one Ella Hurst, a girl in the earlier Bethany days, gathered bones in a bucket, saved up her earnings into a gold dollar from her humble toil for a new building, and how a poem that commemorated it before the tot passed away brought in hundreds of dollars, and showed the unconscious power of even the lowliest childhood; these are specimens of his suggestive way of applying the text or lesson with a Franklin-like vein of practical examples.

HOW THE SCHOOL IS DISCIPLINED

HIS discourse as teacher of the Union ended, he returns to the Sunday-school building and resumes his place as superintendent. The classes have reunited again in one great assemblage. Then he begins another informal talk. He tells the scholars that he has noted bad pronunciation in the responsive reading; he reproaches those who failed to show their Bibles; he has detected some carelessness in the singing, and speaks of it all with a sense of being hurt by it. Then his tone changes, and his face, in the fading sunlight of the late afternoon, grows somewhat stern. "I am dissatisfied with Bethany," he says. "Yes; I am dissatisfied with myself; we have not been doing our best of late. There must be another new rally in our work, and every one of you must take a part in it. You boys are growing into manliness; you girls have learned the refinements of life; but you are falling into ruts, so far as the school is concerned, and you must think of the welfare of others as well as of yourselves."

He calls for one-minute prayers from his assistants and teachers, and when they are finished he closes the service with a stirring invocation of his own. Then he mingles in a genial comradeship with the hundreds who cluster around the platform, inquiring for the sick or the missing, occasionally taking up a toddler in his arms, and next giving twenty minutes to an informal conference, which has been a feature of the school since its earliest days.

EVERY ONE IN BETHANY IS A SOMEBODY

THE greatest problem in Sunday-schools is to hold the interest of boys after they are sixteen and of girls after they are eighteen. The Wanamaker theory is not simply to make their stay in the school on Sundays agreeable, but to have them concerned in it during the week, and to make them each feel that he or she is a somebody in its affairs. Years ago the Rev. Dr. Arthur T. Pierson, one of the most successful of the pastors of the church, which grew out of the Sunday-school in 1865, good-humoredly said that he first thought of "John Wanamaker as a kind of a cross between a Presbyterian and a Methodist, with a sprinkling of independency, who would run a Sunday-school by wind, water and steam all at once—anything to make it go."

The fact was that Mr. Wanamaker early reached the conclusion that the mistake of the average Sunday-school was a perfunctory dryness and an absence of the element of human interest. He began innovations which were not at first readily understood, but most of which have been largely adopted throughout the country. Long before "international series" of lessons was begun he prepared and printed such papers a week in advance at his own expense. The printing press has, indeed, always been a factor of prime importance in the school. A "Bethany Almanac," on a broadside, with calendar, pictures, verses, motto; a year's subscription paid for by himself to a helpful British periodical twenty years ago for each scholar; the free circulation of papers with the news of the school, and his suggestions, such as "The Friendly Hand," for the Bible Union, which even now he himself edits, not long ago contributing a poem written when he was on shipboard in the Mediterranean under the shadow of Mount Lebanon; the addressing of *fac-simile* letters in his own handwriting and penmanship to the scholars at their homes, and many hundreds of cards, leaflets and pamphlets attest how freely he has used both his pen and printers' ink as a stimulus in this direction.

MUSIC IS ONE OF BETHANY'S ATTRACTIVE FEATURES

TWENTY-TWO years ago he brought Professor John R. Sweeney from Ocean Grove to the school to lead the singing. An orchestra of seventeen pieces is now a feature of the services, and as many as twenty-nine hymns have been sung there on one day! So critical is Mr. Wanamaker as to the singing that on one occasion in the midst of a hymn he exclaimed, "Stop! that's enough; you're not singing it right," and obliged the school to read the rest of it. He once printed a card of reasons why singing was the noblest use to which the human voice could be put. One of his favorite plans of enlisting personal interest has been the sending of letters to the houses of scholars, making them feel that they were of enough importance to be missed. On New Year's or other special occasions he sends such cards as this:

TO EACH OF THE SCHOLARS OF BETHANY

(To be put where you will see it often)

Let your life be full of love and sweetness; speak kindly of one another, and cheering words to each other. When people are dead they will not hear you; it will do them more good to say and do kind things NOW.

I prefer kindness and sympathy while I remain here, than to have flowers on my coffin or on my grave when I am gone. A bright smile and a kind word are helpful to many a burdened heart, making the journey through this world; they can do no good after the journey is ended.

The old Quaker said: "Thee will pass through the world but once; any good thing thee can do, or any kindness thee can show to any human being, do it now. Do not defer it nor neglect it, for thee will not pass this way again."

Your Friend and Superintendent

Wishes You a Good New Year.

January 1, 1893.

BETHANY'S NOVELTIES AND SURPRISES

THERE is no child too young, and no man nor woman too old to be considered beyond the pale of Bethany. A baby in arms has received a medal for regular attendance in the kindergarten. Once in three months there is a "Parents' Day." One Sunday the young people went about in carriages bringing the aged to the church in honor of "Old People's Day." Many came with crutches and canes; some so feeble that they had to be provided with roller chairs and seated in easy rockers, and not less than one hundred and fifty were past the age of eighty. The hymns were old-fashioned. Doctor Chapman's sermon was on the "Sunset of Life," and to each was given a souvenir with a photograph of the venerable Doctor Van Deurs.

The anniversaries of the school are signaled as red-letter events. So great is the eagerness to attend them that the exercises need to be repeated a night or two afterward for the parents. Every scholar in the vast throng receives a remembrance from the superintendent—in one year it may be a book; in another it may be a pitcher or a cup and saucer, or again, a box of shells gathered by his little grandchildren on the coast of France. But throughout the year there is the continuous thought of giving the school some little novelty or surprise. Thus, one hot Sunday last summer each scholar received a folding fan, on which, when spread open, was found printed the order of services with the hymns complete. On another occasion the entire school was turned into a Congress under parliamentary rules; Doctor Worden was placed in the chair as Speaker, and resolutions were moved and passed, to the intense delight of the boys, pledging every participant to his personal responsibility as a member of the House.

OBEEDIENCE REGARDED AS A CARDINAL VIRTUE

ON THE "Rallying Day" bright red silken badges were distributed by the thousands. In the kindergarten—a cozy room, where two hundred little ones under five years of age may be found—the lesson of Paul's shipwreck on the island of Melita was impressed on their minds by passing among them a miniature vessel under full sail. Unexpectedly Mr. Wanamaker, from time to time, will, in some such way as this, demand from the whole school a pledge to some rule of conduct: "Listen, make this resolve: 'I will try to shake hands with some one every Sunday, and especially try to make new members and all visitors feel at home.'"

Promptness to obey commands is a cardinal virtue of Bethany. One afternoon Mr. Wanamaker, taking his place at the desk, gave the usual signal for silence. There was an unusual indifference in coming to order. He raised his hand in protest; but the commotion of many tongues and the shuffling of feet continued. Another gesture, and the noise went on. Instantly he made up his mind to wait no longer.

"Teachers and scholars," he exclaimed, and there was an emphasis in his tone few of them had ever before heard. "I have been with you for more than thirty years. I have labored here the best I know Sunday after Sunday. But perhaps I am no longer wanted; perhaps you are getting tired of me. You do not heed my requests. I cannot remain here until you do."

Before the astonished school realized what happened he had stepped from the platform and disappeared into the church building, where the Bible Union had assembled. His faithful assistant there met him.

"Why, what brings you here so early?"

"That's all right, Mr. Anderson," he replied. "You go over and help out Assistant Superintendent Coyle."

That was a memorable day in Bethany. The murmurs of surprise that ran through the auditorium when he left the platform gave way to dismay and distress. There were sobs and tears, and, as one of the spectators said, "The scholars would have gotten down on their knees to him to have him back." When he did return the sign of order was obeyed instantly, and not since has Bethany forgotten that sharp lesson in promptness.

HOW BETHANY HOLDS ITS GROWING YOUTH

THERE is a junior department, under the care of Miss Harlow, in the nature of a preparatory school, from which members are graduated into the main school. The child, to be a graduate, must be not less than ten years of age; he must be able to name the books of the Old and

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the New Testament, and repeat the Lord's Prayer and the Twenty-third Psalm—"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." A Bible and a diploma are given to every one who passes the examination, and the junior who is more than ordinarily proficient is entitled also to a badge, to which seals are attached, when he enters the classes upstairs.

Perhaps in eight or ten years he may feel that he is becoming too mature for a Sunday-school. But Bethany does not let him go. He is then ready to be taken into the great Bible Union. That has been one of the most striking examples of the superintendent's power of organization. It was the first Union of its kind formed in America—an outgrowth of the Moody and Sankey influence during the winter of 1876. As many as twenty-five hundred persons have attended its meetings, and its regular enrollment is now upward of two thousand. The organization is peculiarly the superintendent's idea. He is its chief; next to him are the centurions, and then come the tithemen, each chief over a band of ten. Some of the bands are considerably in excess of that number, but whether the band be large or small its titheman is bound by a pledge to hold himself responsible for its members' attendance, their conduct and their well being. More than one hundred of these special tithemen hold a council with Mr. Wanamaker from two to two-thirty every Sunday before the school convenes, to prepare the work of the week. Each band is designated by the name of some one who has been conspicuous in the clergy or in Christian pursuits—as, for example—John Wesley, John B. Gough or George H. Stuart. The Bible Union idea rapidly spread; ex-Governor Pattison, of Pennsylvania, was foremost in organizing one in the Methodist church, and the ex-Governor and the superintendent of Bethany on one occasion "exchanged pulpits" for the day. During one half of the year the superintendent spends the entire Sunday in Bethany, bringing his luncheon with him, and making himself accessible to any one who may desire conference or advice, or help in any spiritual or material way.



A GREAT SOCIAL SYSTEM

OUT of and around the Sunday-school has grown, not simply the church and the Union, but a social and industrial coöperative system which reaches several thousand families. It includes reading clubs, music clubs, clubs for the purchase of coal, an incorporated savings bank with deposits of two hundred and ninety thousand dollars invested under State laws and State supervision; a dispensary, the House of Deaconesses, who look after young women in distress or in need of employment; a college, in which, at night, languages, music, shorthand, bookkeeping, dress-making and millinery are taught to several hundred students for a nominal fee; a House of Rest at the seashore for girls, and a uniformed military brigade of stalwart boys.

These and other features, as well as the church work under the pastors of the last thirty years, can only here be touched upon incidentally in dealing with the Sunday-school. They have been a potent force in the life of a great city and in making good citizens. When, for example, Mr. Wanamaker organized the Penny Savings Bank, he gave the place of cashier to the janitor of Bethany, whom he had taken as a boy into the old South Street school. And this uplifting sort of help has long filled the institution with an exceptional enthusiasm.



THE RESULT OF A FORTY-YEARS' LIFE-WORK

TWELVE thousand persons have attended all the various services of the church, the Sunday-school and the Bible Union on a single Sunday. The entire enrollment of the school is now past fifty-two hundred.

In all the forty years there has been no superintendent other than the founder, and few are the Sundays that he has failed to be at his post. When he was Postmaster-General of the United States he journeyed from Washington to Philadelphia every Saturday night, often preparing his Bible study for the next day on the train.

The Bethany Church of over three thousand members is the mother of Grace Church of over three hundred members, and at the present time conducts two missions.

At the present time there are four young men students from Princeton Theological Seminary lodged opposite the church, near the Bethany Home and the Deaconess House, who are taking lessons in pastoral work under Doctor Chapman, and assisting in the evangelistic work, open-air services, "Gospel wagon" and visitations.

"There isn't a healthy, vigorous, energetic, self-reliant, successful man," Mr. Gladstone once said, "whose example does not breed the same qualities in others; he winds us up and sets us a-going." And it is in winding them up and setting them a-going that John Wanamaker has given the leisure of the hardest daily working millionaire in the Union to the forty thousand men, women and children that have passed through Bethany since the day he saved his little flock from the "Bouncers" and the "Killers."