A COMMUNITY OF FREETHINKERS
A History of the Ethical Society of St. Louis
1886 - 1996

by
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Chapter 1

FELIX ADLER
AND THE FOUNDING OF ETHICAL CULTURE

Felix Adler, founder of the Ethical Culture movement, was a practical visionary. Like Emerson, he envisioned a religion focused on ethics rather than metaphysical beliefs; unlike Emerson, he took on the challenge of inaugurating such a movement. He brought to rational ethics a passion more commonly associated with sectarian crusaders and nationalistic warriors. His spiritual and intellectual quest set the liberal tone of Ethical Culture, and it serves as something of a paradigm for contemporary freethinkers.

Adler was born August 13, 1851, in Alzey, Germany. His father, Samuel, was a Reform Jewish rabbi. Like his father, two brothers, and father-in-law, the elder Adler was ordained in the Orthodox tradition; in the course of his intellectual development, however, Samuel embraced the reform movement and became one of its chief proponents in Europe. In 1857, the rabbi was elected to the pulpit of New York’s Temple Emanu-El, which was in the vanguard of the American reform movement. During his career at Emanu-El, Samuel Adler instituted striking educational and liturgical reforms, including removal of the temple partition separating men and women. In his scholarly writings and advice to emerging Reform congregations, Adler made substantial contributions to the rise of Reform Judaism in the United States. He was a principal organizer of the Philadelphia Reform Conference in 1869, which established the fundamental principles of the reform movement. Benny Kraut, a Jewish scholar and biographer of Felix Adler, describes that credo, which outlines the religious matrix in which Felix was raised:

Essentially, the Philadelphia Platform affirmed that the messianic mission of Israel was, not to restore the old Jewish state and divide the Jews from other nations, but rather to spread monotheism around the world and unite all people under God; that the Jewish dispersion was not a punishment for past sins, but rather a manifestation of Divine Will
to enable the Jews to fulfill their mission; and that inner devotion and ethical
sanctification comprised the essential components of religion. All of these ideas tended
to minimize the theosophical, logical, and psychological necessity of practical ritual
observances and furnished both an impetus and a rationale for continued religious reform
in American Jewish life.

(From Reform Judaism to Ethical Culture: The Religious Evolution of Felix Adler,
Benny Kraut, Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati, 1979, p. 6)

Felix Adler and his siblings grew up in an environment imbued with religious devotion and
intellectual inquisitiveness. Felix and his older brother, Isaac, attended the Columbia Grammar School
and Columbia College, both of which were private Christian institutions having few Jews. The boys also
attended the Temple Emanu-El Sunday School, and Samuel augmented their religious instruction with
lessons in Hebrew and Jewish history as well as in the Talmud, the Bible, and works of Jewish
scholarship. In addition to providing a rounded secular and religious education, Samuel and Henrietta
Adler inculcated in their children the spirit of humanitarianism. The rabbi was a co-founder of the
Hebrew Orphan Asylum of New York, one of many charitable causes he urged the temple congregation
to support. Henrietta regularly offered food and other assistance to families in New York's squalid
tenements; Felix later recalled that the mercy errands he made with his mother had a profound impact on
him.

My mother had often sent me as a child on errands of charity, and had always impressed
upon me the duty of respecting the dignity of the poor while ministering sympathetically
to their needs. I was prepared by this youthful training to resent the indignity offered to
the personality of the laborer, as well as the suffering endured by him in consequence of
existing conditions.
According to Horace L. Friess, Felix Adler's son-in-law and literary executor, "these excursions... were not only lessons in charity, but gave the child an early and visible impression of the existence and meaning of poverty." (Felix Adler and Ethical Culture, Horace L. Friess, Columbia University Press, New York, 1981, p. 20)

Two other striking influences in Adler's youth deserve mention. First, he felt terribly lonesome and alienated in his school environment. As he wrote in his memoirs, "A Jewish boy from a family largely German among typically American boys of the wealthy class, I found I was forced back upon myself by lack of companionship." (Autobiographical notes of Felix Adler, quoted in Friess, p. 20)

When he entered college at age 15, his relative youth exacerbated his social awkwardness. In addition to encouraging the development of Adler's inner life, this alienation introduced the youth to the harsh realities of economic stratification and religious and racial prejudice. His later efforts to break through class distinctions and sectarian boundaries were no doubt partly fueled by his memories of isolation. Secondly, the Civil War broke out only a few years after the Adler family immigrated to the United States. Samuel Adler imparted to his children his passionate opposition to slavery, and reports of the war showed Felix with what ardor social reform can be resisted; as his moral indignation and social idealism matured, Adler knew what reactionary opposition he could expect.

Adler's undergraduate studies were less than enlivening. Columbia College, which had not yet become part of a prestigious university, offered a fixed course of studies which stressed rote learning. Adler was not encouraged to pursue his native interest in philosophy and religion, and he apparently found no mentor to assist him in synthesizing his studies. Nevertheless, he became an avid reader; in his journal, he quoted liberally from the works of influential freethinkers. He was especially fond of Francis Bacon, who he said revolutionized philosophy by advancing the proposition that the aim of all
philosophy must be . . . practical good to mankind." (Book of jottings, Felix Adler, pp. 21-22, quoted in Kraut, p. 13) According to Kraut, Adler adopted that principle as a cornerstone of his life's teaching: "To Felix, the ultimate value of religious doctrine and ethical philosophy was to be measured by the human good and welfare which they generated." (Kraut, p. 13)

Also during his undergraduate years, Adler discovered and consciously developed his skills as a writer and orator. At Columbia, he participated in a literary society and was named class poet in his junior year. He also taught Sabbath classes at Emanu-El and delivered sermons at the Hebrew Orphan Asylum.

**Awakening in a "New Country"**

In his religious development, Adler adopted his father's beliefs as his starting point. The journal he kept during adolescence indicates he believed firmly in a providential God, an all-powerful being that mysteriously intervenes in the lives of individuals as well as in the grander affairs of the human race. Like his father, he considered theistic faith the only reliable impetus for ethical behavior:

> If man were not restrained by the consciousness that God's eye is upon him at all times, he would say "my small affairs are too insignificant for this great God. I will follow my senses . . . ." And thus the very foundation of society, its morality and values would be destroyed. (Book of jottings, Felix Adler, p. 23, quoted in Kraut, p. 20)

Felix embraced the Reform Jewish doctrine that the Jews had been entrusted with the sacred mission of spreading monotheistic faith throughout the world. This mission, he believed, justified maintaining a distinct Jewish identity. In an essay published in the Jewish Times in 1869, he railed against the custom of Jews erecting Christmas trees in their homes during the Christian holiday season. Titled "The Christmas Tree," the article expressed outrage that Jews should, in the name of cultural assimilation, mark a holiday that Adler believed signified centuries of Jewish martyrdom. But although he respected
the integrity of Jewish culture, Adler began to dream of liberating the faith from its racial boundaries so that it might fulfill its missionary role.

However, Adler took to heart the doubts that arose during his quest. Samuel had imparted to his children his disgust for the indiscriminate perpetuation of orthodox customs and doctrines; in late adolescence, young Adler began to follow his father’s iconoclasm to its logical conclusions. He questioned the value of fasting and performing sacrificial rituals on Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement; he eventually asserted that social activism is the only genuine form of atonement. He also found it difficult to accept the validity of the Old Testament in toto. He could not reconcile his fundamental belief in a benevolent God with Biblical stories of divine retribution -- such as the turning of Lot into a pillar of salt -- and unethical dictums -- such as the command that Abraham kill his son. Such inconsistencies led Adler to question whether, as his father had taught him, the Bible is a divine revelation.

Inevitably, Adler came to question the very existence of a personal God. Looking about at the dreadful suffering of New Yorkers in the midst of postwar unemployment and inflation, he doubted whether belief in a caring, providential God was tenable. His introductory study of science, with its naturalistic explanations of biological evolution and the harmony of matter and energy, further undermined his need to invoke a deity that actively participates in the workings of the world. He retained, for a time, belief in an intelligent, omnipotent creator, but he stripped his God-image of the personality and loving kindness that had so appealed to him in childhood. According to Kraut, Adler noted in a memoir that "the anthropomorphic conception of God had already disappeared while I was in college. I stopped praying one day." (Autobiographical notes, Felix Adler, p. 1, quoted in Kraut, p. 35)

In 1870, Adler returned to Germany to undertake graduate studies. His brother, Isaac, had gone to Berlin two years earlier to train for a career in medicine. Samuel, then, looked to Felix to carry on the family's rabbinical tradition. It is not known whether Felix ever truly aspired to the Jewish ministry, but
the Temple Emanu-El congregation clearly expected him to apply for a post at the temple upon his return.

The Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums (Academy for Jewish Learning), the Berlin rabbinical school at which Adler had planned to study, was forced to postpone its opening because of the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. In the two years before the Hochschule opened, Adler undertook secular studies at Berlin University. Although he specialized in semitics, Adler also studied philosophy, literature, and social sciences. The Hochschule opened in 1872, and Adler studied there for less than a year before transferring to the University of Heidelberg, where received his doctoral degree in semitics.

That Felix had mastered Arabic and received his doctorate summa cum laude fanned Samuel's hope that he might pass on his post to his son. In a letter dated May 13, 1873, Samuel wrote:

I was overcome with surprise and delight and gave thanks to the Almighty. Now, indeed the time has come to think of your future career. I believe you know that my dearest wish is to gradually retire, enjoy my old age in peace and see you take my place.

(Letter of Samuel Adler to Felix Adler, May 13, 1873, Ethical Culture Archives, quoted in Kraut, p. 49)

Although Samuel kept up a steady correspondence with his sons, he failed to appreciate -- or refused to accept -- the change that Felix had undergone during his graduate studies. The European academic world had been rocked by the new paradigms of Darwinian biology and the emergent social sciences. Deism continued to hold sway in various forms, but the concept of a providential God was generally deemed irrelevant in light of fresh scientific discoveries. Physical scientists acknowledged that metaphysics, the study of ultimate causes and principles, was outside their ken, but their new constructs of the evolutionary process and the interplay of cosmic forces required no reference to a universal monarch; in fact, their discoveries challenged the age-old assumption that the universe is orderly and,
therefore, ordered. Social scientists, for their part, had begun to interpret religions as manmade belief systems which fulfill utilitarian functions such as ordering authority structures and establishing commonly held ethical values. Again, most thinkers were not intent on debunking theism per se, but their broadening understanding of religion's cultural evolution and functional roles inevitably relativized the value of specific religions.

Adler eagerly examined these trends of thought; he listened closely, studied arduously, and submitted his faith to the scrutiny of reason. He came to see that Judaism, like all religions, evolved in response to a people's need to understand the world; it provided an overarching mythology within which human existence, striving, and suffering could be seen as meaningful. He saw religion as culturally useful, but he could not but doubt any religion's claim to substantial, authoritative truth. In his unbounded studies of both ancient and modern modes of thought, he decided that strict adherence to a single belief system deprives the mind of the depth acquired through eclectic experimentation.

Adler recalled his departure from mainstream Judaism as "a gradual, smooth transition, the unfolding of a seed that had long been planted. . . . The truth is, I was hardly aware of the change that had taken place until it was fairly consummated. One day I awoke, and found that I had traveled into a new country." (Ethical Philosophy of Life, p. 14)

In time, Adler rejected traditional monotheism. He found no firm, rational proof of the existence of a creator-God, and the notion of making a "leap of faith" struck him as intellectually irresponsible. While at the University of Berlin, he later recalled, "I . . . undertook to grapple in grim earnest with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. The net outcome was not atheism in the moral sense, -- I have never been what is called an atheist, -- but the definite and permanent disappearance of the individualistic conception of Deity." (Ibid., p. 9) Along with theism, Adler necessarily rejected the divine origin of both scripture and the "Jewish mission." He acclaimed prophetic writings of the Old Testament on the basis of their intrinsic validity, and he affirmed the value of channeling the moral momentum of Jewish history
toward worldwide ethical evangelism; however, he denied that the Jews had been chosen, instructed, and sanctioned to carry out such a mission.

Like most ardent truth seekers, Adler felt a certain thrill upon dispensing with an "old wineskin":

The curtain that had intervened between my eyes and the world, on which was painted the image of an individual man-like God, slowly drew aside, and I looked upon the world with fresh eyes.

(Autobiographical notes of Felix Adler, quoted in Kraut, p. 55)

There was a flip side to Adler's change in consciousness: In addition to a sense of relief and unprecedented freedom, he felt the grief that inevitably follows the surrender of certainty:

I look back with dread to that time when everything seemed sinking around me, when the cherished faith which seemed at one time dearer to me than life itself was going to pieces under me, and it seemed to me that I could save nothing out of the wreck of all that seemed holiest to me.

(Autobiographical notes of Felix Adler, quoted in Kraut, p. 55)

Ultimately, Adler saved much of the "wreck" of his religious heritage. Despite his fundamental departure from Judaism, he never lost his reverence for the Jewish contribution to universal ethical values:

The prophets of Israel assigned to the ethical principle the highest rank in man's life and in the world at large. The best thing in man, they declared, is his moral personality; and
the best thing in the world, the supreme and controlling principle, is the moral power that pervades it.

(Ethical Philosophy of Life, p. 16)

Adler found a crucial refinement of that principle in Christianity, a religion to which he "came from the outside, with a fresh mind to receive first-hand impressions." (Ibid., p. 30) He put aside the "mythological idealization of Jesus ... as a thing that did not concern me," but he found in the teachings of Jesus a revolutionary contribution to ethical thought. (Ibid., p. 32) In Jesus' admonition to "turn the other cheek," Adler saw the introduction of a reflective, soul-searching approach to ethical behavior, as opposed to mere resolve to abide by moral dictates:

There is a way, [Jesus] says to the victim, in which you can spiritually triumph over the evil-doer, and make your peace with irresistible oppression. Use it as a means of self-purification; pause to consider what the inner motives are that lead your enemy, and others like him, to do such acts as they are guilty of, and to so violate your personality and that of others. The motives in them are lust, greed, anger, wilfulness, pride. Now turn your gaze inward upon yourself, look into your own heart and learn, perhaps to your amazement, that the same evil streams trickle through you; that you, too, are subject, even if it be only subconsciously and incipiently, to the same appetites, passions, and pride, that animate your injurers. Therefore let the sufferings you endure at the hands of those who allow these bad impulses free rein in their treatment of you lead you to expel the same bad impulses that stir potentially in your breast; let this experience fill you with a deeper horror of the evil, and prove the incentive to secure your own emancipation from its control. (Ibid., p. 34)
Adler saw Jesus as a prophet of what he came to call divine life, the ultimate reality, which manifests itself in the will to goodness. Jesus, he said, clearly perceived "the pure thing in man that thrusts out as alien to itself whatever is impure." (Ibid., p. 35) By sharing in Jesus' perception of the divine life in everyone, Adler said, the seeker finds that one's will to behave ethically is elevated to a new height, the height of love:

To love men is to be conscious of one's unity with them in the central life, and to give effect to this consciousness. . . . To love another is to . . . think of him, and act towards him, as if he possessed the same capacity for purity with oneself. (Ibid., p. 36)

According to Adler, only the perception of divine life makes it possible to follow Jesus' admonition to love one's enemies:

To bless them that curse you, to bless them that despitefully use you, means to distinguish between their overt conduct, to see the human, the potentially divine face behind the horrible mask, and to invoke the influence of the divine power upon them in order that it may change them into their purer, better selves. (Ibid., p. 38)

Despite his deep and lasting reverence for Jesus, Adler always looked at Christianity from the perspective of an outsider. First, of course, he could not accept Jesus' characterization of a heavenly father who cares for the needs of his children; that image, Adler said, "raises expectations which experience does not confirm." (Ibid., p. 23) Secondly, he rejected the apocalyptic vision on which Jesus' ethics are predicated. Jesus taught that the material world is not the true home of humanity, that earth's inhabitants are living in exile as they await the day when they shall enter the "kingdom of God." By Adler's reckoning, that belief gives all of Jesus' ethical teachings an other-worldly cast, an implicit
disdain for political, economic, scientific and artistic affairs. In addition to emasculating the respect due to all honorable human endeavor, this stance, Adler felt, leaves the person of good will without direction: "How shall an ethical person conduct himself in a world which his philosophy of life teaches him to reject, but with which the necessities of his existence compel him to come to terms day by day and hour by hour?" (Ibid., p. 40)

Thus, Adler found it necessary to make a fundamental departure from the Judeo-Christian tradition:

Religious growth may . . . be compared to the growth of a tree. To expect that development shall continue along the Hebrew or Christian lines is like expecting that a tree will continue to develop along one of its branches. There is a limit beyond which the extension of a branch cannot go. Then growth must show itself in the putting forth of a new branch. (Ibid., p. 18)

Diversity in Creed, Unanimity in Deed

Although he rejected theism in its usual conceptualizations, Adler retained his urge to revitalize religion. If religion is an institution subject to the universal principles of cultural evolution, he reasoned, then the modern generation is obliged to overhaul the institution to serve the needs of its age. He adopted Matthew Arnold's depiction of God as a moral power, and he embraced Kant's supposition that ethical behavior is based not on faith but on an irrefutable moral imperative operating in the mind of every individual. He believed that this stance provided the foundation for a religion that would respect and incorporate intellectual advances while promoting social cohesiveness and ethical progress.

Members of the Temple Emanu-El congregation did not all share young Adler's enthusiasm for his newly wrought religious outlook. Upon his return to New York in 1873, the rabbi's son was asked to deliver a sermon at the temple. The congregation tendered the invitation so that it might assess Adler's fitness to succeed his father; Adler, however, used the opportunity to test the congregation's openness to
his universalist vision of religion. In the sermon, titled "The Judaism of the Future," Adler proposed that the Jewish faith serve as the driving force of a broader religion of ethics:

[This religion shall have] institutions . . . bearing on all conditions and relations of life.

[This] religion, not confined to church and synagogue alone, shall go forth into the marketplace, shall sit by the judge in the tribunal, by the counselor in the hall of legislation, shall stand by the merchant in his warehouse, by the workman at his work. In every department of life, wherever man's activity is unfolded its quickening influences shall be felt; religion and life shall be wedded once more in inseparable union.

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We discard the narrow spirits of exclusion, and loudly proclaim that Judaism was not given to the Jews alone, but that its destiny is to embrace in one great moral state the whole family of man . . . . The genius of religion . . . is the genius of Judaism; . . . again shall it proclaim its great humanitarian doctrine, its eternal watchword: One Truth, One Love, One Hope in the Highest, One great brotherhood of men on Earth.

("The Judaism of the Future," Ethical Culture Archives, quoted in Kraut, pp. 77-78)

Nowhere in the sermon did Adler refer to God -- an omission that did not go unnoticed. The sharpest reaction to the sermon came from Gustav Gottheil, Samuel Adler's associate rabbi, who threatened to resign rather than share his responsibilities with the young rebel. When temple officials, responding to Gottheil's criticism, asked Adler to clarify his position with regard to the deity, Adler acknowledged that he no longer believed in the personal, providential God exalted in the Bible. After that confrontation, he must have recognized that Temple Emanu-El was not the proper forum for his ideas, for he declared that he was not to be considered a candidate for a rabbinical post. He rejected as unethical the proposition of
certain liberal congregants that he remain within the fold as a means of liberating Jews from sectarian beliefs:

This advice was repelled by every inmost fibre of my being, and could not but be utterly rejected. I was to publicly represent a certain belief with the purpose of undermining it. I was to trade upon the simplicity of my hearers in order to rob them of what they, crudely and mistakenly perhaps, considered their most sacred truth, by feigning provisionally, until I could alter their views, to be in agreement with them. Would this be fair to them or to myself? Was I to act a lie in order to teach the truth?

*(An Ethical Philosophy of Life, p. 26)*

Despite Adler's theological departure, many of Emanu-El's congregants were deeply impressed by his erudition, social idealism, and oratorical skill. In October 1873, a month after his temple sermon, 47 congregants signed a letter inviting him to deliver a series of lectures "on subjects congenial to and connected with your line of studies." (Letter of October 21, 1873, quoted in Kraut, p. 86) Adler was gratified by the invitation; between November 1873 and March 1874, he delivered six public lectures at New York's Lyric Hall. The lecture series included talks on major world religions -- Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, as well as Judaism -- and a critical assessment of the prospects of religious growth in the United States. He drew heavily upon the philosophical and sociological works he had studied in Europe.

Adler used the Lyric Hall addresses to subtly provoke intellectual change in his primarily Jewish audiences. By outlining the evolution of religions within their narrow cultural matrices, he invited his listeners to apply the tools of critical reasoning to their own faith; only several years later did he openly debunk the underpinnings of Judaism and dispense with his Jewish religious identity. The lectures were well-received in the liberal Jewish community and among New York's intelligencia. The Jewish press
gave the series prominent coverage, but its overall approval was tempered with criticism of Adler's
derisive attitude toward belief in divine providence.

The notoriety Adler attained through the lecture series led to his appointment as a nonresident
professor of Hebrew and Oriental literature at Cornell University. Beginning in spring 1874, he lectured
for about six weeks each school year for three years. The texts of his lectures are not extant, but he
reportedly included in his literary talks the critical assessment of world religions he had introduced in the
Lyric Hall addresses. His Cornell lectures drew sizeable and appreciative audiences, but his religious
liberalism antagonized conservative Christians both on the faculty and in the Ithaca community; the
antipathy toward him resulted from a mixture of sectarian provincialism and bald anti-Semitism. As a
result of the controversy, Adler's contract was not renewed after it lapsed in 1876.

The abrupt end of Adler's academic career was fortuitous, for it allowed him to turn his attention to
the establishment of the "practical religion" he had long prophesied. In May 1876, Adler spoke at a
meeting that had been called by liberal Temple Emanu-El congregants to organize a permanent lecture
movement:

There is a great and crying evil in modern society. It is want of purpose. It is that
narrowness of vision which shuts out the wider vistas of the soul . . . . It is the absence of
those sublime emotions which, wherever they arise, do not fail to exalt and consecrate
existence . . . . True, the void and hollowness of which we speak is coveredover by a fair
exterior. Men distill a subtle sort of intoxication from the ceaseless flow and shifting
changes of affairs . . . , but there comes a time of rude awakening. A great crisis sweeps
over the land . . .

[I]t is my dearest object to exalt the present movement above the strife of contending
sects and parties, and at once to occupy that common ground where we may all meet,
believers and unbelievers, for purposes in themselves, lofty and unquestioned by any. Surely it is time that a beginning were made in this direction. For more than 3,000 years, men have quarreled concerning the formulas of their faith... Freedom of thought is a sacred right of every individual man. Believe or disbelieve as you list -- we shall at all times respect every honest conviction -- but be one with us where there is nothing to divide -- in action. Diversity in the creed, unanimity in the deed. This is that practical religion from which none dissents. This is that Platform broad enough to receive the worshipper and the infidel. This is that common ground where we may all grasp hands as brothers united in mankind's common cause....

(Address delivered by Felix Adler on May 15, 1876, at Standard Hall in New York City; Ethical Culture Archives)

In his proposal, Adler called for regular Sunday meetings that would include lectures and music; he explicitly ruled out the use of prayer and rituals. By the following fall, more than 250 people had bought subscriptions to the first lecture series, and on Feb. 21, 1877, the New York Society for Ethical Culture was formally incorporated. In its articles of incorporation, the society declared its purpose to be "the mutual improvement in religious knowledge and the furtherance of religious opinion which shall be in part accomplished by a system of weekly lectures, in which the principles of ethics shall be developed, propogated, and advanced among adults, and in part by the establishment of a school or schools wherein a course of moral instruction shall be supplied for the young."

While its founders intended to express those ideals in the institution's name, "Ethical Culture" always has struck many of its adherents as prim, antiquated -- and unfortunate. Interestingly, Adler himself referred to the term as "curious" and "inadequate." In an 1897 address, he explained that the name had been chosen to signify the "need of getting to work thoroughly and cultivating ourselves as you would cultivate the hard ground -- rake it up and make it fruitful and do not spare the sharp spade in digging."
As the membership of the New York Society grew and stabilized, it undertook a variety of social services and reform activities. In addition to its Sunday school for the children of members, it ran a free kindergarten for the children of the poor. Its members and associate leaders founded two settlement houses to provide health, educational, and job-placement services to immigrants. A Guild for Aiding Crippled Children and an employment bureau for handicapped adults were organized. Henry Moskowitz, an associate leader of the New York Society for 15 years, was one of three principal organizers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909; several of his fellow Ethical leaders assisted in his efforts. In response to the abysmal health care system in New York's slum districts, the society organized the District Nursing Department, sending both volunteers and paid workers to tend to the needs of the sick; that agency evolved into the modern-day Visiting Nurse Association. Adler and his colleagues fought, often successfully, for legislation upgrading housing codes and guaranteeing the rights of laborers. Samuel Gompers, the first president of the American Federation of Labor and a member of the New York Society, said in 1894 that Ethical Society members were "first among religious and professional groups that supplied the best and most persistent advocate of the cause of labor." (Toward Common Ground: The Story of the Ethical Societies in the United States, Howard B. Radest, Frederick Unger Publishing Co. New York, 1969, p. 100)

In 1878, consonant with Adler's belief that the working class can advance only through education, the society founded the Workingman's School, an elementary and secondary school that combined training in industrial arts with ethics classes and a conventional pedagogy. After it began admitting paying pupils in the mid-1890s, the school was renamed the Ethical Culture School. Its subsequent experiments in liberal arts education has earned it nationwide acclaim.

The movement expanded quickly after the founding of the New York Society. Between 1882 and 1886, ethical societies were founded in Chicago, Philadelphia, and St. Louis. Each society was begun by
a leader who was selected and trained by Adler, and each patterned its Sunday services and educational programs after those formulated in New York.

In 1886, the American Ethical Union (AEU) was founded as a federation of the ethical societies in the United States. For much of its existence, the Union has served as little more than a channel of communication among independent communities; ethical society members, many of whom have rebelled against traditional religions, habitually resist institutionalization. Nevertheless, the AEU plays a strong role in the selection and training of leaders and coordinates nationwide educational programs.

Evolution of an Ethical Ministry

Just as the Ethical Culture movement has shifted the religious "center of gravity," the leaders who serve ethical societies have developed a mode of ministry profoundly different from that of traditional religions. Having no imperial directives from Rome or Tibet and little tradition to guide them, they have learned to serve the needs of society members according to their own lights. Wherever they serve, they face high expectations: They are asked to educate, stimulate, inspire, guide, console, and mediate; they are expected to foster fellowship, spur activism, administer a variety of programs, and coordinate public relations. The fiercely individualistic nature of the ethical movement puts its leaders in a trying position: They are asked to enlighten but forbidden to preach; they are asked to offer direction but forbidden to give orders.

Ethical society members brook no authoritarianism; like political officeholders in a democracy, ethical leaders serve at the will of their congregants. And, like constituents in a democracy, congregants do not speak with one mind. Elsie De Wald, a member of the St. Louis Ethical Society from 1962 until her death in (198?), said in an interview that it is virtually impossible for a leader to measure up to the varying standards of a society's members:

It's a very difficult row to hoe, to be a leader of the Ethical Society. My heart goes out to them. There's criticism on all sides; it's very unfair. Somebody doesn't like the way you
talk, somebody doesn't like something else -- they expect too much. It's a 25-hour-a-day job.

You have to have somebody who is highly intelligent, because it's a very intelligent group of freakish people. They're high-grade people, and you need stimulation [to get] people to want to come.

During most of his lifetime, Felix Adler hand-picked leaders, oversaw their training, and placed them in positions, largely at his own discretion. In making his selections, he emphasized the need for erudition:

What is needed in a leader is scholarship. A man should be versed in religion and in philosophy, for our religion is a way of life and to be a Leader is to know what people in the past have found or thought that they have found and expressed in their philosophies and their religions.

(New York Board of Trustees, Minutes, November 1925)

At Adler's insistence, most of the movement's early leaders undertook graduate studies in philosophy at a German university. The next phase of training was an apprenticeship under Adler at the New York Society or one of the agencies spawned and maintained by that society -- the Ethical Culture School or one of a variety of social programs. Upon satisfactorily completing this apprenticeship, these leaders were assigned to permanent positions in New York or one of the fledgling societies in the East and Midwest.

If Adler minimized the value of typically pastoral attributes, his Socratic ideal of leadership was counterbalanced by the style of several men who served in his inner circle. Most notable among those early leaders is John Lovejoy Elliott, a native of Illinois who brought Midwestern earthiness both to the platform and to the social reform efforts he led on New York's West Side. Adler and his other associates
concentrated on reforming political and philanthropic machinery, but Elliott worked directly with the city's poor. Leaving behind his uptown digs, he moved into the squalid Chelsea neighborhood in the mid-1890s and began organizing the educational, recreational and employment agencies that came to be known collectively as Hudson Guild. In a talk before the New York board of trustees in 1925, Elliott reflected on the manner in which he altered Adler's vision of the ethical ministry:

Years ago, when I first met Dr. Adler at Cornell, he made a deep impression on me when he spoke of the "new profession of teaching people how to live." I would change that phrase now to the "profession of living with people," with people of all kinds, in sickness, people in trouble, in the most soul-searching kind of trouble.

(New York Board of Trustees, Minutes, 1925)

De Wald, a graduate of New York's Ethical Culture School, at which Elliott taught, recalled the leader's warmth in an interview:

Everybody loved Dr. John -- he was "Dr. John" to all of us. We loved him. He'd sit in his office and we'd pass by -- the little children in the school -- and there was Johnny waving his hand to everybody: "Hello, dear heart," he'd say. He was adorable, a beautiful man. He was no speaker -- he was a terrible speaker -- but he held everybody in the palm of his hand. Dr. Elliott was tall and handsome -- oh, what a beautiful man he was! He was a bachelor, and he lived down in Hudson Guild. He had good friends down there. He was the soul of the whole community down there. He was very, very loving.

He had one of his "parishioners," as he would call them, a boy who was sent to Sing-Sing, which is a criminal prison. Every week, he'd go up to visit this man. He never missed a week. That was John Elliott.
He was so darling. He was so sweet. He loved life. He was spontaneous -- he couldn't be anything but John Elliott. I think he was the most beloved person I've known.

By contrast, De Wald recalled Adler as an aloof, professorial man:

You couldn't say you loved the man. You had great *regard* for him. He was a cold man. He was very arrogant, quietly arrogant. I mean, he didn't parade it, but you knew that you were just a little pigeon on the walk.

He was a brilliant man. When he was dying, he read Homer in the original Greek -- that's the kind of man he was. He talked about everything. He would stop in the middle (of a lecture) and go into a sideline, and he'd come back again after five minutes of the most exciting, stimulating talk and pick up from the last word he'd aid before his mind went astray. It was fantastic! But he was very withdrawn.

Throughout the history of the movement, Adler and Elliott have been held up as polar paradigms of leadership style. Seldom has a leader succeeded in blending the best qualities of both. The Ethical Society of St. Louis, in its first century, has had five principle leaders. Each has redefined the role and given it a distinctive character. With one exception, each has made leadership in the Ethical movement a lifelong career.
WALTER L. SHELDON
Apostle to the St. Louisans

Walter Lorenzo Sheldon, the inaugural leader of the Ethical Society of St. Louis, was at once the most ponderous and most activist of the Society's leaders. He was a complex man, a stoic and rationalist with a profound appreciation of mystical experience. Though fettered by guilt and bouts of dark depression, he was a seminal thinker in the early development of Ethical Culture and a pioneer in the movement's education of children. He shared with the fellowship his devotion to free thought, the edification of working-class people, and cultivation of the inner life. In searching for reasons why the Ethical movement has flourished in St. Louis while lagging and even disintegrating in larger cities, Sheldon's troubled but forceful personality stands out as an irreplaceable boon. By attracting hundreds of loyal members and making the society's influence felt throughout the city, Sheldon bequeathed to the fellowship two decades of vital momentum.

Sheldon was born in West Rutland, Vermont, on Sept. 5, 1858, the oldest of three sons of Preston and Cornelia Hatch Sheldon. When he was 6 years old, his father drowned in a sailing accident. His mother, a devout Congregationalist, nurtured him in evangelical Christianity. He was devoted to the church and, through much of his adolescence, planned on a career in the ministry. In a set of New Year's reflections written in 1875-76, he resolved to "more fully and more completely love and adore and worship my God, -- love and trust my Savior and the Holy Ghost -- love the Bible." (Sheldon papers quoted in "The Philosophic Sources and Sanctions of the Founders of Ethical Culture, unpublished doctoral dissertation by James F. Hornback, Columbia University, 1983). Before long, however, Sheldon's loyalty to the church clashed with his broadening appreciation of other religions:

In this year the whole course of my life has been changed by my resolve to go through college. There is growing within me a respect for all creeds and religions and I have grown much more liberal in my views respecting religions & creeds, but I fear that I have gone too far so that now in many respects my mind is puzzled and it is only by a slow process that I must feel my way forward or backward as must needs be best.
(Ibid.)

At Vermont's Middlebury College, which he attended for two years, Sheldon maintained at least an outward fealty to the church. After he transferred to Princeton University in his junior year, a student
humor magazine at Middlebury facetiously reported his death from "excessive swelling of self esteem" and "a too rigid observance of the rules of the Orthodox church."

While at Princeton, Sheldon abandoned orthodox Christianity. In an autobiographical note published in the Sexennial Record of the Class of 1880, he wrote:

Now that I have taken a stand so wide from the religious attitude of Princeton, I have felt that the college would not own me. Princeton taught me a great deal in many things, but while I was there . . . I was taking an attitude that, by the time of my graduation, put me far outside the pale of its theology . . . .

His career plans shattered, Sheldon felt adrift. After graduation, he traveled throughout Egypt, Palestine, and Europe with a classmate. In 1881, developing an inclination for an academic career, he began two years of graduate studies in philosophy, psychology, and literature at the University of Berlin. There he met S. Burns Weston, who had been sent there by Adler for the obligatory German sojourn before starting up the Philadelphia Society for Ethical Culture. The men became close friends, and Sheldon eventually caught his soul mate's fervor for the new religion of ethics. Sheldon transferred to the University of Leipzig in the 1882-83 academic year, but he kept in touch with Weston and accepted his friend's invitation to return to New York with him in the fall of 1883.

From 1883 to 1885, Sheldon worked with Adler at the New York Society; his principal role was as leader of the Society's Young Men's Union. During his apprenticeship, he continued his studies in political and social science at Columbia University. At the time, Adler was looking for someone who could lead an ethical society in St. Louis; a group there had sought to organize a society since 1883, and its request was prominent on Adler's list of expansion sites. Adler was favorably impressed with Sheldon's leadership abilities, but Sheldon, racked with doubts about the philosophical foundation of Ethical Culture, was not prepared to commit himself to a permanent post in the movement.

James F. Hornback, leader of the St. Louis society from 1951 to 1984, detailed Sheldon's tortuous philosophical search in his 1983 doctoral dissertation, "The Philosphic Sources and Sanctions of the Founders of Ethical Culture." According to that account, Sheldon's challenge essentially was to find within the human person a foundation for a system of ethics that would be as sound as is the voice of God in a theological matrix. He needed a firm reason to believe in free will and the human capacity to make moral judgments, but neither Adler nor the myriad philosophers he studied was able to satisfy that need. During his years in New York, he painstakingly drafted a system of thought he titled "The Ethical Constitution," which underscored the reality of consciousness and predicated ethics on the primordial
sense of duty, which he defined as "truth to my whole nature." He considered conscience inherent in the human person -- not something taught or deliberately formed. Hornback describes the tenets that Sheldon drew from that starting point:

Man has four aspects in his total nature. He is, first, a physical being or structure, which is but a piece of nature following its laws without choice or duty. Second, he is a sentient organism, no longer just an effect but a vital cause, with the duty to maintain life through the satisfaction of the appetites, procreation, and struggle, while avoiding the giving or the suffering of unnecessary pain. Third, he is a man among men, a brother, who sees himself as an end in himself and ought to see and treat other men in the same way. Fourth and finally, he is a self, with special and even unique capacities, an individual striving for his highest possible effect and realization in the universe, in progressive equilibrium with the strivings of others. Out of struggles, conflicts, and antagonisms among the aspiring consciousnesses rise the sense of duty and the "four great duties of men to one another, Truth, Benevolence, Justice and Cooperation." Even in the higher development of the self as unique, these basic duties apply, for there is always interrelation and struggle with an imperfect self, and with the environment. But if the whole universe had a single consciousness, or "an ideal to work out," according to Sheldon, "... a sense of duty would not exist, for there would be no struggle against the environment. The end would come of itself."

Thus did Walter Sheldon arrive at an ethic of self-realization, in a multiplicity of consciousnesses to whom the earthly end is clear, though the means are cloudy approximations aimed at the greatest possible progressive equilibrium. There are no absolutes in ethics, whatever there may be in the great unknown and unknowable area formerly bound to ethics by religion.

(JFH, p. 192-3)

Despite his satisfaction in working out this system of thought, Sheldon was not sufficiently confident of its veracity to continue in the Ethical movement. Intellectually stymied in his progress as an ethicist, Sheldon considered turning toward a medical career and, in 1885, enrolled at the school of medicine at the University of Berlin. In a letter written to Weston in September 1885, Adler revealed his dismay over Sheldon's departure and his frustration over Sheldon's scruples:
I too see Sheldon depart with regret. I cannot conceive that medicine should be his proper sphere. Sheldon despairs of an assured intellectual basis for his moral convictions. I on the other hand should despair of the movement without such a basis! You tell me that Sheldon "believes and would teach the freedom of the will, but when it comes to a philosophical explanation of it he finds contradictions which he cannot reconcile." With what confidence then can a belief be promulgated of which the teacher is aware that he cannot state it without self-contradiction?

I must work until I can get a satisfactory reason for the faith that is in me. But Sheldon refuses to do this, and what is more asks that his state of intellectual indecision be erected into a precedent and a rule in our movement. To this demand I can only return an inflexible negative. I need not repeat that in requiring reasons for his faith it is not implied that he should give our reasons, only strong reasons, reasons that will make him feel that he has a right to teach what he does teach, and that will guarantee the permanence of his moral convictions.

(Letter from Felix Adler to S. Burns Weston, September 1885)

During his year at medical school, Sheldon warmed to Adler's calm attitude toward open-ended philosophical problems. He agreed that one can adopt a "religious attitude" while one's ideas are in the making. As he acknowledged in an essay written some years later:

Mind as mind would never have a religion, but only a philosophy of religion. In the long run, of course, there must be intellectual conviction behind the attitude we take. But the truth-seeking tendencies of our nature are not the forces which drive us toward it. No; it is the human will, seeking for guidance and support, which falls back upon religion.

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The whole scheme of human thought is in the process of change. Philosophy is in a state of transition. But while all this is taking place, we want something to cling to. We are reluctant to look upon ourselves as out in the cold, barren of religious sympathies, unauthorized to have ideals or aspirations, solely because we are not convinced of the truth of one system of thought. I have ventured to assert that according to the real meaning of the term, and in agreement with the most fundamental standpoint of the human heart, we can still be religious while waiting for a philosophy of religion.
In the spring of 1886, he returned to New York and informed Adler he had decided to make his career in Ethical Culture. He accepted the invitation of the nascent St. Louis fellowship to deliver a series of lectures in May of that year, and in November Adler and his disciple launched the Society's first season.

A PROPHET OF ETHICAL RELIGION
Sheldon's Philosophy of Being

Sheldon was devoted to his role as part of the founding generation of Ethical leaders. Along with Adler, Elliott, Salter, and Weston, he was shaping a religious movement which he expected to flourish in the centuries to come. Acknowledging the movement's roots in Greek and Kantian ethics, and its inspiration in the works of Emerson, he spoke of it as "in part only a revival," an orchestrated sounding of "a neglected chord in history." (The Meaning of an Ethical Movement, from An Ethical Movement, W.L. Sheldon, Macmillan and Co., New York, 1896; p. 2)

He believed that Western civilization, and particularly America, was ready to hear that chord as never before. In explaining the movement, he distinguished between the "two great tendencies" of religion. The first, he observed, is to cultivate the "devotional side" of human nature, awakening "spiritual exaltation or the rapture of self-surrender." (Ibid., p. 3) In the Christian tradition, it places great emphasis on life after death and conceives of moral evil as "love of the world"; it stresses ardent loyalty to beliefs and urges spiritual culture through worship of God. The second tendency of religion, he noted, is to promote dedication to mitigating suffering and altering the conditions that produce it. It is this aspect of religion, he wrote, that "makes us acknowledge our mutual responsibility for all the evil in the world and our mutual share in it; and also to see that if anything is to be done, it is to be done by us, and not through some extraneous influence." (Ibid., pp. 4-5) In every religion and every age, he wrote, one aspect or the other takes precedence; looking beyond the organized movement he was working to form, he applied the term Ethical Movement to the general disposition to emphasize the ethical aspect of religion over the devotional.

At the outset of his career, Sheldon believed that Western civilization stood on the threshold of a new religious age. The development of industrial technology had strengthened humanity's sense of mastery over nature, and the burgeoning labor movement had given workers a new-found perception of
economic power, fostering "a determination to establish a Kingdom of Heaven of some kind here and now." (Ibid., p. 8) He predicted that confidence in an afterlife that would set right the injustices of earthly existence would wane in the coming centuries, and that the only religious philosophy that could flourish in such an age was one that offered ethical direction to the drive for self-mastery. In light of the irreversible social changes of the 19th century, he said, religious teaching "must concentrate its attention upon the practical side of daily life and everyday needs. It has been too much disposed to think of morality all by itself as 'secular,' neglecting to emphasize the voice which speaks within, out of regard for the voice which speaks from Above." (Ibid., p.9). He refrained from predicting the success of Ethical Culture as such, but he felt sure that an alliance -- formal or informal -- would emerge among "serious and earnest individuals who... are becoming more and more willing to forget the other differences, to pass by diversities of theological or philosophical belief, in order to concentrate their attention upon rescuing and developing the moral ideal." (Ibid., p. 19) He believed that the Universal Church prophesied by Emerson would be modeled after the emerging prototype of an ethical society.

The distinctiveness of the Ethical Movement, Sheldon contended, derives from its consummate attention to the driving force of all religion, "a common spiritual endowment" which he described as "the aspiration to reach a higher level of being, -- or, expressed more popularly, the desire on the part of each one "to be a better man and to have a better human society." (Ibid., p. 7) That impetus was for Sheldon the spark that ignites genuine religious fervor:

This desire is not something vague, mystical, or supersensible. It is definite, concrete, and positive, in the original form in which it awakens within us. It may exist faintly at times, and seem almost to die away altogether. But it has been in us at some period or other in the course of our lives. A man in the very depths of his nature is not quite content with what he is at any one moment; he would always like to be something else, a trifle better, a little further along in the scale of being. From this standpoint the difference between man and man is only a matter of degree. We are haunted with visions of a "better self" and a "better human world." Our common meeting-ground, therefore, is in the mutual interest we take in "the good life."

The new Emphasis on Ethics would have for its aim to bring into the foreground this universal interest or desire, and to utilize all conceivable means for developing it and making it become a dominant factor in the conduct of every living man.

(Ibid., pp. 7-8)
This Emphasis on Ethics, Sheldon wrote, would treat as sacred subjects all ethical relations of life, including the family, the state, property rights, individual rights, and reform efforts. Its sources of inspiration would be the greatest books of world literature, including the works of Shakespeare, George Eliot, Goethe, and Dante; the movement would seek guidance from recent statesmen such as Washington and Lincoln, just as the Hebrews had looked to David and Saul for wisdom grounded in everyday life; and it would value economics and political science as much as it would the study of ancient scriptures.

Apart from encouraging devotion to a deity, the movement he conceived would include the traditional elements of religion: Sunday morning meetings, moral instruction of children, social service and activism, and a trained clergy. He expounded on his definition in a statement of purpose which he proposed for adoption by all ethical societies:

An Ethical Society exists for the purpose of inducing people to think more about conscience, duty, justice, the cultivation of the higher nature, working for others, about High Conduct in all its phases, Morality in all its aspects. It exists supremely to emphasize the importance of Ethics.

An Ethical Society exists for the purpose of persuading people to do more than they are doing toward making themselves better men and women and toward improving the rest of the world.

An Ethical Society exists for the purpose of keeping public attention on the moral aspects of the Questions of the Day, and not allowing people to judge on such matters from their own personal interests or from purely material considerations.

An Ethical Society exists for the purpose of organizing practical educational work in social reform on a basis which shall be strictly neutral on all matters pertaining to religion. In all such effort the Society will seek to establish the motto "the work for the work's sake."

An Ethical Society exists in order to serve as a meeting-ground for people who are unable to agree in their religious beliefs and yet who are warmly interested in working together for their own moral improvement and for the moral improvement of the whole human race.

An Ethical Society exists for the sake of cultivating the sense of reverence and fostering the moral and spiritual nature of each person, while allowing every man to think as he pleases or as his judgment may compel him to think.
An Ethical Society exists for the purpose of awakening and fostering higher scruples in one's conduct in the home, personal life, public affairs, commercial life, and in all one's relations to the city, the State, or the nation to which one may belong.

An Ethical Society, amid the changes now going on in religious beliefs, exists for the purpose of persuading men to hold tenaciously to the great Moral Principles established by the experience of past ages, and approved by the voice of conscience, while at the same time always seeking light wherever it may be found.

An Ethical Society exists in order to accomplish these various purposes by means of lecture courses, educational clubs, classes for children, organized efforts for social reform, courses of reading or study, all concentrated on the one aim.

(Ibid., pp. 17-18)

Speaking of God in a Whisper

Sheldon defied the traditional categories of religious disposition, refusing to call himself a theist, atheist, or agnostic. He considered himself deeply religious, and his scrupulous intellectual honesty forbade him to reduce his attitude to such neat terms. He found that the word "God" had become so laden with personification and superstition that it tended to trivialize the ineffable mystery it was intended to honor; he wrote that he rarely used the word, not "because it means so little to me, but because it means so much." ("How People Can Use the Word "God,"" p. 84) He was tempted to avoid the use of the word altogether so as not to "degrade it . . . and our own natures, by tossing it heedlessly about," (Ibid. pp. 85-86) but he feared that by doing so we shall separate ourselves completely from many persons with whom we may be in close bonds of sympathy." (Ibid. p. 86) Aware that "God" is used to signify very different -- and even contradictory -- meanings, he was intrigued by the efforts of poets and philosophers to coin circumscribed substitutes -- Infinite Power, Supreme Being, the Absolute, the Ultimate Source, the Great Lawgiver, the Invisible Companion, and so on -- but he owned that such terms never had gained sufficient currency to be of use in common discourse. For his part, he chose to affirm certain specific conceptions, experiences, and beliefs the term "God" is used to designate. In an address titled "How People Can Use the Word 'God,'" he maintained that three aspects of human experience point to a reality which could, with proper caution and reverence, be termed "God." They are: the mystery of being, the unity of nature, and a universal force or tendency toward moral goodness. Of his experience of the "sheer mystery of being" he wrote:
It is not the process of development or evolution itself which overwhelms me with its mysterious grandeur, but the bare fact that anything exists at all. I look down at the paving stones under my feet, and ask myself how came they into being, what holds them there, -- not what they are made of, not the changes in shape or locality which their substance has undergone, not the conditions by which their chemical structure is explained, not what they are as contrasted with something else, but just the fact that they are! There is something so baffling and awe-inspiring in the simple fact of their existence, that when thinking about it I feel everything slipping away from me as I sink deeper and deeper and lose myself and all my thinking in this one bewildering circumstance. It gives me a feeling akin to fear, and yet allied to the sublime.

We have no sense of the strange or the mysterious in the thought of nothingness. But the step from nothing to something utterly dazes the mind.

(Ibid., pp. 89-90)

Sheldon owned that some people lack awe before the fact of existence, and are moved only by awareness of organic life, or of the "self-conscious soul." But those aspects of reality, he insisted, are "mere phases" of the fundamental fact of existence. "The grandeur, the solemnity, the majesty of it all," he insisted, "is just as much in the atom or the wave motion of the ether as in this subjective life of ours." (Ibid., p. 91) He believed that awe before the mystery of existence, rather than fear of some particular source of power, was the most primitive religious sentiment. When impelled to give a name to the mystery of existence, one may, he said, "with reluctance or dread, in fear of committing sacrilege in reference to what is deepest and most sacred, . . . speak of it as 'God.' " (Ibid., pp. 91-92) He made it clear that he applied the term strictly to the fact of existence; he did not apply it to a creator that supposedly brought into being all that exists, for such a designation would simply beg "the greater mystery of the being of that Creator." (Ibid., p. 91)

Mysticism and critical observation blend in the apprehension of the second aspect of deity, the unity of nature -- "the kinship between everything existing throughout the universe." (Ibid., p. 92). Sheldon credited Indian and Greek philosophers for crudely depicting the interrelatedness of things, a perception that would be refined by Newton, Darwin, and contemporary scientists and philosophers of science. For Sheldon, discoveries of the laws of physics and the evolution of organic life supported and clarified the mystical experience of oneness with the universe:
I do not see how any one can ever look at the skies in the splendor of evening without thinking of the fact which we now know beyond dispute, that the substance there, the very atoms of the stars are like the atoms of the earth we stand upon, that the chemical constituents are much the same there as here, that the quantity of matter throughout the universe is unchanged and unchanging. Or if we single out one of those glittering lights in the heavens, shall we not at once begin to fancy that it, too, may be a sun with planets like our own moving around it, that every one of those stars may be the centre of an evolving planetary system where organic life may appear, and where the great struggle for justice may begin, as self-conscious beings arise.

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This sublime kinship, by which we recognize unity of substance and relationship in development everywhere, thrills us and possesses us in a way that no language can express.

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At rare intervals I believe that the student of philosophy or the man of science in thinking of this unity will wait for an instant, and then whisper, "God."

(Ibid., pp. 92-94)

In forming a construct worthy of the name "God," Sheldon deemed the preeminent element to be the "stream of tendency" in nature supporting moral goodness -- a tendency experienced personally as the aforementioned "desire to reach a higher level of being." He admitted, with some distress, that this aspect of Ultimate Reality could not be empirically substantiated. And while he repeatedly intimated that history validates the tendency toward righteousness, he presented no compelling evidence of the claim. That this axiom served as the bedrock of his lifelong philosophy of ethics helps to explain his unshakable faith in it:

No matter how unphilosophical this may appear, the human mind is strangely prepossessed with the conviction that, even if nature or the "cosmic process" is indifferent, there is a process of the process, or nature of things, on the side of those who devote themselves to the ideally Good. . . . We are led to assume that when we sacrifice our personal or transient interests in the cause of Duty, there is something in the universe or behind it which is aiding us and standing by us, that we are fighting in the cause of some fundamental principle in the universe.
A conviction of this kind seems almost ineradicable. The new science and new philosophy have had little effect upon it. They have shattered innumerable beliefs, torn away the veil from many a mystery, reduced a multitude of our prepossessions to fanciful illusions. Yet they have not shaken humanity's faith that there is a "stream of tendency" in the nature of things working in the interest of righteousness. The man who dies for a cause is satisfied that his effort cannot be altogether unavailing, inasmuch as he thinks it will be taken up and carried forward by such a stream of tendency. (Ibid., pp. 94-95)

He traced the belief in "fighting on the side of right" back to ancient cultures, including the Greeks, the Hebrews, and the early Christians. In its crude form, he wrote, the belief was manifest as trust that divine providence was "on our side" in a conflict. Through history, the belief matured into the "grander thought . . . that we are taking sides with the divine providence or the nature of things." (Ibid., p. 96) He was mindful of the inevitable objection to his axiom: that in a war between people of different faiths, warriors on both sides believe they are sanctioned and empowered by God and are fighting for a righteous cause. Though he did not directly address that objection, he warned against degrading the axiom into its primitive form, the tendency to "materialize the impression and think . . . of the hand of a deity interfering in the conflicts of life, just as the gods in the stories of Homer entered here and there in the battles, and took sides with their favourite heroes." (Ibid., p. 97) He taught that one acquires faith in the power of righteousness only by actively fighting for justice. "The more grovelling natures," he wrote, "know nothing of it." (Ibid., p. 96)

Because of his reverence for the elements of deity, Sheldon took umbrage at the cultural inclination to attach human attributes to that reality. "Some will personify it and speak of 'Him,' clothing that power with feelings of sentiment and loving care," he wrote. "They will fancy the sheltering arms of a Personal Father reaching out to them from the skies." That belief, which he spoke of as a child's conception, "would be a sacrilege to a mind like that of Spinoza or Goethe," he wrote. (Ibid., p. 98) He also decried as blasphemous the popular depiction of God as constable:

We shall only degrade the whole subject by dealing with theistic beliefs as a useful means for encouraging good behavior. There is something utterly repugnant to the finer moral sense in the famous saying of Voltaire: "If there were no God, it would be necessary to invent one," -- meaning, as I understand him, that such a belief is necessary
to the preservation of "social order." Every argument for the existence of a deity from that standpoint will only be repellent to people of high character, while leading others to glaring, defiant atheism. No man can reverence a Power of which he is simply afraid, because of the penalties which such a Being can execute upon him. An "expediency" God means no God at all for any except the most inferior or most decrepit natures. Only a decaying civilization, which has lost its virility and is reaching out for any straw to save itself from utter collapse, will stoop so low as to drag down the grand conceptions associated with the idea of deity, by desiring to make such a Being a substitute for a police force. If there is not something implanted in human nature which can develop an inner strength and of itself furnish a motive for high conduct, then our civilization is doomed. If we cultivate the belief in a deity because we need such a Being, for reasons of practical expediency, then in the higher sense we have surrendered manhood and Godhead alike.

(Ibid., p. 100)

From Sheldon's perspective, then, it was reverence, rather than "mere unbelief or negative Agnosticism," (Ibid., p. 101) that restrained him from uttering the word "God." He encouraged respectful appreciation of the three elements of the deity as he conceived it, but he quietly discouraged use of the common term. When it seemed necessary to refer to an overarching reality, he preferred to speak of the "Power" -- that is, "the totality, the Being from whence everything came and to which everything returns, the Power whence springs the fact of law, the Source of the all-pervading Unity, the Guiding Energy which takes sides for justice and righteousness." (Ibid., p. 101)

[FOOTNOTE] But he was reticent even about that conception and manner of naming.

Far from holding that belief in a deity, however conceived, is essential to the ethical life, he asserted that it is of no ethical relevance. All that is needed to carry on "the ethical cause," he taught, is the conviction that "the nature of things is on the side of Right" -- and that, he said, comes inevitably to those who engage in the struggle.

[FOOTNOTE: Capitalizations are Sheldon's. The practice of capitalizing key words and terms was not uncommon among 19th century writers and poets.]
The True Destiny of the Human Soul

Sheldon's conception of religion, though essentially this-worldly, was nevertheless imbued with spirituality -- what he described as attentiveness to sentiments that point to a higher reality, however inchoate. An ardent truth seeker who had "left the fold" of a creedal religion, he offered a fresh, if inconsistent, alternative to those whose religious doubts had undercut their sense of place in the universe. He delineated the hallmarks of true religion as: 1) a consciousness of what Wordsworth termed "moving about in worlds not realized"; and 2) surrender of the will to the "All-inclusive aim of the universe."

Sheldon spoke of being religious as a matter of character and disposition rather than of belief or piety. He deemed religious "those pure, deep, lofty natures," individuals of "serene, unselfish inwardness" who display "a certain steady loftiness of purpose." ("Being Religious -- What it Means to an Ethical Idealist," from An Ethical Movement, W. L. Sheldon, Macmillan and Co., New York, 1896; pp. 23-24) Such natures, he held, arise in those who, while aware of their animality and essential oneness with matter, are yet conscious of "belonging to another order of existence." (Ibid., p. 29)

His elevation of that consciousness placed him in a philosophical hinterland. Though he did not actually profess belief in a non-material order of existence, he was resolutely opposed to the philosophy of materialism, the supposition that all reality -- including thought, will, and feeling -- is essentially matter. "I may be tolerant of many creeds or many systems of philosophy, but for one attitude I have no toleration, and that is the thing called materialism," he wrote. "Toward this my feeling is one of disgust and loathing, and I mean to fight it till I die." ("What the Ethical Idealist Has to Fight For," by Walter L. Sheldon, Ethical Addresses, Vol. XIII No. 1, Philadelphia, 1905; p. 12) For him, materialism denoted brutishness, a compulsion to satisfy base cravings, a blithe at-homeness in the world devoid of regard for supreme values. So he chose instead to call himself an idealist, a term which connoted for him ethical refinement. However, he recognized that he stood apart from the philosophical school of idealism, which holds that objects of perception are manifestations of an independent realm of essences or forms. He sought to resolve his dilemma by minimizing the theoretical distinction and focusing instead on the differences of character that he associated with the terms. The "Ethical Idealist," by his definition, is one who apprehends a higher plane of existence:

It is not that we are altogether of another world, not that we are absolutely unlike the earth whereon we dwell; but we are conscious that there are orders and degrees, -- as it were, a higher and lower everywhere. Our order is not the same as that of the outer world. This is what we imply in saying that the human being has soul. It is not the same
as the old distinction between this and another world, or between matter and spirit. Strictly speaking, as we know, there is only one world and one universe. But there is a difference in order or degree. We are higher or superior to what we look out upon, -- the earth, the air, the mountains, and the sea. The religious man is the person who is conscious of this difference. How religious he is, may depend on how strong an impression this fact makes upon him.

It is religion which emphasizes unity everywhere; only it is a unity of the spirit, and not of the fleeting pageant of the outer world. We belong to the truly real. It is this phase which connects religion with our thoughts of an Invisible Being. That Being is the great Spiritual Centre, and we belong to its order. The old conception is true, that man was made in the image of his Maker. We may not be able to have definite beliefs about that Being; indeed, it is far more vital that we should have such beliefs about our own being, its meaning and destiny and the laws it should obey. But our kinship is with the great Central Fact. Of that much we are assured.

That sense of belonging to a superior order of existence, the "starting point of all true Idealism," was of no worth to Sheldon unless it was allied with the other crucial element of religion, the surrender of the will. "Religion has its supreme value in that it serves as the agent for breaking and taming the wild caprices of the human will," he wrote. "It puts the soul of man into a harness." (Ibid., p. 31) The oft-heralded "aspiration to reach a higher level of being," he taught, must be informed and disciplined; it must be consciously directed toward a high aim. To devote one's energies toward a low aim, such as acquiring wealth or power, will produce a "cold, heartless nature." (Ibid., p. 34) To be religious one must surrender the will to a "Supreme Something" beyond one's personal satisfaction. That "Something," he said, need not be a personal deity, but it must represent what one understands to be the highest aims of humanity. In sum, Sheldon defined religious life as "the surrender of the will to ideal or sacred principles which are to us the expression of the true destiny or worth of the human soul." (Ibid., pp. 38-39)

Having established the essence of religion, Sheldon laid out a methodology for cultivating the soul, "the something in us which is not mind and is not body, and which separates us from all other animate or inanimate existence that we have any knowledge of." ("Methods for Spiritual Self-Culture," from An Ethical Movement, W.L. Sheldon, Macmillan and Co., New York, 1896; pp. 23-24)

First, he advocated assembling a personal "Bible," a collection of literature which one finds "expressive of the whole struggling spirit of mankind." (Ibid., p. 206). His suggestions for inclusion in
one's "Bible" ranged from the works of Plato and Marcus Aurelius to the plays of Shakespeare and the poetry of Wordsworth; he revered the Hebrew-Christian Bible, but he also found guidance in the Buddhist "Path of Virtue." He stressed the importance of regularly rereading the works in which one finds inspiration. "When you truly have a Bible," he wrote, "its thoughts, its sayings, will move you, thrill you, strengthen you, nerve you to tread the pathway of your life." (Ibid., pp. 208-209). He added that people who are especially moved by music should consider the musical selections that most elevate them to be part of their personal bibles.

Sheldon's second method for "spiritual self-culture" was appreciation of nature. He recommended spending time out of doors attending to one's interrelation with plants and animals, soil and sky. "We restrict the soul-life," he wrote, "when somehow we do not get into some sort of conscious relationship with every form of existence to which we are in any degree whatsoever allied." (Ibid., p. 211) Even without leaving the bustling life of a city, he said, one can find a "healing power" in communing with nature by looking up at the stars or examining a green leaf. Sheldon himself found inspiration in walking along the shore of the Mississippi River:

Every city which has a river flowing along its borders, offers an opportunity for mingling with Nature. In its way it is as grand as the mountains or the sea. All the great poets have been conscious of this, and have talked about it and mused over it. A river is as suggestive and inspiring to the soul as the unclouded sky of evening may be to a lonely traveller on a country road. Is is Nature! We watch the turbid, muddy stream and follow it with our mind's eye in its sinuous course through cities and states, until it pours its waters into the great sea. What is it but a suggestion of time and eternity! Does it not remind us of the stream of our own life, wending its way through time to the ultimate Something to which all must go? Does it not suggest the relationship of the finite to the infinite; or make us think of the soul of man yearning to lose itself and be swallowed up in the Divine?
(Ibid., p. 214)

Sheldon also advocated the cultivation of a sense of mystery. "My idea of mystery," he wrote, "is that we come to a borderline beyond which we feel that we cannot go; while at the same time we are convinced that if we could get beyond it, we should find something more, something grander, than anything we know of now." (Ibid., p. 215) But while he often spoke of the sense of mystery as vital to the religious life, he sternly warned against all forms of occultism, which he referred to as "materializing
the spiritual side of things until the truly spiritual has vanished from our conceptions altogether." (Ibid., p. 215) The best guard against slipping, he said, is to scrupulously adhere to scientific facts. "The man who reads Shelley," he wrote, "should also read Darwin." (Ibid., p. 216)

Solitude was another of Sheldon's methods for spiritual self-culture. One must spend time alone to expand one's awareness of the soul, he taught, for constant human interaction makes one self-conscious -- that is, attentive to the perceptions of others rather than to the "higher spiritual atmosphere of the self of the selves." (Ibid., p. 217) It is in that realm, he said, that one "will get in touch with the spirit land of all human nature." (Ibid., p. 218)

But for all his talk of mystery and the "spirit land," Sheldon believed that the principal arena for spiritual self-culture is the working world. The unrelenting battle for survival, he said, is the "grindstone on which our spiritual self is shaped." (Ibid., p. 219) The true self emerges through day-to-day conflict, through striving, disappointment, and physical pain. This, for Sheldon, was the paradox of paradoxes: that "active life in the world is the true nursery for spiritual culture. We must mix in the daily struggle; toil and labour with our fellows; go through their trials, their defeats, and their victories; jostle and be jostled, and so gradually develop the higher life at the same time." (Ibid., p. 220)

The Soldier at his Post

Many of Sheldon's addresses and essays were variations on his central thesis -- that religion consists of promoting and cultivating the universal impulse to do good. For Sheldon, this desire -- "this restless longing for something more, something grander, something deeper, something higher than you have yet realized" -- was the basis of morality. ("Duty -- to One Who Makes a Religion of It," from An Ethical Movement, W.L. Sheldon, Macmillan and Co., New York, 1896; p. 60) In its raw form, he conceived of it as an evolutionary force leading humanity to ever higher planes of ethical behavior. In its refined, mature form, however, he perceived it as a static and absolute taskmaster, an inner Voice of Duty that commands unflinching obedience. His oft-used model of ethical perfection was the soldier at his post, the person who resolutely does what must be done -- even if the cost is life itself, even if the reasons are inscrutable and no reward is forthcoming beyond the satisfaction inherent in obedience.

He was so passionately loyal to his belief in that "mysterious" Voice that he avoided examining it, even discounting his own knowledge of socialization. He evidently felt that calculated explanations of the phenomenon would diminish its purity, rendering it unworthy of the devotion he gave it. The very title of one of his addresses on the theme indicates how highly he exalted it: "Duty -- to One Who Makes
a Religion of It." He opened that address by asking his listeners how the drive to obey one's Sense of Duty could be even stronger than love of life and fear of death:

Can you explain why it is that a man should value anything more than his own life? We know this to be true of an immense number of people. Some will give up their lives in one cause, others in another. It is not life itself which we seem most to care for. If it came to a choice, we should rather die than be obliged to take a certain course of action. There is something in all of us that we would not surrender even at the cost of life... We ask ourselves, How is it possible that a man can love this human life, care passionately for earthly existence, and yet prefer to do what may cost him his life? What interest should the outcome of his acts have for him, if he is no longer here on earth to share in it?... What motive has he for making such a surrender?

(Ibid., pp. 42-43)

In working toward an answer to that question, Sheldon asserted that the Sense of Duty is innate. "We start out in life with an original measure of values," he wrote. "We do not come by it from thought or abstract reflection." (Ibid., p. 43) He spoke of Duty as one of the chief distinctions between human beings and other animals; because it leads inexorably toward high ideals, it is at war with animal desires. "We, of all creatures in the universe," he wrote, with more than a touch of mournfulness, "must be tortured and checked and held down, or urged along another line against our inclinations, by this relentless authority." (Ibid., p. 45)

But while he often described the Voice of Duty as "persistent," "stern," or "severe," he observed that it also is gentle and reassuring. It can, he wrote, "soothe while it controls us" and "inspire while it dominates us." (Ibid., p. 49) He found that Duty conveys the sense that human beings do not belong to themselves, that they are part of a higher reality that exerts an overarching will. As noted earlier, he preferred not to name or describe that reality, venturing only that "what we have is a suggestion of something beyond, an order that is outside of us and yet includes us." (Ibid., 50) Obedience to that Voice, he wrote, saves us from alienation: It "puts us in touch with our fellowmen; yes, with all living things, with inanimate nature, with the whole wide universe. Duty no longer strikes us as something altogether stern and sombre. We are glad to obey it, because it adds more to our life and puts us in accord with life everywhere." (Ibid., p. 51)

Sheldon acknowledged, though in passing and by way of illustration, the psychological and sociological underpinnings of Duty. He noted that a child learns to obey the will of his parents rather
than his own because "greater happiness is given to him by belonging to the home than by belonging just to himself." (Ibid., p. 51) As we mature, he wrote, we learn that through obedience to the Voice of Duty "we join the world's family," obtaining peace and calm by fulfilling our roles in the Grand Order of Things. (Ibid., p. 52) However, he firmly denied that Duty is a worthy master only because it puts one in harmony with others, or that it controls one only in human relations. Rather, he claimed, it is a "grandly impersonal" force: "What we are commanded to obey is not a person, but a principle." (Ibid., p. 53) In other words, Duty, as a relation between each individual and the universal "rule of law," is innate and ever-present, but human interaction calls it forth and develops it. He believed that the Voice of Duty is utterly independent of social norms and expectations, so that "if there were no other man or woman on the face of the earth, if there were no Supreme Companion, yet, alone in space with no other conscious fellowship anywhere, the Voice of Duty would still exist in you and call for obedience." (Ibid., p. 55) Answering the question he posed at the outset of the address, he asserted that it is the deific omnipresence of Duty that compels one to obey it even at the cost of one's life. He recognized the validity of the theistic perception of Duty as the "Voice of God," but he found that such a conception tarnished the grandeur of the "universal law" by depicting it as a set of arbitrary decrees rather than the changeless, absolute structure of reality -- what he called the Nature of Things. His ultimate definition of Duty:

Duty is the command of our Highest Self, bidding us, in scorn of transient consequences, to act as if we belonged not to ourselves, but to a universal system or order, and to render unconditional obedience to the highest law or highest measure of value that we are conscious of.

(Ibid., p. 57)

Having underscored the changeless nature of the "rule of law," Sheldon -- departing from a conviction of his youth -- owned that the long-prevalent conception of conscience as an innate ability to distinguish right from wrong was no longer serviceable. "The pathway of life is never perfectly illumined," he wrote. "It is not always a clear, plain course. We are obliged to think and brood and ponder, before we choose and decide." At the same time, however, he contended that everyday human experience usually makes clear the "true course" one must pursue; iniquity, he said, arises not from perplexity over conflicting obligations but from "the calm defiance of all sense of duty." (Ibid., p. 59)

For Sheldon, Duty was the linchpin of civilization. "When civilization begins to weaken and decay, this indicates not necessarily a loss of religious belief, not a spread of rationalism, but simply a
decline in the regard men pay to the authority of their sense of duty," he wrote. "If men will only come to have the spirit of the soldier standing at his post, I feel that human society is safe and that the race of man will go on advancing." (Ibid., p. 59)

**Christ as Ethical Culturist**

Sheldon saw Christianity and Ethical Culture as sharing a common starting point -- namely, the longing to be good. His unpublished writings reveal that his own surrender of Christian faith was a frightful experience, a change that eviscerated his sense of meaning and of belonging to the universe. Much of what he wrote, both privately and for his readers and listeners, indicates a lifelong effort to retrieve and reinvigorate whatever kernel of truth had endeared him to Christianity.

Sheldon observed that Christianity so thoroughly pervades Western culture that getting at its wellspring requires intellectual tenacity and a sensitivity to human nature. Because most Christians adopt faith in the central figure of the religion without examining the historical evidence of his life or questioning the plausibility of gospel accounts, Sheldon sought to understand what there is in human nature that predisposes people to believe in such a person. In doing so, he examined the two principal aspects of the popular conception of Christ -- the "mystical Christ," an incarnation of an Infinite Personal Father sent to save humanity from the domination of sin and lead it to a higher moral path, and the "human Christ," a gentle, patient man who endured great suffering and persuaded his followers to devote themselves to ideals of justice. The first aspect, he said, corresponds to the "tendency toward the Good," giving shape to the universal, original faith that "the nature of things is on our side in the struggle against evil." ("The Ethical Christ," from An Ethical Movement, W.L. Sheldon, Macmillan and Co., New York, 1896; p. 111)

In the second aspect he found an inspiring legend of one who surrendered life itself in devotion to a "sacred Cause." (Ibid., p. 115) For Sheldon, that aspect of Christ, compellingly illustrated by his death on the cross, expresses the universal yearning "to merge our wills and our individual purposes into a larger Will or larger Purpose." (Ibid., p. 117) Christendom, he wrote, bows before the image of Christ on the cross "because men have been driven to think that the religious life of self-surrender is the highest and most perfect life." (Ibid., p. 118)

In this way, Sheldon naturalized and humanized Christianity, virtually baptizing Christ in Ethical Culture. While he could not accept the divinity of the figure or believe that his death was salvific, he could without apology share in revering him as a composite paradigm of goodness. He saw in Jesus a man who embodied qualities to which human nature instinctively aspires --kindness, selflessness,
devotion to universal brotherhood. Seeing Christianity as an enshrinement of the Ethical Ideal redeemed for Sheldon the rich heritage of the religion in art, architecture, music, and literature:

When . . . I see another in prayer or worship before the image of Christ, I may have to say: I cannot pray your prayer or take your attitude of worship toward the Personal Jesus; whether all the events you believe in actually occurred, I do not know; but the motive ______?
THE NATURE OF THINGS
Sheldon's Social Philosophy

Sheldon considered himself a "radical" by dint of his unconventional religious beliefs, but in social ethics his thought ranged from conservative to reactionary. He was, above all else, a defender of Great Institutions of Western Civilization -- marriage, the family, the state, free enterprise. He applied the central precepts of his philosophy of the individual -- Duty, natural law, the "stream of tendency" supporting moral goodness -- to each of the institutions to which the individual belongs. He encouraged strong expressions of individuality, but always in the service of the good of others; as a spouse, family member, and citizen, one must assert creativity but defer to the mandates of the greater whole as expressed in custom and law. In his addresses on the individual's place in society, he expressed reverence for the institutions that have evolved to bring out the best in each of their members. His attitude toward political reformers was detached and paternalistic; he was sympathetic with the movements for women's and workers' rights, but he consistently counseled patience, warned against narrow self-interest, and condemned civil disobedience. Nowhere did he advocate a sharp departure from the status quo.

On Marriage

Sheldon spoke of marriage as the most potent factor in the quality of a person's life. "According as you act in this matter," he wrote, "your life may be a success or failure." ("Marriage -- In the Light of the New Idealism," from An Ethical Movement, W.L. Sheldon, Macmillan and Co., New York, 1896; p. 230) The key to a happy marriage, by his reckoning, was self-surrender -- devoting oneself to fulfilling the needs of one's spouse. In one of his first talks on the subject, "Marriage -- In the Light of the New Idealism," he took a hard line on the requirements of marriage.

[FOOTNOTE] His response to complaints of dissatisfaction was to throw responsibility squarely on the complainant:

If you, as the woman, cannot make the home sufficiently attractive; if you cannot be sufficiently attractive yourself, to hold the husband there and keep him interested in you and your life, then the trouble lies with you and with the home you have made. You were thinking of yourself and about being made happy yourself; and you were not thinking about adjusting yourself to him so as to make him happy.
On the other hand, if you, the man, do not have a happy home, if the wife is not the wife you would like to have her be, if she gives you a cheerless hearth, if she seems more interested elsewhere than in yourself, we say to you again: you are to blame. You ought to have been thinking of her happiness and of giving her so much pleasure that she would have been eager to provide you with a cheerful hearth and a happy home. We ask you: What have you been to her? You were thinking of your happiness, of having a beautiful home for yourself; and you were not thinking of adjusting yourself to her needs and to her happiness.

Until this fundamental fact is realized, every marriage must be a partial failure. Three-quarters of the sorrow, bitterness, and disappointment which come in married life, have occurred from just that one mistake of thinking the other to blame. You dreamed of the husband who would yield to your wishes; you dreamed of the wife who would follow your fancies. You reversed the whole normal process, you overthrew the very basis of the whole institution of marriage. And then you wonder why you have made a failure of it!

(Ibid., pp. 226-227)

In that address, Sheldon hammered away at his belief in the necessity of selflessness. One who is not capable of it, who is "not willing...to give up the caprice of the eye and caprice of the heart in lifelong devotion to another," ought not marry, he asserted. He believed that it is "only as we gradually rise out of brute selfishness, that we become capable of this higher relationship," and that the human race is "only partially worthy of this ideal institution" because it has "only partially evolved." (Ibid., p. 234) However, in a later address titled "The Marriage Problem of To-Day" -- an address, it should be noted, written in 1902, after 10 years of direct experience of the institution -- he softened his tone considerably, stressing the need for tolerance and forgiveness. "There are not two people on the face of the earth to-day absolutely, unselfishly devoted to each other," he owned, "because there is not an unselfish heart anywhere. We are not made that way. We all have our streaks of imperfection somewhere." ("The Marriage Problem of To-Day," Ethical Addresses, Walter L. Sheldon; S. Burns Weston, publisher; Philadelphia, 1902; p. 106)

In both addresses, but especially the latter, Sheldon railed against the romantic image of love that saturated popular literature and music. Talk of two people being "made for each other" or discovering "two hearts that beat as one" struck him as obscenely silly and contrary to human nature. Noting that the sentiments trumpeted by popular culture are peculiar to courtship and the first few years of marriage, he
denigrated what he called "the spasm-theory of marriage." Those who cling to it, he wrote, are apt to believe that their love has died once the "mad ebullition of passion" has passed. Only those lovers who remain faithful beyond that point can reap the profound but unheralded joys of marriage, he taught.

"Time must be given for a further reunion to arise on a spiritual plane, but where prose and poetry must jostle together in the daylight of stern reality," he wrote. "In that second experience, it is no longer the sentiment-standpoint of two souls with a single thought or the two hearts that beat as one -- a fantastic impossibility -- it is an awakening to the actualities of life, and to all its possibilities. An affection may then arise which can admit of imperfections in the one for whom it exists, which can cling in spite of weakness and selfishness and caprice." (Ibid., p. 110) In the earlier address, he even suggested that by wisely attending to the inevitable shift in feelings, married lovers can discover "a sentiment transcending in value all the poetic dreams of early life." (Ibid., p. 228) By his observation, only bland, passionless individuals find themselves stuck in bland, passionless marriages.

Sheldon's attitude toward divorce also softened over the years. Essentially, he considered marriage vows irrevocable. Writing in an age when the accessibility and social acceptability of divorce were hotly debated, he initially dismissed those who questioned the permanence of marriage as plainly selfish. "The plea such persons make is not a plea for mankind," he wrote in the first address, "not for the welfare of the human race in the future, but rather a plea for themselves and for their disposition always 'to do exactly as they please.'" (Ibid., p. 224) He rigidly declared that "the sanctity of this institution is beyond debate and beyond discussion," and vowed to keep clear of the "unholy" men and women who attacked it. (p. 235) But while he stood foursquare on the side of the Roman Catholic Church in the debate, he insisted that his reasons -- though unspecified -- were naturalistic:

From a purely rationalistic basis I believe in the indissoluble sanctity of this relationship. What we have to do is to take our stand once more on the original sanctity of the institution. We must go back behind the Church itself, to the great law of Nature. We must surround the institution with every possible solemnity; we must rest it, not on the authority of Church or of society, but look for its basis in the Nature of Things. We must refuse to secularize it. We must make it even more solemn than it has been made by the Church. We must see in it the ideal surrender of self. We are to make it religious by connecting it with what is universal in religion. That is to say, we should associate it with the idea of Law and of reverence for the principles of Duty. When this is done, and done completely, we shall at last realize all the possible ideals in the Institution of Marriage.
He conceded -- again, in agreement with the Catholic Church -- that family life can be destroyed by certain kinds of behavior, such as infidelity, and that separation is sometimes justifiable. Even in the case of a separation, however, the marital bond perdures, for "it was registered for eternity." ("Marriage - - In the Light of the New Idealism," p. 244) Remarriage in the lifetime of the estranged spouse was unacceptable.

In the latter address, he changed his tone markedly and loosened his official policy, if only slightly. First, he entertained as legitimate the arguments of social philosophers for "monogamic unions, freely contracted and at need freely dissolved by simple mutual consent," and he empathized with unhappily married people who chafed against the "tyranny of tradition." Secondly, rather than baldly asserting that "Duty" commands everlasting union, he laid out an anthropological argument by which he claimed that the evolution of permanent monogamy had been in integral element of the advance of civilization. "I believe," he concluded, "that all the most careful study goes to show that those types of races or people will be the most liable to survive, where the tendency continues in the direction of tightening the knot of the marriage-relationship, or where, at any rate, that relationship has of itself a tendency to be an abiding one, lasting until the separation of death." ("The Marriage Problem of To-Day," p. 100) Lastly, beyond restating his position that two people may justly separate rather than "continue in hell," he opened the door to the possibility of remarriage. He considered the legal dissolution of a marriage to be legitimate, but insisted that the "spiritual tie" is indissoluble; accordingly, he held that the "innocent party" of a dissolved marriage should be permitted to remarry under state sanction -- but without religious rites. At the same time, he called for a national divorce law forbidding the "guilty party," the spouse responsible for the breakdown of the marriage, to remarry. He condemned the "loophole" by which states grant uncontested divorces without ascertaining guilt, calling the resulting freedom of adulterous or abusive spouses to remarry "an outrage on the institution and an outrage on human nature." (Ibid., p. 102)

On the Rights and Privileges of Women

Sheldon's views on sexual equality were less than progressive. He lumped the women's rights movement in with the labor movement and the socialist movement, calling attention to the collective "social problem" of the age. "All this agitation now manifest in so many directions has developed out of
the intense individualism which is characteristic of the nineteenth century," he wrote. "It is this which is responsible for the demand of the new woman for emancipation, for equality, for the obliteration of all distinctions between men and women." (from an address titled "The New Woman," as quoted in Thoughts from the Writings and Addresses of Walter L.Sheldon; compiled by Cecelia Boette, Nixon-Jones Printing Co., St. Louis, 1919; pp. 40-41) He claimed to "sympathize with woman in the demand for right to her individuality," and he underlined the philosophical axiom that all individuals are centers of thought and will. "The great declaration of Immanuel Kant that every human being is an end in himself stands unrefuted and should stand forever even unchallenged," he wrote. "When Milton says of man and woman that 'he lives for God' and 'she for God in him,' it seems as if an indignity had been put upon all mankind." (Ibid., pp. 41-42) But though he was conscious of the "many idle, mischievous illusions which have checked woman's development," he warned against unthinking and unrestrained rebellion against tradition. (Ibid., p. 47) "In so far as the demand on the part of woman is for the opportunity of doing as she pleases, I have no sympathy with it," he wrote. "This is the one feature I dread more than anything else in this whole agitation pertaining to the new woman." (Ibid., p. 44)

He stopped far short of declaring women to be equal to men or deserving of the same legal and social rights. (Ibid., pp. 41-42) He dodged the question, claiming that the concept of equality could not be applied to such dissimilar beings. Just as the differences between male and female bodies "were fixed in the structure of the human being hundreds of thousands of years ago," he contended that there are "like distinctions in the mental and spiritual structure of man and woman." (Ibid., p. 46) Those differences in character, he held, equip the sexes for different roles: "Woman, as a rule, shows her peculiar character in art, or in the life of the home; man, on the other hand, expresses himself through practical life in the outside world. It is as natural for the one to care for the one, as for the other to care for the other." ("Marriage -- In the Light of the New Idealism," p. 239) He believed that these differences should be "cultivated rather than suppressed; so that woman shall be more truly woman and man more truly man." (Ibid., p. 47) He asserted that the distinct roles of the sexes arise from natural differences, and that neither sex can be said to be superior to the other. "You can no more compare them in that regard than you can determine whether poetry is a higher art than music, or painting than sculpture." (Ibid., p. 47)

He emphasized a crude, unscientific, and patently prejudiced distinction between the "fundamental facts" of the nature of women -- presumably, qualities related to child-bearing -- and "mere tendencies" of the sex. For instance, he noted that a girl's mind develops more quickly than a boy's, but that among adults over 30, men exhibit a tendency to continue their intellectual growth while women are vulnerable to "arrested development." Likewise, he observed that women are less apt to succeed in professional careers because, unlike men, they are disinclined "to plod on alone, slowly, determinedly,
energetically, for a score of years, in order to realize one purpose." (Ibid., pp. 48-49) Unlike the immutable "facts" of womanhood, however, he believed that a secondary quality of the sex could be overcome. "Now if a woman would only appreciate this mere tendency, which is characteristic of the very structure of her being, physically, mentally and spiritually, then by knowing it in advance she might be able to conquer it," he wrote. "One cannot get around facts or laws, but one can get around tendencies, if you know them beforehand." (Ibid., p. 48)

Sheldon approved of the opening of career opportunities to women. "The time has come," he wrote, "when we should give woman a chance to show what she can make of herself. She should have the right to enter all the spheres of life and occupation pursued by man, providing she really desires to do so... Nothing is more injurious to the advance of civilization than to check any human being in his rights because of some abstract theory that we may believe in." (Ibid., p. 42) He quickly added, however, that any woman interested in pursuing a career is morally obliged to remain single. As Sheldon saw it, the right of a family woman to pursue a career is cancelled by "the rights of the society to which she belongs." A woman who chooses family life is bound by the Nature of Things to devote herself to the responsibilities of home life. And while a man can shut up his office at the end of the work day, he observed, "the care of the home is a complete occupation in itself." (Ibid., p. 43) Even a married woman without children could not justifiably work outside the home. "On this point I am old-fashioned and conservative," he admitted. "I am still convinced that there is the loftiest possible opportunity for a career on the part of woman just simply in the effort to help her husband to achieve a career." Women who follow that path, he averred, "get the most satisfaction out of life, in spite of all the disappointments which may have come." (Ibid., p. 45) About the only stand he took against conventional expectations was his exaltation of the single life for women. "Many a woman would far more realize the ends of her being, be a more complete character, by remaining single, than by yielding to the dread of prejudice and marrying a man wholly unworthy of her," he wrote. "Some of the grandest, noblest, most ideal women in the world have been those who have never entered into this relationship." (Ibid., p. 45)

He evidently maintained neutrality on the question of women's suffrage. Though a contemporary of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Carrie Chapman Catt, he avoided touching on the subject in his addresses, probably because his listeners held sharply divergent opinions on it. In "Citizenship and the Duties of a Citizen," a Sunday School textbook published in 1904, he merely made mention of the issue in the chapter on voting. In a note to the teacher, he suggested having students investigate the limitations of suffrage, making sure they learned that women could vote in local elections in three Western states. He then advised the teacher not to "go far into a discussion as to the wisdom of

[FOOTNOTE: The address was originally released in pamphlet form under the title "Marriage and Its Ideals." The condensed and polished later version, "Marriage -- In the Light of the New Idealism," was published in *An Ethical Movement*, an 1896 Macmillan and Co. collection of Sheldon's signal addresses. All excerpts and page references are from the latter version.]

**On Social Reform**

Sheldon lived in a time of historic social change, a time of strikes, lockouts, boycotts, and mass protests; a time when unionists and political progressives fought hard for a national minimum wage, child-labor laws, and guarantees of humane working conditions; a time when journalistic muckrakers attacked the "boss" systems of urban governments; a time when feminists battled for voting and property rights. In contrast to his colleagues in New York, he stood apart from the fray, intensely interested but determinedly nonpartisan.

What set him apart from reformers -- both within and outside the Ethical movement -- was his all-consuming concern for individual reform. He believed that changes in the external structures of society would have no direct effect on the moral caliber of citizens. Further, "visionary schemes" that appealed to the "masses" struck him as contemptibly ignorant of history and sociology. A thinker well-versed in the social and political philosophies of Plato, Thomas Moore, Rousseau, and Marx, he saw popular social theories as "lacking in the scientific spirit or wanting in philosophy"; he went so far as to say that "sometimes they read more like wild, incoherent cries, than sober, well-considered schemes worthy of being given a trial." (*"Social Ideals and What They Signify to the Ethical Idealist," from *An Ethical Movement*, W.L. Sheldon, Macmillan and Co., New York, 1896; p. 287) He was put off by fanatics, "people who are fairly seething with the desire to improve the conditions of their fellow-men, or to realize some Social Ideal." (Ibid., p. 284) At the same time, though, he felt sympathy with their aims and listened carefully to their arguments. The first duty of an Ethical Idealist, he taught, is not to attack or encourage a reform movement, but to study it, to "read between the lines" of passionate rhetoric to understand the conditions that call it forth and the motives that fuel it. "The supreme work of an ethical
teacher on the labour program should be, to explain and point out the symptoms, rather than to suggest the remedy or cure," he wrote. "He must lay his finger on the wrong." (Ibid., p. 294)

An Ethical Idealist, said Sheldon, could not throw oneself into a revolutionary movement because it is too narrowly focused on changing temporal conditions. "[T]o the idealist," he wrote, "such an effort is always a mere stepping-stone toward a more remote purpose" -- that is, the moral development of the individual. (Ibid., p. 295) After all, he noted, establishment of an industrial system which apportioned property justly could not ensure that individual beneficiaries of the reform would use their newly acquired property for moral ends. He did concede, however, that the stepping-stones of social reform are essential to advancement toward the higher goal. "It is idle," he wrote, "to suppose that men could have the higher, inner, subjective life of the soul, while being obliged to earn their daily bread, in defiance of the principle of justice, by trampling over their fellow-men." (Ibid., p. 299) And while he refused to subscribe to any particular utopian vision, he hailed the "millennial dreams" put forth by reformers because they awakened the "lethargic masses" to present-day injustice and mediocrity and stirred enthusiasm for what could be. He did not expect socialists, communists, or anarchists to succeed in their revolutionary aims, at least in the United States, but he did believe they would counter conservative economic forces, raising American life to a higher plane of justice. In "Social Ideals and What They Signify to the Ethical Idealist," an address published in 1896 but probably written several years before, he further predicted that the "historic wave-movement" of his day would usher in an age of heightened ethical concern:

I am inclined to prophesy that, by the close of the coming [20th] century, the enthusiasm may be for what I have termed the Ethical Ideal. The ambition or expectation of being able to establish a perfect system of government, or the ideal industrial system, will have exhausted itself. The structure of our political institutions will have been very much improved, and our industrial system will be on a far higher plane. Neither of them will have been revolutionized, and the dream of the radical will not have come to pass. But, in the meantime, a few men, ever increasing in number as years go on, will have become more and more eager to realize this other aim, to concentrate every energy on developing the higher individual personality. The subjective spiritual side of our nature will have asserted its rights, perhaps even secured a supremacy. The plans for altering industrial, political, or social institutions will be weighed, first and supremely, from this other standpoint. The problem will be in every instance: How will it serve in developing man? You ask: Why not both enthusiasms at the same time? I must answer: That cannot
be. No man can hold two objects *supreme*, although he may work for both in various ways. It would imply almost as much as having two religions. Your energies, your heart, your being, will concentrate along one line or the other. This is natural and inevitable.

(Ibid., p. 298)

**On Materialism**

In the years just before his death, Sheldon all but recanted his optimistic prophecy of an age of ethical preeminence. His doubt that economic reform would nurture moral character was, he believed, vindicated by the response of Americans to increasing prosperity. What grieved him was that progress on the material plane did not foster a deeper appreciation of things spiritual -- the mystery of being, the unity of nature, the universal tendency toward moral goodness. Instead, he saw the soul, the "man within the man," obscured or surrendered in the quest for wealth. Materialism, as a school of philosophy, was on the wane at the turn of the century, but by his reckoning, people more and more behaved as if they believed in it -- as if the deepest human longings could be satisfied by the acquisition of material goods. This insidious progeny of materialism, he wrote, "is eating at the very vitals of our civilization." ("What the Ethical Idealist Has to Fight For," by Walter L. Sheldon, Ethical Addresses, Vol. XIII No. 1, Philadelphia, 1905; p. 12)

At first, he expressed his concern in a measured, philosophical tone. As the nation pulled out of the severe depression of the early- to mid-1890s, he warned his listeners not to assume that their happiness would rise in proportion to their improved economic conditions. In an 1899 address titled "Why Prosperity Does Not Always Bring Happiness," he owned that steady employment, higher wages, and healthier business interests would make a difference in peoples' lives, that "having a little more money may make it more possible for us to get a little more happiness," but he anticipated that the improvement would be slight. ("Why Prosperity Does Not Always Bring Happiness," by Walter L. Sheldon, Ethical Addresses, Series VI No. 9, Philadelphia, 1899; p. 186) He further predicted that the wave of economic vitality would precipitate "an enormous amount of disappointment" and "a great deal of bitterness." (Ibid., p. 172) He founded his prediction on the observation that ease of life makes people more sensitive to hardship and more exacting in their demands. He spoke of his dread upon meeting men he had known in times of adversity, once-kind and companionable men whose material success had spawned selfish preoccupation with their comforts and discomforts -- a condition he termed "spiritual dyspepsia." That increasing prosperity brings with it increasing discontent is fortunate, he said, for it
spurs individuals to work harder and fuels further scientific and social progress; nevertheless, he wrote, the inevitable dashing of expectations "gives a shock to the moral character" which could undercut commitment to ethical principles.

To his eyes, the national character that emerged in the dawning of the new century proved that his worst fears had been realized. Laborers had secured better pay and conditions, and the middle class was swelling and gaining political strength, but while he had hoped that such advances would predispose the American people to turn their attention to "the spiritual side" of human nature, he saw only a growing obsession with the craving for affluence. In an address delivered at the 1905 AEU assembly, he vented his disgust at the decline of moral values:

It is doubtful whether in all history the human race has ever reached quite as low a level of groveling materialism as it has reached at this precise moment. The conditions were bad enough twenty years ago; but they are worse to-day. There have been other periods, when special classes of men have fallen low in their ideals. In our age it is no longer a matter of class, for the whole human race would seem more or less infected.

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The earth has opened up its riches as it has never done before and may never do again. The change has come suddenly, almost as it were in a night. At the beginning of the twentieth century the race of man has waked up to find itself possessed of hoards of treasure such as even the Aladdin of earlier times never dreamed of. And the temptation has been too great for the soul to withstand. The human race has become convinced at heart that satisfaction is to be had out of "the world and the things of the world." It is determined to feed its senses with all that is to be had out of this life and the next one too. Mephistopheles is playing a deep game and his stake is high.

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Mankind has never before had the opportunity to get a full taste of the earth's riches, -- eat them, drink them, wear them, parade in them, murder with them, glut itself with them. We can only learn from experience. The present generation must pay the death penalty with the rope around its neck, whereby future generations may take home the lesson and find their soul.

("What the Ethical Idealist Has to Fight For," pp. 8-10)
His doleful observations forced him to reassess the value and prospects of Ethical Culture. He told the assembly he had been drawn to the movement because of its practicality -- summed up in the slogan, "Deed, not Creed" -- and its respect for intellectual freedom. Early on, he had believed that "the religious millenium would begin to draw nigh" as the movement loosened the shackles of dogma. After 20 years of service to ethical religion, however, he was forced to admit that it had not been "winning its way," that in fact the world was "much farther away than it was twenty years ago, from all that is dearest and highest and most precious to me." (Ibid., p. 8) Belief in dogmas -- including the existence of hell and a vengeful God -- had declined, but not in the course of a search for truth. Instead, people were merely seeking and crafting "a comfortable religion, a soothing religion, one that shall make them feel safe in this world and safe for the next -- a religion that shall given them a sense of after-dinner comfort for body and soul alike." (Ibid., p. 10) He saw that Duty was not becoming the central element of religion. Instead, he said, "we have been getting art, a sensuous art, in the guise of religion, and an irrational mysticism in the place of creeds." (Ibid., p. 10) He recognized that, contrary to his earlier convictions, the abolition of creeds would not necessarily lead to spiritual regeneration, and emphasizing deed over creed would not necessarily nurture a hunger for righteousness. He even doubted if the "practicality" of Ethical Culture was much of a guard against corruption: "There may be as much of formalism and conventionality, of make-believe and subterfuge in a religion of deeds as in a religion of creeds." (Ibid., p. 11)

His disillusionment did not shake his faith in the potential of ethical religion. On the contrary, he felt that his experience had made it a more personal gospel and a more worthy mission. After getting his "bearings," he decided that the movement's future lay in an inward direction, in discovering that "the deed like the creed must have its roots in the living soul." (Ibid., p. 14) Unless the movement promotes spiritual development, he concluded, its aims are too shallow to be called religious:

Behind the deed as well as behind the creed there must go a faith of man in himself, in his own spiritual nature. Without this, his honesty and rectitude are only mechanical, like the good behavior of the dog which growls at his feet. It has its value, but it is not religion. When, however, in the presence of the whole animal kingdom, in the presence of the dust he treads on, yes, in the presence of the whole physical universe, he can say and feel, "I am better than thou," -- at that moment he stands on another plane and his conduct acquires a meaning it did not have before.

The richest gift of the religious consciousness has not been the faith in a God, nor the hope of heaven, nor the decrees of conscience, but rather the belief in soul,
yours and mine, soul anywhere and everywhere. It took the human race a hundred thousand years and more, to grow up to this conception. All the burden of all teaching of all religion of all time has centered in that one query: What shall a man given in exchange for his soul? At the present moment the human race is bartering its spiritual nature for simple dirt. It is the soul of man we are called upon to rescue, whatever our creed may be or distrust of creed, whether our religion be that of an Ethical Society or of the established Church, whether we are atheists, agnostics, theists, Jew or Christian. It is not the God-belief, the Christ-belief, the belief in heaven which is menaced to-day, but just this faith in the human soul, in the worth of man's spiritual nature.

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And so it is that I give my answer as to the direction in which every earnest religious teacher is called upon to throw the emphasis of his efforts. He must put up a new fight for the human soul. A bread-and-butter religion of simple philanthropy will not do. There is something worse than starving or aching bodies. There is something higher even than feeding the hungry or clothing the naked. If we do anything for men's bodies, its ultimate purpose is that we may reach the spiritual nature and build up the soul.

(Ibid., p. 11-12)
A TORTURED SOUL
Sheldon's Journal

In addition to his formal writings, Walter Sheldon bequeathed to posterity a private journal, a painfully revealing collection of self-criticism and cries of despair. This slender, leather-bound book, as long as a reporter's notebook and slightly wider, contains nearly 700 entries, all written in pencil. Because he was writing for his eyes only, he made liberal use of abbreviations and was careless about punctuation and grammar. The script is so rough throughout as to require deciphering, and many of the entries expressing anguish are written in a frenzied hand; some words are simply illegible. Though he did not date any of the entries, sparse references to dates indicate he kept the journal from roughly 1887-1891; his last entries describe his first encounters with Anna Hartshorne, whom he married in 1892. The journal tells little about the circumstances of his life. It does mention that he had a dog (it annoyed his neighbors), that he lived in an apartment building or duplex (he felt he had neglected the family that lived upstairs), and that he was chronically short of money. In the main, though, the journal is a chronicle of Sheldon's inner life: It served as a tool for self-improvement and a catharsis for the feelings he would not permit himself to share with friends. It presents a vivid portrait of a guilt-ridden, alienated man, a man of intense but repressed feelings, a man who yearned for affection and professional success but doubted he would ever attain them. One can only guess at his reasons for leaving it in his papers; in omitting the names of the people he most despised, he admitted his fear of its discovery. Perhaps he hoped that someone, safely removed by time, would finally understand and appreciate his torment.

Blunders! Blunders! Blunders!

Sheldon was self-critical in the extreme. The form of journal entry he made more than any other was marked with the codes "Me.," "E.," or "N.," evidently denoting "mistake," "error" and "note." He recorded all sorts of faux pas, from "the asinine remark to (longtime board President) Robert Moore about the weather at St. Louis Club" to "smoking in presence of the Goldmarks (the family of Adler's wife) even tho they are accustomed to it." If he ever believed himself to have behaved well at a social function, he did not make note of it:

E. of offering the lamb to Miss G before she had offered it to me
E. mistake last year of not calling on Mr. [E.N.] Plank [first resident superintendent of the Self-Culture Clubs] when invited

e. of not speaking to Mrs. Taussig [probably wife of James Taussig, vice president and de facto president of the board in 1886] at the wedding of R.J. Taussig

E. Carelessness of pointing with my fingers at persons when conversing with Mrs. B. at supper. [Possibly a reference to the wife of William Brandenburger, director of advertising for Anheuser-Busch Cos. and one of the Society's chief lay leaders.]

Me. at the reception of not taking away the chairs & introducing the people and moving among them

E. mistake not to rise when Mrs. Lackland came up to speak to me at Mrs. Plant's

E. of offering Mrs. Taussig my left arm when going out to dinner.

E. The mistake of the carelessness of housekeeping and carelessness at evenings of Social Science Club

Me. Mistake of going to the Leap Year Ball on Saturday evening the mistake in getting myself in that position when I could not get out

N. of showing Miss N. the gift of another friend to me which was prettier than her gift -- unkind & unfeeling thoughtlessness

N. when coming to dinner extremely hungry not sufficient restraint and self control over eagerness to quiet the physical unrest of hunger.

Me. My blunder in staying so late with Professor & Mrs. Ives [Halsey C. Ives was director of the St. Louis School of Fine Arts, where the Society met until 1912, and]
guiding force behind the building of the Palace of Fine Arts, which would become the St. Louis Art Museum after the World's Fair

E. Not giving the armchair to Miss Boeck but keeping it myself

Me. The carelessness that comes upon me in table manners from eating alone.

Stop it

Rem. [Remember] Black Wednesday. after visit to Mammoth cave. 1 arrival. rush of reminiscences of my failures and the conditions which led me. in a word the "ghosts" 2 the discovery of mistake toward Mrs. Dormitzer. 3 the hour of gloom before the fireplace in the afternoon under the depression of the influence of working with a man so much stronger than myself in what he can do. 4. evening -- spilling the coffee on Mrs. L's dress

Me. Blunders! Blunders. no end to the blunders!

Me. Another F.P. [faux pas] at the Greeley lecture about sitting on the platform.

E. of bowing to Miss R when apparently she did not wish to bow to me.

Blunders! Blunders! Blunders! [capitalized and underlined]

Me. Blunder at the Single Tax League one of the worst in my life. fortunately it has come early enough to teach me a lesson.

Blunders! Blunders! I wonder how I manage to keep alive here in spite of them all.

Perhaps no other single aspect of social intercourse caused Sheldon as much consternation as his clothing. His difficulty in dressing appropriately was to him a sign of his alienation. "I try to be like other people at least in dress," he wrote in one entry, "but even then I make a failure of it." He criticised himself for not wearing a dress suit to dinner at the Costes, and for being the only man at the wedding of
"Mr. N" -- other than the ushers -- who wore evening dress. He was chagrined at discoveries of disheveled clothing -- allowing his undershirt sleeves to stick out beneath his cuffs during a visit to "Mrs. L," having his socks down "in presence of ladies," going about with his necktie improperly tied, going to "Miss A's" with "untidy cuffs or wristbands," and speaking from the platform with a hole in one of his coatsleeves. On one occasion he believed he had spoiled an evening at the home of Washington and Martha Fischel, two of the Society's most supportive members, by failing to clean his boots beforehand. One of his many dislikes about St. Louis was that the coal dust that saturated the air in the late 19th and early 20th centuries left layers of soot everywhere; he resolved to keep his clothes carefully covered at night to prevent them from being soiled, and was angry with himself when he forgot. He revealed in one entry his "two supreme reasons why I must lay stress on elegance of dress." The first was "to obviate the suspicion of the crude or the vulgar in my radicalism"; the second was that, because he was generally lacking in social graces, he felt he had to take extra precautions to avoid being perceived as "a boor or indifferent to opinion of others."

Sheldon was intrigued by games but embarrassed by his ineptness while learning them. He scolded himself for "playing at bowling when not knowing anything about it at the club" and for "going into whist [a card game similar to bridge] when I was so poor a player, thus giving the impression of being an 'unfinished mind.'" Several times he resolved "not play as amateur a game with strangers where I cannot play well." Once he learned to play a respectable hand of whist, he became finicky about keeping to the rules, believing that allowing deviations "spoils you when you come to play with those who do follow the rules." His characteristic rigidity sometimes made him a trying partner; on one occasion he regretted "taking the game so seriously as to anger Malcolm by caring about the accuracy of the count and blaming him." And though he came to enjoy this innocent diversion, he worried that it encouraged him to let his guard down; he once upbraided himself for "playing whist too much and being too familiar" on a train trip.

It is easy to understand why Sheldon was perceived as stuffy and self-conscious; he regularly berated himself for speaking without proper restraint:

N. referring harshly of the South before one from the South.

Me. of reading my report at Bd meeting when it was not cared for. Should have laid it aside at once.
Me. wretched error of going to Mr. [John Calvin] Learned [Unitarian minister] about the case of Dr --. to think that I could be guilty of such indelicacy.

Me. error of mingling freely in dispute of the Board

Me. of my way of dealing with the elder Mr. Coste [father of treasurer Paul Coste] when meeting him and finding him ill.

Me. of alluding to my circumstances to Dr. [Charles W.] Stevens [board president in 1887]

Me. in speech at Round Table of alluding to president of U.S.A. and to capitalists so being personal indirectly (Mayor and John T. Davis)

N. grievous mistake of speaking to Mrs. [L.D.] Hildenbrandt [one of the principal fund-raisers for the Self-Culture Clubs] about "my conscience being free of the matter"

Me. of criticizing Mrs. Stone to Miss Lyon and Mrs. Hildenbrandt

Me. of mentioning to Mrs [J.A.] St. J [Mrs. St. John was another principal fund-raiser for the Self-Culture Clubs] the fact of the warning I had received not to deliver the lecture on Jesus.

Me. The egregious blunder at board meeting of saying of Prof. A. [Adler] "he will come when he pleases"

Me. I talk too much -- give too many explanations and reasons, especially to ladies

Me. of telling Mrs [garbled name] what Mrs. Nelson had said about ladies getting contributions. [Mr. N.O. Nelson was the original treasurer of the Self-Culture Hall Association.]
Me. careless speech verging on indelicacy at dinner table at Beedes to Mr. F.

Me. repeating to Mr D the very same remarks about Harvard I had made the last time I had met him.

Me. careless levity over the "flock"

N. Bite off my tongue for my brutal report of what was said to me about Mrs. Wiggin

Rem. Remark of [Thomas] Carlyle [19th century British writer] "Keep your mouth shut and you will feel so much more compact!"

Me. of the "letting down" Sunday night at Black's. when one lets down should do it alone.

N. That was a carefree and unfeeling remark which I made to Mr. F. in the presence of Dr. F [Washington Fischel, a prominent member of the Society and husband of Martha Fischel, a Self-Culture Hall instructor and later the first woman president of the Society]

Me. of speaking once too much at the Informal Club. "speech is silver, silence is golden"

Me. of arguing with housekeeper when she was half intoxicated

Me. I talk too much

Sheldon saw himself as disorganized, forgetful, and lazy. He chastised himself for his chronic tardiness, listing the inconveniences he frequently caused himself and others by missing trains, arriving late for meetings and social engagements, and making club members await his arrival outside the Society's rented quarters. Clearly an absent-minded man, he often noted with shame that he had missed
appointments, forgotten to pass along information, and misplaced important items. At times he criticised
himself for failing to make comprehensive plans; at other times he bemoaned his "waste of time thro
having complicated arrangements." He was mortified by his frequent inability to remember names, a
problem he attempted to rectify by listing the names of people he did not know well but was apt to
encounter. He chided himself for his "absence of method" and "careless waste of time." He often
criticized himself for a lack of preparation for talks before Self-Culture Clubs, Sunday School classes,
and other gatherings sponsored by the Society. He set for himself a demanding schedule, yet he was
forever frustrated with his habit of rushing to complete vital tasks. His procrastination in personal
matters also was an endless bane: He told himself that his delay in having his eyeglass chain mended led
to the breakage of the glasses, and that his dog collar was lost "thro carelessness in not taking trouble to
lock it." He was upset with his "constant way of getting and spoiling nice things" --
including an oak table and wash stand he had neglected, a rifle he had allowed to rust, and, of course,
clothing that had gotten soiled and torn; he told himself he did not "deserve to have them." He often took
himself to task for failing to keep his room tidy and his books properly arranged, a habit he considered
"suggestive of a possible untidyness of my mind -- not keeping my ideas in shape and order -- not having
a clearing out & clearing up of mind sufficiently often." He lamented that his "subjective nature" kept
him from efficiently handling "more practical matters"; his response to his repeated shortcomings
alternated between resolve to be more diligent and resignation to his habit of -- in the oft-quoted words
of Wordsworth -- "moving about in worlds unseen."

The Wound in the Side

Underlying Sheldon's critical watchfulness of his speech and behavior was a tormenting
consciousness of his self-interest. Believing that impure motivation turned a right into a wrong, he
demanded that even his thoughts and feelings conform to his ethical ideals. He repeatedly castigated
himself for desiring notoriety, for longing for the appreciation of Society members -- even for wanting a
strong showing on Sunday morning. "I must watch my emotions," he resolved. "It is so easy to think I
am doing something for a cause when I am doing it for myself." He even questioned his motive in taking
note of his errant behavior, reminding himself that his penitence did not give him permission to forgive
himself. "One needs to be careful in keeping a confessional book, just as attending confessional," he
wrote. "The merely setting down the wrong does not atone. The shame of the guilt is still there." In other
entries, he told himself that the practice of recording misdeeds was, by itself, shallow -- that he must
"scrutinize and record the wrongs of inner feelings as well — the very source of wrong." Guilt was such a constant that he sought to appreciate it as a helpful companion: "There is after all an element of laziness about me. I only do my best work when goaded by disappointment. What would the world be good for without pain. It is that which makes men have deep [sic] feelings and goads men into thinking."

In a similar entry, he reminded himself "that a man is never going to do effective work unless he feels uncomfortable."

Sheldon's self-doubt seems to have been unrelieved. The journal is shot through with cries of sorrow over what he saw as a failed life. His uncertainty about his vocation, which earlier had prompted him to leave the Ethical movement and try his hand at medicine, would continue to plague him. In an entry he wrote upon turning 30, he noted that he had "fulfilled the condition of success of long preparation & waiting" but that his failure lay "in not taking the right direction." He regretted that he had "no permanent profession" and that he was "too far advanced in life to learn a profession and have time or determination to make a success of it at an age when it is clear that I am not of the stuff ever to be at the top." In assessing the life of the mind at that milestone, he noted his success in "getting culture so far as it meant reading books yet failure so far as it meant reaching an equipoise on a higher level, so far as getting suavity of soul conditions."

Sheldon repeatedly declared a sense, if not a decision, that it was time to leave the profession and seek one less fearsome and harassing. One such collection of entries began after William Salter, the leader of the Chicago Society, spoke before the St. Louis Society. Salter evidently left at least one of his listeners in reflective or awestruck silence. "What would I not give," wrote Sheldon, "if some one were to say to me or of me too what Mr. N. [Charles Nagel, a prominent St. Louis attorney and founding member of the Society] said of Mr Salter that he did not want to speak to him or anybody else for several hours after But it will never be." The heartache Sheldon felt upon hearing Nagel's praise of Salter wore on for days, culminating in a tentative decision to find and train a successor in preparation for his departure. In a light, calmly written notation made sometime later, Sheldon identified the first of the following entries as having been written "the Sunday after S. was there"; the next two entries in the journal evidently sprang from an encounter with someone at the Informal Club, a group of liberal clerics that met monthly for luncheon discussions [FOOTNOTE]:

I have reached the turning point at last. It is settled now. Whether it is late or soon it does not matter. But I give it up. My spirit is broken. This day has decided it. It was all a mistake. Five years are nearly over. I am where I began. Now to hold myself together until I find my successor My life is stranded. I must take the consequences. I
have brought it upon myself. I mistook my profession. Today was the test. I knew it was coming. This occasion decided it. From this time on my course is clear. To finish up what I have begun to fix the work so that it can stay of itself. No more care about establishing myself. No more thought about my personal hold. Absolute indifference about my own standing. That is over. But what of me now? My eyes had been dry but today not today

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Ref. [Reflection] This Informal Club certainly has given me an experience, a good many experiences

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Ex. [Exclamation] I am tired so tired, so very tired even to being almost sick. Worse still I am sick of myself so discouraged so disheartened with myself. I have struggled so hard agonized so much and yet accomplished so little. Saddest of all, worst of all I have suffered so much at my own failure that I have committed the most selfish act of my profession in not being able to be absorbed in the suffering of others. Is it possible that a man could strike lower depths than when I be face down and moan in my soul. Yet why don't I disclose it? Was it a mistake. He does not yet understand it. He has experience [sic] suffering from one kind of experience He does not yet see that the identical degree of pain may come from another cause[written in margin] And yet I have never been so tired as to be willing wholly willing to give it up and die

Q. [Question] Was that a mistake that Sunday afternoon with Mr. Nagel I wonder. I wonder

Sheldon felt compelled to make a significant contribution, but he despaired of doing so. Many of his journal entries bemoaned his failure -- as a lecturer and clergyman, as a scholar, as a man -- and sought to explain it as inevitable. In one typical entry, he ventured that he was "too earnest to be successful on a large scale. Too subjective." In another he resolved to "go into the world to conquer this sense of being an unfrocked priest." His emotional pain kept him from working with "continued
purpose," leaving him virtually convinced that he was inadequate to fulfill his role. He felt deficient in everything his vocation required: he considered his education wanting, his public speaking style stiff and dull, and his social skills abysmal. He feared that his unconquerable daydreaming -- his habit of "moving about in worlds not realized" -- rendered him incompetent at directing the practical affairs of the Society and the Self-Culture Halls, yet he never let go of his yearning to be both "a man of culture and a man of the world."

Only rarely were his expressions of despondency and self-doubt countered by words of encouragement to himself:

Me. of selection of a subject for lecture in New York. That word "much improved." why is it that I always appear young and yet feel so old.

Rem. with frail human nature such as it is be content with limited results many may be climbing the hill but many stop & digress in the ascent

Rem. the factor in in [sic] my failure is my want of persistance the factor of my success is my restlessness. encourage the last keep up the causes of the restlessness, but discourage the causes that cause the want of persistance.

Me. mistake of my life effort to be a man of the world when I am not that at all.

Rem. The reason that makes success so much harder for us than men in the world (politics or business) is That we are restricted to purity of methods -- hence so harassing.

Rem. the world loves most the man who works with All the life that is in him never stopping to breathe or rest. To be widely loved one must be a Chas. Kingsley [19th century English novelist] or Robert Ekmere.

Ex. How it digs into me, this impression as though I were offering myself where I am not wanted. what a relief it would be to be in a work where what I did was something which the world not only needed but wanted
Rem. I wanted to be a man of culture and a man of the world but I was not large enough to be both and I must choose till there is no doubt where my choice lies.

Suppose I was to begin all over again. Suppose Tolleton was right.

Rem. My mistake of youthfulness, not giving the impression of maturity.

Reg. [Regret] I wish I had given a full year to mathematics at Cambridge, England.

Ex. How it makes me jump or sits me ajar when a letter on matters of business comes from St. Louis to my retreat in the mountains. Will I be able to be [a] man of affairs as well as [a] man of thoughts?

Ex. How utterly impossible it is to be the man of thought and the man of affairs. instance. getting settled in the fall -- [garbled word] how it irritates me!

Ref. I can never succeed because I can never "fill the gallery" and yet that is essential in order even to keep up the courage of the serious. (But the gallery does not mean the poor who cannot afford better seats)

Ref. I simply dare not do it and cannot even think of it. A financial crisis, the loss of three or four friends from change of sympathy, the death of three or four, the whisper of a false scandal, and where am I then? stranded. I cannot please the multitude, even the few only partially. Each one sympathizes with only part of what I do or one direction. The deepest that I can do, my best, I cannot do because those for whom or with whom I could do are shut away from me by a wall of suspicion. Where I touch on what I know most about and feel the most deeply I have the least hearing. And yet I cannot move hand or foot. To whisper my own doubts of my own capacity would increase the doubts of others. In this country a man must believe in himself before he can make others believe in him. Yet I must stay till I find another to fill my place. But each year I wait it will make it more and more difficult to do anything with myself when I
must step out. I have nerve and pluck, but where would be the years for the new
apprenticeship. Oh that figure -- "the wound in the side"

Ex. I have nerve, energy, will, mind, gift of speech, belief in what I am doing.
But others with the same gifts do three times as much. ergo ______

Rem. One thing is certain. If I do not succeed the defect lies wholly with myself.
People have treated me as well as I deserve to be treated. If I cannot awaken their
enthusiasm I may be worthy of it but I have lacked the power in myself to call it out

Ex. A man can smile and smile, and yet be awfully unhappy. That gnawing sense
that I mistook my vocation!

Ex. This sense of depression, of gathering oneself together for a pull when one is
torn in pieces internally where in the depths have I not been this last fortnight. And yet it
is not physical. It has its reason. It is the sense of defect, the littleness of results beside
what I have been working for! Oh my God. I keep saying it over to myself why not here
I suffer so much myself that I have not time to sympathize with the suffering with others

Me. I don't get time to do any reading. am falling behind. Where will I be in a
few years

Q. Am I a "disappointed man"? What does that mean? defeat in one's main life-
purpose? The accomplishment of only a small part of what one sets out to accomplish?
Certainly I have defeats enough. How many efforts I have made which only drove me
back into the same haven from which I started. How many times I feel "knocked down,"
struck to the earth. Perhaps "a disappointed man" means one who has not accomplished
what he has felt himself capable of. But that would include the failures both of fools as
well as geniuses

Q. Remember that remark. You are doing this work because you desire to
"establish yourself." find a position or sphere of work for your faculties in the world.
How much does that mean
Q. I try to analyze my motives. I seek to stifle all unworthy suggestions.

Rem. If a man is to know and influence the world he must move near the center of the whirl, where the forces are the most concentrated. The sources whence the energies move out which control the events.

So much effort is used up in just trying to be like other men, and I know I am not like other men.

Q. It is true of a strong teacher that he is filled to overflowing with one idea. He wants to put it forward. Have I such an idea, or do I just want to be a teacher and find the idea afterward.

Q. It does come to us all at times the feeling. Are they worth it. is it worth the while. Can we do anything. My God! My God --------

Ref. I suppose the one elemental difference between the successful & the unsuccessful man is that the one always looks for the obstacle in himself. The other in conditions.

Ref. Self sacrifice comes hard. When it does not help the growth of the receiver but merely makes up for his defects at the same time that is not merely giving up a satisfaction to the other but surrendering his own opportunity or means of growth. Then the problem is hard.

E. That awful point of confusing one's cause with one's personal ambition.

Rem. A man may delude himself by giving dignified names to very unworthy feelings.
E. What a ludicrous dream one can build up and see it vanish like a bubble come and gone -- it leaves no void. only a dream

Ex. I may as well face the truth. My effort has been a failure. In my work I am a failure. I have now worked four years and have not established a work. It still hangs by a thread. A cloudy sky or a concert or an uninteresting subject and they stay at home. I have put all my soul in it and am burning up inside. My hair is getting grey. I have suffered over it all the agony which usually men only suffer when they taste the bitterness of grief. I do not know how to smile, have almost forgotten what it means in St Louis. I ache all over in spirit. I cannot find a method. I try everything. I have given up my soul to this. I know not how to go ahead. I know not how to stop. How long will it take for me to wear out

Oh! but a man does feel so shackled!

Res. There is just one thing for me to do. I am so unlike the other men in my work that I can be of no good or consequence to them. I must push out in a new field where they do not reach. I gain influence so slowly that were I not alone I can do nothing. I am adapted to a certain class of minds and they are not the kind which the other men bring or which the movement in its present spirit would draw. I must work and wait and find my own field. It requires some philosophy to hold the will firm in the face of the kind [of] looking-down-from-the-height feeling which I receive from the men with whom I feel myself equal. But then it's a small matter. It is not for the esteem of others that I work. But yet I am that human that I would like to do one special piece of work which could distinctively bear the imprint of myself

Ex. It's so pathetic that a man can help the world more with his second-best than with his first-best

Ex. Oh this wound in the side. My God! My God! It takes so much energy and so little comes
Ex. After all what it's all worth! a man must say it sometimes. It comes like the tears and brings relief. I pull so hard and it won't come.

Q. Is it right to dissemble to appear gay or lighthearted when my heart is like lead. No wonder Mrs. G thinks I think the world about right! Yet I can't show the truth. For myself I can see no future I must inevitably retire sooner or later. I have no profession no means of permanent livelihood I cannot have a home. My life is going to be a failure (although for the sake of the cause I am consecrated to, I may not for a moment disclose my feeling). Yet I could stand up against this if I saw the world getting better. But I can't even see that. I work in the spirit of that young Captain of the Salvation Army, but without the bouy and faith.

Ex. I feel as tho I were bleeding all over. I ache in my very soul.

R. I'm not working from the heart now, but from the will. It tells

Me. Of showing my consciousness of the size of my audiences

What a curious thing it is my [encountering] a business man and asking him the question "What do you think of the silver question?" me!!

Ref. I am so disappointed in myself. I accomplish so little! And I seem to waste so much time. I get scarcely more than a half dozen hours a day. I don't keep up with the world. My brain does not improve as a self acting instrument. If I go to the country it sleeps. I love to travel, to be on the move, to be in the whirl in order to have the incentive to think. I am not one thing or another.

Good God! I have given my life blood to this thing for five years and I am half dead. I have given my all and yet -- and yet -- Well I suppose it must go as it is. I see men with less devotion make more and better friends. I can't make myself understood. Sometimes I even think I am an unselfish man after all. But this trying to please people, be what they want to have me be, trying to go in four directions at once. Oh I'm tired I'm tired. Somehow it seems as tho --. well I can't do anything but go it alone. but I
shall tumble ere long and my light go out. But if my work can go on, I shall be at peace. It is a wonder as it is, stranger in the world as I am that I have accomplished anything at all. I had no right to expect it, to expect *anything*.

If only I could ever catch up... People want so much and expect so much... If only I could get to the point where people would have faith in me without wondering why I do it this way or that way or the other way. But there's no use. It cannot be. Never mind what people may not be to me. What I am to think of is what I can be to them.

[FOOTNOTE: The Informal Club continues to meet under the name Sandwich Club. All leaders of the St. Louis Society have belonged.]
THE NUCLEUS OF THE EARNEST

Sheldon's guiding aspiration was to make his mark as an Ethical leader. That vocation, which he defined as spurring people to rise above mediocrity, was the path by which he hoped to raise himself above mediocrity. Whatever may have been the actual source of his lingering sense of despair, he interpreted it as the sober recognition that he was failing on both counts. "I suppose there is about as acute misery in this profession of religious teacher as a human could suffer," he wrote in the very first entry in the journal. "It is silent but it is intense. The awful, awful jar which makes the soul ache, ache so much." In many other entries throughout the journal, he explored the hardships and disappointments of his work:

Rem. that the nucleus of the earnest is very small at all times. The Savonarolas must be alone in their cells even while they live in this world. [Girolamo Savonarola, 1452-98, was an Italian monk, a religious and political reformer who was burned at the stake for heresy.]

Rem. the penalty of isolation attached to my profession. in the very need of being impersonal whereas it may be the duty of men in other professions to regard & allow their course in consideration for the feeling of others, for us it is a duty to disregard such feelings, to take the one path (hence reason for not marrying) see effect of Beecher's political course & his loss of friends [Henry Ward Beecher, brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe and an early contemporary of Sheldon's, was a clergyman and lecturer]

Rem. whereas for the artist (e.g. Professor I.) policy being polite, diplomacy would be a duty. for me in my profession it would [be] a crime [Professor Halsey C. Ives was director of the St. Louis Museum and School of Fine Arts, where the Ethical Society met in rented quarters]

Rem. the chief value of our work must be in the new direction in which it leads. the wastes of unitarianism is in adapting to the old. All that is new that we give may live. the old will not live. it is purely for the present.
Will the time ever come that men believe in me, not in what I teach but in me as a man.

Ex. What wears a man out is that sense of defeat in winning people that will hold. The loss of a man's hold on people is what wears him out. It isn't the work that wears.

Ref. How inevitable it is, to accomplish a result one needs to arrange and plan and work desperately hard with a view to twice the results one actually gets and not only that as a stimulus he needs to expect twice the result he will actually get and then keep up his courage when only the one half comes.

Ref. What eats into a man is this dread uncertainty of a half or losing hold on people. A man never knows just where his work stands or how near it is to the brink of a precipice.

Ex. What a melancholy experience this is, the working down of a man's spirit to adjust himself to the niche he must occupy.

Q Ex. [Query and Exclamation] This sense of homelessness since I came into the Ethical Movement a "stranger in a strange land." My life is divided into two labors.

2. Would I regret that I ever came to the Ethical Movement if I found there was no place for me there? Do I begin to regret it now? Sometimes I feel as tho I had been entangled in a [sentence unfinished]

Ref. The most melancholy epoch in a man's life is when he is beginning to realize the limitations of his powers. That no effort he can make will lift him above mediocrity. It is the critical period, for it determines whether it will check his ambition.

Res. If the hour should come when in the work of my society I did not realize it growing and gaining strength in the community, or when the next year was to go on doing the same work as last year, then let me stop or die, for I shall be dead in soul already.
Ref. When asked how my work goes I have but one answer "splendidly." It ought to be written on my tombstone

Ref. It worries me to think that I never can do any great work. I have discovered my limitations. It comes hard to come down to the connection that I must be one of the rank and file, to do just the work others do or have done. It is not that I would care to have a name. I think it would be just the same if I could do a great work and yet never have it known that it came from me. I should know it. That would be enough. Now comes the struggle to accept mediocrity of result and yet keep up enthusiasm

Ex. It is beginning all over again. I thought it would be different this year. This gnawing sense that I am unable to make myself an essential factor to others, to make them feel they need me. My fourth year I have been here and yet even this year my work begins and even my stipend is not voted. Oh but it hurts! hurts! Yet I alone am responsible. I am not strong enough to make them feel me worth it.

Ref. Here it is, the first Sunday noon with that sense of sick exhaustion. to continue 30 Sundays! What am I to do (?) Ach Goll!

Ex. What worries me more than anything else is the fear lest I be sidetracked, lest my work may be not on the main line of progress. work may be progressing but not on the main line and so not tell on the future.

Ref. The great difficulty in such work is always to keep heart that it is worth the while; that men are worth doing it for. We have to conquer the craving for personal appreciation or gratitude. we never doubt that some are worth it. the hardest part is to feel that mankind is worth it

I have started from the one thought men are careless with their lives, they just exist from day to day. They don't live up to the best in themselves. The finer elements which distinguish us from the brute men let them die. When they are young they lay plans but later on they do not carry them out. They sink back to the ungual level and live to get a living. I did want to urge men to be something more. I felt that the existing
teaching did not do this. Could not give this spur. I wanted to do it. But how? how? how

Ref. I am dominated by one ambition, to accomplish some specific result, to do
some definite, effective work in the world: just to live -- for that I do not care, unless I
can show a product. and the worry, the dread is, lest I may not -- lest I cannot do it. I am
learning so much, my own restrictions and limitations. a man could hurt me more by
striking at my work than by striking at me

Ref. The saddest thing about leadership and power is that it develops arrogance,
even of religious leaders. he is cordial according to the degree of deference shown to him

Q. I wonder if this work makes a man cold or selfish. I do so hunger for
something. But I can't have it I can't have it. My soul is exceeding [sic] sorrowful even
unto death

While Sheldon's talents as a scholar, writer and lecturer made him well-suited to the work of an
Ethical leader, founding the St. Louis Society forced him to develop his much weaker administrative
skills. Until 1891, when Robert Moore ably began his 30-year stint as the Society's president, the
community's members and lay leaders expected Sheldon to guide its financial affairs and handle many of
its organizational tasks. Sheldon accepted the role resentfully:

Rem. that a man who founds a Society is not likely to be able to
continue the leader of it because in the necessity of his working to push the practical
machine into working operation he is thrown into a light that alters his influence purely
as a teacher. R[esolve] Work therefore to build up a Society and then be ready to step out
for a successor who can be to the people what the first cannot be by reason of his double
functions.

Res. I must bend every energy first for one or two years to building up the
Ethical Society in members and finances so that it shall be on an existing basis Then I
must think of my standing with scholars and the outside world. My existence here will
depend on my prestige among that class. My personality is so unlike that of other men that I can not rely on *it* to sustain me.

Ex. How I dread those Board meetings. If only I could bathe in the ether after coming away from them. That I must not only be the teacher of religion, but have to show them how to raise the money.

Rg.[Regret] If I could only get to the point where I would not be haunted with the consciousness that my work looked as tho it were for the purpose of getting a living. I have to push the Society at the top and also *at the bottom* and that sort of thing eats intoa man. It is not the *work* that wears a man out, but the nervous *chafing* that goes on inside of me while doing the work.

The Ethical Society of the late 1800s, like the city at large, was a heterogenous community marked by conflict between native-born Americans and recent immigrants. Some of the most vocal and active members of the Society -- German-born freethinkers and ethnic Jews -- tended toward cliquishness, and Sheldon, a New Englander of Protestant upbringing, felt ill-equipped to cope with the inevitable conflicts that at times seemed to threaten the community's continued existence:

Rem. The three different elements to be met in my Society. (1) the radical German the (2) conservative American and (3) the Hebrew. how to blend them.

Rem. If failure comes, it comes through the fact that in dealing with the diverse elements we may not as in politics or the press use diplomacy.

Ex. Baffled, baffled by this Hebrew question! cramped by it and never can get away from it

Ex. What a turn my life took when I swung away from the old moorings. The old human relations. Now I am a stranger among H's & G's [Hebrews and Germans]

Ref. I begin now with "the wound in the side." Oct 21. Yet let me not own it outside to nobody but the leader. Let me throw all I have into the rest of the year and
then stop. Even if I go on it would be idle. Perhaps if I had started two years ago more fully fledged as I am now it would have been different. What with my own nervous exhaustion, the Hebrew difficulty, the anti-radical feeling, the listless indifference of those who are outside of the churches and my own want of personal attractiveness there's exhaustion enough.

Sheldon also was perplexed but what he saw as a class conflict in the needs and appeal of the young Society: To survive, it had to attract people wealthy enough to make substantial contributions, but the very people who were most apt to become wealthy were least inclined to join such a community. "The misfortune of our work," he wrote, "is that we make it so expensive that it depends on the membership of the rich and how can we expect many of that class when naturally we appeal to the most refined natures and the art or method of getting rich requires thick skin and tough sensibilities." By Sheldon's reckoning, that conflict did not augur well for the future of the Ethical movement: "How can we expect to get the financial support from the very classes which we propose to find fault with, to expect them to pay us for chiding them for their neglect of their duty?" In looking over "the class of the rich" in St. Louis, Sheldon noted that he could identify only about a half-dozen "refined gentlemen," affluent men who exhibited commitment to ethical ideals; the only Society members he numbered among them -- "John T.D." and N.O. Nelson -- were "2 in 1,000." It disturbed him to think that men drawn to the Society at a young age might be dissuaded from ever joining that elite. "I wonder is there danger in our work of making persons too tender skinned to be able to cope with difficulties to meet [garbled word] in their struggle for a living," he wrote. "We run a risk in discouraging a young man from wanting to be rich." Elsewhere he noted that "the difficulty is to induce a refined nature to have push and self assertion."

Alas

Sheldon felt he was particularly lacking in organizational and motivational skills. He was frustrated by his inability to inspire Society members to do more for the community. "Alas it is disheartening," he wrote. "I have been at work three years and yet I have not been able to induce ten persons, no not five, to do steady work for others. There is so much talk about philanthropy but so little done of the actual thing from one man to another." He worried that the Society's reliance on a handful of volunteers rendered its continuance precarious. "How true it is that only a few men constitute the running
force of the world," he mused. "Take out certain 10 men out of it would wreck any society it would
wreck any church." Further, it seemed to Sheldon that even those who did give generously of themselves
tended to concentrate their energies in narrow areas of the community's life. "How alone a man is who is
carrying a multitude of aims in mind in each of which separate persons are working," he complained.
"Each one thinks his part the chief if not the whole. scarcely one of them enters into the aims and central
thought of the leader." Some of the "blunders" he listed indicate that he had trouble marshalling
volunteer assignments and activity schedules. Committee work only multiplied his distress:
"Me.[Mistake] if only we had had persons, not committees to do the work."

He especially feared that his poor administrative skills would hurt the progress of the Self-
Culture Clubs Association. He chided himself for his "lack of determined enterprise in connection with
the Reading Rooms" and the "unbusinesslike methods" with which he managed them. "I shrink from
going ahead," he once wrote, blaming his ineptitude on "this accursed subjectivity."

Sheldon consistently fell short of his aims as a pastor. He observed, probably correctly, that his
preoccupation with his ambitions and his inner turmoil kept him from attending closely to members of
the community. "Unlike the true 'minister,'" he wrote, "instead of being full of the troubles of others I
am full of thought of my own success or failure." Suppressing his sorrow sometimes required stoical
discipline. "Never show tears in the eyes before another unless they are tears of sympathy for another,"
he resolved. "In oneself for oneself they indicate want of pluck. rem[ember] the instance of the laborer
Fenton who came to see me." He complained of his difficulty in paying attention to people in
conversation while harassed by concerns about the Society as a whole. Similarly, he worried that his
devotion to his scholarly work undercut his effectiveness on a person-to-person level. "There is danger
lest in doing so much for my work for mankind in general I do little or nothing for individuals in
particular," he reminded himself. "What persons have I helped [?]" In an effort to overcome his
tendency to "move in worlds not realized," he made resolutions to accomplish specific pastoral tasks,
such as calling on Society members who had stopped coming to platform meetings, paying visits to
gatherings of women's clubs, and keeping himself posted on the health of ailing members.

Sheldon's difficulty in accepting human nature is evident in several of his reflections on his
vocation. "One reason why a man can not do effective work if he is of thorough culture is because the
people whom he might help are not of thorough culture and do not want it," he reflected. "They want
'just a little.'" He also expressed exasperation with students and discussion club members who wanted
him to "do the talking"; he once observed that his "great failure as a teacher is in drawing others out and
inducing them to talk so as to interest others."
Although devoted to the ethical education of young people, Sheldon felt he could neither understand them nor appeal to them. "Why is it that I do not win children?" he asked himself after an upsetting encounter with children at the Keene Valley retreat. "Is it because instead of entering into their mood I let myself be worried by their restless presence?" Toward the end of a particularly stressful week, he expressed repugnance at the "awful nightmare" of teaching children's classes over the weekend. He blamed himself for the dissipation of the first young men's club and the first girls club he started, concluding that he should have had "someone else start them and not myself so securing their push and enthusiasm." One entry shows that his intricate instructions on proper behavior -- as in his "Lessons in the Study of Habits" -- stemmed from the demands he placed on himself: "Every time I prepare the lessons for the children about the state of things which others do not see, cleanliness, dress, neatness, etc. am reminded of myself. where am I?"

Alack!

The platform service was the focus of Sheldon's attention. He wrote his addresses with care, combining his extensive knowledge of philosophy, religion, and world literature with anecdotes. "The element of success in a lecture," he noted, "is in the proper combination of principle with facts of every day experiences every body has the experiences. a few know the principles. very few know them properly together."

Never confident of his speaking ability, Sheldon continually experimented with changes in his style of delivery. Though stung by criticism, he took to heart the observations of his colleagues: M.M. Mangasarian, who replaced William Salter in Chicago from 1892-96, told him that he held his hands too stiffly, failed to modulate his voice, and stood still instead of moving about the platform; S. Burns Weston told him, after he delivered an address in Philadelphia, that he had a tendency to assume "awkward postures" and repeat words and phrases; James Taussig, the Society's de facto president in the 1880s, confirmed that he repeated himself, and added that he covered too many points in a single address, that his style was "too strained" and "too florid," and that the audience was put off by the "prolonged intensity" of his delivery. He tried to rein in his tendency to speak didactically, "as tho instructing orlaying down the law." He generally committed his addresses to memory to avoid the "crude & rough delivery" that resulted from reading them, but he allowed himself to keep the manuscript before him when he was tired. On at least a few occasions he experimented with what he called "the nervous method," evidently an informal style in which he allowed "more free play to method natural to self." In doing so, he may have hoped to emulate the charismatic speakers he envied, men who had the
"curious power" to "pose with commonplaces and yet make the world listen to them as tho the utterances were the mark of genius"; that skill, he believed, was "not wisdom or genius but personality."

A low turnout at a platform meeting was a source of grief for Sheldon. "It is those missing faces that wear on a man," he wrote. "He feels so much the limitations of his power." Clearly the fluctuations were real, as he noted several occasions when lay leaders expressed their concerns about attendance, deepening his chagrin. His anxiety was not solely self-centered, however; he believed that a strong showing at meetings underscored for regular participants that they were part of a vital movement. "I can never succeed because I can never 'fill the gallery,'" he wrote, "and yet that is essential in order even to keep up the courage of the serious." He had yet another reason to hope for high attendance: A small gathering of loyal members created an atmosphere of intimacy that unnerved him because it made his formal oratorical style seem inappropriate. "When congregation small," he told himself, "either read or stand behind the desk."

In selecting topics for his addresses, Sheldon took into account his strengths as well as the preferences of his listeners. Recognizing his inclination to speak about literature (his inventory of his first 25 addresses in St. Louis includes talks on Robert Browning, Hawthorne's "Scarlet Letter," and Shakespeare's "King Lear"), he made a concerted effort to "give stress to philosophy, so to keep the balance." It was with difficulty that he rounded out his offerings with a third category -- what he called "the Social Problems"; he often told himself that one of his chief failings was in not sufficiently grasping -- or speaking out on -- current issues in the nation and on the global scene. In 1888, the year that Benjamin Harrison claimed an Electoral College victory over the winner of the popular vote, incumbent Grover Cleveland, Sheldon faulted himself for "taking abstract subjects and not themes in connection with what everybody was thinking about, at election time." For Sheldon, to speak on "practical subjects" was to risk exposing his ignorance and offending political sensibilities:

Rem. A democracy makes it impossible for the leaders to be more than a little way ahead of the people just so in politics just so in religion. how can we touch on social questions when even the best of the multitude know so little and feel so intensely about them Yet what is my work worth if I [avoid them] in my speech [?]  

As badly as he wanted to win the approbation of the membership, Sheldon came to take their suggestions and complaints regarding platform topics with a grain of salt. For one thing, he discovered that there was "not a single subject in which my congregation as a whole has an interest That is where I am handcuffed." (In deliberating over topic selection, Sheldon once reminded himself of a man who
would no longer come to the platform meetings because he "did not want to hear any more about Jesus Christ." The reminder prompted him to exclaim, "alack! alack!") Further, he genuinely feared that letting the membership dictate his choices would lower the caliber of the platform program. "Whatever work is for the multitude and yet is above them and aims to draw them up to it cannot be supported by them for they will not see the value of the higher plane till they get there," he reminded himself. "If a man follows his inclinations he will not walk up hill".

In a couple of entries, Sheldon admitted a concern that he might run out of original ideas. "Sometimes I worry in fear lest there will be nothing left to say," he wrote, referring to his writing as well as his public speaking. "All the best thots [thoughts] will be said or printed by the others. Well in that case all the better unless the time comes when I shall have thots which are so much a part of myself that others can't say them. I wonder did that anxiety ever worry Emerson?" In one entry, he consciously soothed his fear that the membership would tire of him. "I need never be troubled in my self if people think they now possess all that I have to say," he asserted. "So long as each year I am in my self conscious that I myself can be advanced to higher & higher standpoints. If they do not see it, it may be due either to my want of power in showing it by not knowing how to say it or by their own want of advance."

Next to lecturing, Sheldon held writing to be the most important aspect of his vocation. Though an erudite man whose library numbered some 3,000 volumes, he recognized that he was not a ground-breaker; he saw his mission as making philosophy and religious studies comprehensible and relevant to people of limited education. "In literary work which is not exploration of knlg [knowledge], importance of form of expression," he wrote. "Even tho not have great learning if we can in single sentences say what others feel, or crystalize their experiences for them we still do a great work. It was the work of Emerson." Again, in expressing his admiration of Emerson and poet-essayist Matthew Arnold, he reminded himself that "half of the power of the essayist the thinker the reflecting mind as contrasted with the systematic mind of science or philosophy lies in the choice of expression . . . . The keenest observer might not be able to say anything." One entry expresses his sentiments succinctly: "I would rather have been Emerson than Kant." Because he so appreciated the power of a well-turned phrase, he reminded himself of the importance of jotting down thoughts and sentences as soon as they came to him. "If a thought in reflection comes," he resolved, "catch it in its first expression as it occurs in the mind." While he was no doubt gratified to have several books published by Macmillan and Co., he did not expect them to reach a large audience. That Emerson's books sold poorly during Sheldon's lifetime, in contrast to popular novels, confirmed for Sheldon that "effrontery & the commonplace do succeed in this country."
One singular entry in the journal, a record of evening engagements, shows how thoroughly Sheldon's social and professional lives were interwoven:

Record of evenings for a month --
Mr. Nagels 12-1
Tuesday Unitarian Club Dinner at Mercantile Club
Wednesday Piano Club. afterwards at Prof Ives
Thursday lecture to S. Bdway [S. Broadway Self-Culture Hall]. afterwards at Mr. Nagels supper with Plank [E.N. Plank, resident superintendent of the Self-Culture program]
Friday Mr. Taussigs at supper. Lecture afterward [garbled word or name]
Saturday Supper at Nelsons. Then home
Sunday D Carels here. then at Dr Fischels. 10-11 __
Monday Supper here. Reform Club. afterward
Nagels 10-12:30
Tuesday Planks for supper. P Office. then Civics Club
Wednesday Supper at Meaux Then to meeting at Bringhurst studio
Thursday Supper home. Call on Arnstein. Mercantile Club/ 11-12 at Nagels
Friday Campbell at supper. not go out
Saturday Plass for supper. then to Salvation Army. Standard Theatre [garbled word]
Excursion night
Sunday Whole evening at home!!
—
Monday Supper at Mr. Nelsons. Then home. St. Louis Club till 11:30
Tuesday Supper at home. Call on Mrs. Stone. Art Museum Reception then Fischels
12:30 Wednesday Supper at Learneds. Address to Knights of Labor
Thursday Lecture of Factory girls. Then home. St. Louis Club
Friday Supper & evening with Moore & [garbled name]
Saturday night on train to Chicago. Coste at supper
Sunday On train to St. Louis. Supper at Salters
—
Monday Supper at Mr. Taussigs. home rest of evening
Tuesday Civics Club. Then Mrs. Allen's Reception
Wednesday Biography Club -- Nagel home 1 a.m.
Thursday Symphony concert
Friday Mr. Nagels to [garbled name]
Saturday Round Table
Sunday Dr. Holland's Church

A Different Coin

Sheldon lived on a tight budget, receiving a stipend of only about $1,200 a year in his first few years in St. Louis. He often failed to make ends meet, and was forced to borrow from friends, including S. Burns Weston and James Taussig, and a relative, his Uncle Charles. Long before the invention of the credit card, Sheldon learned the hazards of buying on credit. "Let no bills collect," he resolved. "Pay at the place where purchase made. wait the purchase till I have the cash in the bank." To induce himself to stop buying on credit, he reminded himself of the "the confusion and trouble which came into my accounts thro letting my bills collect in '87" and the "the embarrassment of being harassed about bills in the fall of '87 and being obliged to borrow." If bill collectors were the stick that kept him in line, the carrot was the thrill of hard cash: "What a curious feeling it is when I go down to the bank and get some money. I feel so much power come back to me, a sense of exhilaration in [garbled word] having the money tho I knew it was there before."

He second-guessed his spending decisions, scolding himself for his "stupidity" in accumulating library fines of up to a dollar, his "careless waste of money in selection of ill-fitting shoes," and his "business blunder of taking this house." Then, as always, the Big Apple was particularly hard on the pocketbook; he resolved to "stop running out of money and having to borrow when visiting New York." He chided himself for squandering money on "luxuries," but he mentions few non-essential expenses; a list of expenditures over the course of a few days includes 15 cents for streetcar fare, 20 cents for cigars, 15 cents for envelopes, $3.08 for postage, and 30 cents to have his eyeglass chain mended. When he wasn't angry with himself for buying luxuries, he was angry with himself for not getting much luxury for the dollar:

I am haunted, haunted by the feeling that in the comforts of the world I have more than my share, or at least that I have more opportunities to get comforts. Tho I doubt whether I use my money with the common sense way of getting comfort or luxury to the amt that most persons get who do not expend one quarter the amt of money. I am
squandering privileges (or money, which is the same thing) It may be as much wrong to waste money as to spend it on one's selfish comfort. Think what other strugglers could do with it.

In addition to the "irritating necessity of not being quite sure of making ends meet," Sheldon was perturbed by his inability to be generous with friends and to contribute to worthy causes. "It does worry me very much that I spend so little money for others," he wrote. "My work is for others and I spend it in fitting myself to do my work. But I ought also to share my privileges." On some occasions, however, he had to restrain his tendency to use his personal funds for the work of the Society and the Self-Culture Clubs. "If I am to make ends meet I must stop throwing money into the Reading Rooms," he resolved. "I subscribed $25 twice, but in the last 12 months they have probably cost me $125.00."

He repeatedly resolved to sharply reduce his expenditures so he could set aside money to carry him through a stretch of unemployment or a sharp drop in his stipend, which was set anew each year. Because his income depended on the health of the Society and the generosity of the board of trustees, he considered moving into a home "in the cheap neighborhoods with the working men" so that the hardship of a slashed stipend would not be compounded by the need for a sudden move. "The hour may come at any moment when my income may be reduced 50 or 60% and the sudden necessary change would throw me in bad plight," he warned himself. "I should be where the change would not require any change on the outside. Then too I should have a reserve fund to fall back on. a too sudden relapse is liable to break the spirit."

He had mixed feelings about the nature of his employment. On the one hand, he wanted to be so pure in his devotion to the cause that he would not concern himself with his income level; on the other, he envied professionals in other fields whose income was determined by the market value of their services rather than the uncertain generosity of contributors:

Rem. that remunerations must depend on the amount of work a man can do. I can do scarcely one third what A [Adler] can do. The man can can do more, needs more remuneration so as to better equip him for the larger work.

Q. Is my desire that my work shall reach that point where I can have an adequate salary for what I consider my needs an indication of a mercenary spirit?
Rem. We who are in the lead in matters of religion must work for the cause only without recognition without remuneration. The recognition & remuneration falls to the "safe men" the men who keep the line up to where the leaders left it but never carry it ahead. They are the men who never jump the tracks. They do their work, a good work, and they get their pay. So do we only in a different coin.

Rg. [Regret] If I could only get to the point where I would not be haunted with the consciousness that my work looked as tho it were for the purpose of getting a living.

Ref. What wears is that sense that people have to beg others to support us. In serving people's personal interests one makes oneself wanted but there's no profession more humiliating than that of a reformer. People have to be begged to support it. It would be such a relief to be actually earning one's living by serving people where they can see that they need [garbled words] that's the way in other professions but in ours we seem to live on charity. It hurts.
A NATURAL HERMIT

Sheldon's loneliness was constant and crushing, at least during the time he kept the journal. He was frightfully ill at ease in social settings, whether formal or informal. He was alienated, feeling himself too different from others and "too largely in the subjective life" to form friendships. He expected perfection of others, as he did of himself, and his inability to accept human frailty left him bitterly disappointed. Wounded by criticism and hobbled by envy of highly respected peers, he sought -- feverishly but unsuccessfully -- to find an inner tranquility that did not depend on loving relationships. He ultimately renounced the path of celibacy and solitude when, in defiance of all reason and contrary to his longstanding intentions, he fell in love.

As the leader of a religious community, Sheldon felt obliged to attend the Society's rare social functions, but they were for him occasions of abashment and dismay. He once resolved to "beware of receptions" because they "accomplish little and seldom do the right kind of people come." Assemblies of the American Ethical Union, which included leaders' meetings as well as dreaded receptions, especially unnerved him because they tended to deprive him of solitude. "I do not enjoy those Conventions," he wrote after one. "A man feels himself common after it is over. no separate private life for his soul . . . . as tho he were on exhibition." Characteristically, he promised himself that in the future he would travel to assemblies by himself and stay in private quarters. At one assembly, probably in 1889, he felt he had committed "an awful blunder . . . . totally destroyed the weight of my words by speaking too long. It was so awfully stupid." To help establish the Society's place in the larger community, Sheldon also accepted invitations to St. Louis society events, but they flustered him to the point of anguish. He once reminded himself of "the misery at the V.P. Ball from sense of isolation -- acquainted with many, yet everywhere a stranger." Ever bashful, even fearful, he found that mingling at such events magnified his loneliness. "It tries a man's soul to call on a person when he does not know how he is going to be received, or to be moving among people who do not wish to recognize him," he wrote. "It is worse than being among actual enemies." His lack of worldly knowledge, coupled with his shyness, left him all but incapable of making small talk. "I wish I knew how to be a man of the world," he wrote, "to talk tunnels & mines!"

While acknowledging that his "peculiar ways" inevitably would be noticed, he sought to fit in, to "be as much like the rest of the world as I reasonably can without going back on my real self." At times, however, he resolved to "stop forcing appearance of sociability which I do not feel"; he once averred that to feign congeniality was to do "violence to my own nature. shy, a recluse, a natural hermit. I try to put on a savoir faire and go into the world. But it does not succeed."
In addition to attending society functions, Sheldon frequently accepted outside speaking engagements. He noted that in a single year he had spoken before a committee meeting of the Post-Dispatch Charity Fund and at meetings and banquets of the Knights of Labor, the Carpenters Council, the Rationalists Club, the Single Tax League, the Informal Club, the Medical College, the Artists Guild, and the Round Table. As a "radical" clergyman, however, he was never confident that even a kind reception was genuine; after someone remarked at the sectarian funeral of Dr. Charles W. Stevens, a one-time president of the Society, that "those heathen" were to have a word, Sheldon marveled at "what an amt of silent dislike must exist for me in St. Louis."

His journal shows he was as harshly critical of others as he was of himself, and whatever belief he had in the native goodness of people was more theoretical than actual. "After all," he reflected, "the hardest thing is to keep up one's faith in the divine in human nature. I am more impressed by the slow cattlelike sluggishness." He recognized that his "want of sympathy for all sides of human nature" put people off, but he found it "so hard to esteem or love men who do not have pluck, who wilt under difficulties and curse the world," and noted that "what wears on the mood is dealing with the 'weaker brethren.'" Even those he most respected could not fulfill his superhuman expectations. "I am inspired by people till I know them personally," he observed, "then somehow they dwindle before me." Sooner or later, those he knew best let him down: "It is painful to find a friend human," he wrote, "yet inevitable." Elsewhere he noted wistfully, "We would so like to have some men just perfect!" His disappointment was not unrelieved, however. In examining the distress of "finding people out," he owned that "we like them or we love them just as before. They are stronger in some ways & weaker in others. but they are different from what we thought. It is that difference which is painful."

Further, Sheldon was racked with envy of successful and well-loved people, for he felt all the more insignificant by comparison. "It is not that I am not truly glad at the success of the other," he wrote in reference to an unidentified colleague, "but it does make one so weighed down with disappointment over himself." He acknowledged his envy only in the context of seeking to eradicate it; he asked himself if there was "no way of conquering these accursed little feelings which play on the surface of the consciousness when preference is shown to others." He felt ashamed that he could not "exult" with a man he identified as "Y" when Y had achieved some sort of social success; he admitted that he even had a passing sense of gratification at a possible calamity that might level things." He was humbled by the recognition of his streak of malice: "Do all men have these brute feelings," he asked, "or is it the curse of this subjective life [?]" Another man, identified only by a dash, engendered distrust "so intense as to make the repulsion almost a sin"; he accepted the distrust as justified, but resolved to overcome the feeling which accompanied it. Several times he reminded himself of an experience he had had in the
woods near his boyhood home in Salisbury, Vermont, when someone he identified as "J" came to tell him that J's father had been injured; because he was haunted by guilt over his emotional reaction, it is reasonable to guess that Sheldon felt elation at the possibility that his friend would lose his father, as Sheldon had in childhood. He once thought of the incident in the context of exploring his invidiousness: "Q. Does this depression at another man's success come from jealousy or does it come from sadness over my own incapacity [?] Rem. the experience in the Salisbury woods."

One colleague especially aroused Sheldon's envy and anger. Throughout the journal, Sheldon referred to this man, a public figure whose popularity he coveted, only as "G." [FOOTNOTE] Sheldon's dislike of G was instantaneous. Early in the journal, apparently not long after meeting the man, Sheldon told himself that he should "never hope to have relations of mutual harmony with G. The inevitable nails in the heel will show themselves. Silence, silence and patience!" He further reminded himself of the "inevitable experience when he visits me" and cited a particularly unpleasant encounter at a reception. He apparently had trouble following his own advice; he told himself he had committed a "grave error" by engaging in a "confidential talk with G. at the hotel supper." While he described G as arrogant, he chided himself for his antipathy. He sought to counter his ire by reminding himself that "the work is larger than the man." Nevertheless, it was with difficulty that he restrained himself from undermining G's stature by venting his anger behind the man's back. He asked himself if he had been wrong in speaking freely of G to "Mr. T" -- probably James or Joseph Taussig. And in the very next entry, he asked himself if he was justified "in telling Mr. H something about G when I know it might shake his faith in him just a little. was my motive pure [?]" He envied G's earthy manner of public speaking -- his ability to "play with and use the foibles of men" -- and he admitted feeling a "sinking at heart" when he learned that G had been warmly received at a speaking engagement in New York. In other passages, however, he dismissed G as a showman: "The secret of G's power," he wrote, was that he was "not a public speaker but an actor, a soliloquizing Hamlet on the platform." Most of all, he envied G his personal strength and the esteem in which he was held. "People believe in G are are [sic] overpowered by him," he wrote. "Yet I can't see the grade of difference in the work. It must be in the men, in the degree of will power, to stand being in the wreck and yet not wearing out to keep the spirit up and the mind firm under every strain. I can't do it. I wear out."

At times, Sheldon tried to convince himself that his spontaneous emotions, however base, were morally neutral. He initially told himself he must have been "low down" to have felt such intense anger at "S." -- possibly William Salter, leader of the Chicago society, or Rabbi Samuel Sale of Temple Shaare Emeth in St. Louis -- when S told Sheldon he could not accompany him to Europe one summer; "it's bad very bad and I feel mean & ashamed," he wrote of his reaction to the news, "tho it is only a bad feeling."
He also attempted to soften or dilute his bitterness, making it more nearly acceptable. "It is so hard to feel just pity and nothing more for people who show themselves very small," he told himself, "and yet that is all they are worth."

Sheldon was hypersensitive to criticism, especially of his professionalism. He was so distressed by comments about his stilted public speaking style and his "difficulty in coming to a point" in conversation that he jotted them down -- sometimes repeatedly, as if probing a wound -- and he once remarked that the face of a critic often "crowds before the mind with some unpleasant remark or experience" as he was working. He complained that "jarring conflict with people" so wore him down that he collapsed "in exhaustion." For Sheldon, the most grievous hardship of being a public figure -- besides having to attend balls -- was opening himself to criticism in newspapers in an era when journalists freely expressed their opinions in news stories; one such "attack" on him in the St. Louis Republican haunted him with a "sense of isolation." His sensitivity further drove him to seek refuge in solitude. "If I didn't undertake to live with men," he wrote, "then there would not be the need to be dissatisfied with me." He once assuaged his hurt feelings by reminding himself that "others are not my conscience nor my judge, but they are simply the aids by which I can appear more truly before the inner seat of judgment." In moments of calm, he seemed able to accept his frailty. "Well I suppose I am human too," he reflected. "People get disappointed in me as I in others. They discover in me what gives them pain."

[Footnote: A couple of journal entries mention social engagements with a G. Meorse, a man who has not been identified independent of the journal. Because the G. of the envious passages was a public figure of considerable renown, the initial might have designated John H. Gundlach, a powerful businessman and politician who was active in the Society; Sheldon's custom of referring to known subjects by the first letters of their last names adds weight to that hypothesis. However, Sheldon's observations about the man reveal a direct sense of competitiveness -- an indication that G was a fellow religious leader. Considering that, the initial might have referred to the Rev. George R. Dodson, a Unitarian minister who ultimately succeeded John Calvin Learned -- one of Sheldon's few friends in St. Louis -- as pastor of the Church of the Unity.]

A Calm Exterior

Sheldon hid his feelings assiduously. "How very very seldom it is that I expose my real self to people," he noted. "I talk chaff or I talk business or I talk ephemeral but I never feel aloud. Indeed I am
rarely my self save when alone." Perhaps because his severity caused people discomfort, he tried to mask it as a way of muting his self-consciousness. "I laugh on matters which I feel about the most deeply," he wrote. "It is my way of hiding myself in the crowd." His notes on the observations of others indicate that he often succeeded in appearing sanguine, and he believed that he alone knew the truth about his anguish. "My joking or laughter or light speech is a play or screen behind which I can hide my real & sombre self," he wrote. "A man can smile and smile - and yet be very miserable." The very success of his masquerade sometimes struck him as absurd. "What a curious feeling this is," he noted, "to ache and throb in every nerve of the soul and yet wear a calm exterior -- the same quiet face through it all." He wryly marveled at the presumptuousness of people who "get used to a man's face and so by & by they think they know his soul too. And yet they have never crossed the threshold." Generally he felt "glad & fortunate . . . that my exterior does not give away my feelings." At times, however, he feared that his masquerade might fail, that he was "too introspective to appear strong & firm & calm -- chafe too much inwardly." He also questioned the moral value of his studied disingenuousness: "I jest about what I feel most deeply in order not my real self be seen [sic] is it wrong [?] Well I am a sober man. My laughter is made up. I can be jocose when in the very depths."

Even with those he liked and respected, he rarely permitted himself to express his feelings. He dearly wanted to confide in colleagues and acquaintances who made friendly overtures, but he forbade himself to give in to the desire, telling himself that a cleric should concern himself with the sorrows of others -- and should never impose his own on them. While conversing with an inviting friend, he observed, "my brain half reels with emotions that I may not express." When he did reveal his feelings to a friend, he invariably regretted it as a "loss of control" and vowed not to let it happen again. "I told Mr. N. [N.O. Nelson, a lay leader and friend] just how the whole situation was last night," he recalled after one such lapse. "But it was selfish on my part. I am here on the plea of helping others and yet cry for help myself. That is all wrong. Am I really unselfish [?] I begin to doubt." On another occasion his weariness prompted him to let his guard down: "Blunder that I should again have gone to some one when I was tired. I must not do it. No matter how solitary I am, [I must] stay by myself." And when once he told someone of his debilitating fatigue, he cursed himself for his "stupidity," demanding of himself, "Why didn't I hold my head up like a man [?]" Similarly, he accused himself of "lailing" (a contemporary colloquialism meaning to babble or whimper like a baby) to John Calvin Learned, the Unitarian pastor of the Church of the Unity, about his "want of success." One unnamed friend was a particular source of exasperation because, while Sheldon wanted "an explicit understanding of a modus vivendi by which we meet just as minds," this man insisted on meeting "both ways" -- that is, sharing feelings as well as ideas. "How I shrink from [this man]," he wrote, drawing a dash in place of the name.
"How I shrink!" Writing in his journal was the only outlet Sheldon permitted himself: "I call this book my confessional," he wrote, "but it has become rather the book I cry into as I can't cry in the presence of others. It takes the place of crying with tears. It is curious I do not remember having a good cry that way for 20 years. But the tears come occasionally." He considered keeping the confessional vital to his well-being; after not having written in it for five months, he told himself that he "must begin again and go deeper. I shall be in greater danger than ever before."

A Heart Grown Cold

Sheldon was disturbed and puzzled by his lack of empathy. He was unfazed by two calamities that occurred in 1889 -- a disastrous flood in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, and an outbreak of yellow fever in Jacksonville, Florida -- and he wondered if his emotional detachment was evidence of his "over subjective habit which makes external things slow to reach my mind." In these instances, he concluded that he was more sensitive to spiritual ruination than to natural catastrophes: "It is the slow, long working evils and disasters I feel, not the sudden shocks. The slow dying of millions affects me more than the sudden death of ten thousand." In another reflection in which he sought to apprehend "what is wrong with me that I do not have more sympathy," he ventured that he had not suffered enough; "I certainly have suffered mentally -- agony enough there," he owned, "but perhaps not enough physically." He elsewhere attributed his coolness to the demands of his work: "There is no sadder experience for me than the fact that my feelings and attention are so absorbed in the success or defect of my efforts to build up the Society that no time or space is left to be worried or saddened by the trials and troubles of others." He felt his inability to empathize was a prime factor in what he considered a failed career. "If I had the sympathy of Mr. L [Learned] and the sweetness of life of Mr. S [again, probably Salter or Sale] along with my own intellectual life I might succeed," he wrote, adding that "people do not come to me when in trouble as they do to Mr L." Those occasions when he did feel compassion for someone who confided in him made him more acutely aware of what he saw as a woeful character flaw. "It knocks my own inward pain all to smithereens," he wrote after one such encounter. "What business have I to be thinking of myself. Alas for me! a religious teacher and yet not learned the first lesson of thinking of others' sorrows instead of my own suffering." In another entry he ruefully admitted to himself that he was "too impersonal for my profession. I cannot enter into all the little moods." In lieu of genuine empathy, he wondered if "one must sustain one's love for his race by cherishing . . . a kind of high pity for it all." He once jotted down, without comment, an excerpt from a poem that expressed his perception of himself as unfeeling: "From the contagion of the world's slow stain/ He is secure; and now can never mourn/ A heart grown cold, a head grown grey in vain."
Sheldon was introspective to the point of narcissism -- and he knew it, if not by that name. "My supreme defect or mistake," he wrote, "is that people interest me abstractly and not as persons. So it is that they are interesting to me more when absent than when present. Would it be possible to try the other method?" He was committed to perfecting himself, to reaching an ever higher plane of spiritual refinement, and he wondered at times if his intellectual or moral superiority prevented intimacy: "I see now the secret of my failure. I attract [garbled word] because few men interest me. shall a man take theunction to himself that he [is] above others and therefore exceptional, or put it plainly that he is more restricted in his sympathies, narrow, and therefore exceptional?" It actually grieved him to recognize his need for friendship; he evidently wanted to reach some sort of nirvana, and he felt that human intercourse held him down in his quest:

Q. What is the reason that when I meet early friends I always feel a certain sense of internal distress, mental distress. Is it because I each year outgrow or grow above the earlier self and the friend treats or deals with me as the earlier self and so compels me to go back on the old level of myself and so I feel pulled back? I feel the same attachments to earlier friends but yet for that reason do not find the same pleasure in their company unless the friend appears exclusively from his new level and so gives the incentive to larger friendship again. [Applies] also for my relation to my bro [brother] for that reason advisable in meeting old friends unless they heartily and fully respond to one's new added life better not allude to it at all for it thus gets the new life small in the inner vision.

Q. I begin to think I ought to break away from many of these earlier connections & associations. In the last year I have grown into a new life. now to go out and develop into still newer life where I can work out from my new plane and not constantly be drawn back on my old plane.

Q. Why is it that I have to look to external stimulus (a conversation, a book, a poem, a novel) in order to get into a higher state of inner feeling? Could I by self thinking, by a process of contemplation thro my own imagination, effect the same thing?
Q What's a man like myself to do who lives to see the spirit himself yet wants to influence men who live in the world

I flounder so when I come down to earth.

Ex. What an isolation it is! solemn yet terrible. This being ahead of the world or being outside of its general feelings think of all the pain that has been suffered in the process in making the new species whether in the animal or the spiritual world

Ex. I can't get en rapport with people I am never happy save when alone and yet when alone I long for an unknown something. It was always so even when I had the faith and the God. At the same time pure humanism does not fill & satisfy. I want something more than human society.

[written in margin] a person comes in and I feel myself drop into a new atmosphere I can't keep upon the level where I was when alone

Rem. People seem to have such a way of standing still. I get back to my natural self when I get to the mountains to the undefined & illimitable

Ref. Every time that I meet people to talk with them I seem to myself to come down.

Ref. I am fond of being alone and yet when the end of the day comes I gasp for company.

Ex. As soon as I come in the neighborhood of people I know then I feel this appalling sense of loneliness. I want to come near people and yet shrink from it. It is as tho I felt myself dwindle in stature when I am with others. Yet the world is a desolately lonely place.

Oh the solitude of the pathway
The trouble with me is my feelings center around ideas not men. I live in myself and there is my failure.

Me. My great defect is that I do not have within myself the stimulus for thought. I have to read or travel in order to have my mind aroused to thought. After I have been in one place a certain length of time or in environment my mind stagnates. Every winter I need to go to N.Y. Every summer to travel. It is a misfortune.

Here among my books and thoughts I am myself.

Ex. "When I am alone then am I least alone." But this is not the feeling for a man who wants to influence people.

Ref. It is not an ideal condition when in the rare intervals the tears comes [sic] to the eyes that it should never be for others but over one's own disappointment. Even the struggle to help others seems to concentrate a man's attention on himself.

Sheldon's yearning for euphoric solitude alternated with a maddeningly unconquerable craving for companionship. "After all I am weak," he admitted. "I can't hold out to be alone. Later in the evening I do so crave company. How I long and long to go and see Mr N. Well I'm not much of a philosopher." He sometimes wondered, briefly, if his sense of isolation stemmed from his renunciation of Christian faith. "Lord! but life is awfully lonely," he once exclaimed, then asked himself if it would be any different if he still believed in God and could pray. "No I doubt it," he answered. "The want is the want of human relations. I am near to no man." The incessancy of his loneliness is underscored by two lines of a German poem which he entered repeatedly throughout the journal: "Allein! Allein! Ach Gott ein enzig wisen!Um dieses Hump an seine Brust degen" ["Alone! Alone! Oh God in such a way/this head on your breast to lay"]; one such entry was followed by the words, "Cold -- cold -- ice cold." Sheldon's feeling of being odd and unaccepted ("My God how like an outcast on the face of the earth I feel myself to be!") was lifelong. "From earliest boyhood people have always misunderstood me," he wrote. "I have always had to explain myself." In one entry he traced his history of alienation:

Ref. My life is an awfully solitary one -- I wonder if it comes because I work for results so far ahead and so never have much to show. But I win the esteem and trust of so
very few persons. The school boys drew away from me because I was so abnormally conscientious and they did not know what was going on within. In college I was just a "hard worker." In N. York A [Adler] never had confidence in me. Now my colleagues distrust my intellectual capacity. When I assert my work I do it so blunderingly it looks as tho it was self assertion. Even in St. Louis they only half trust me. There is always an interrogation point I am all inside and that is the trouble. I must wait and fight it out. Slowly I make a few believe in me to some extant. But it comes a little hard, to [be] cool & composed on the outside when I am burning up within.

Weary of "explaining himself" and "trying to be like others," he pined for "just one person who would take me for what I am and think I must be right." He frequently bemoaned his inability to gain people's trust, and hoped to win them over by sheer persistence. "This long waiting," he reminded himself, "is the price I pay for the long time it takes me (owing to my peculiar nature) to make men have confidence in me." He took some comfort in the feeling that he was unappreciated because he was out of his element. "When in the life of the spirit and using his eye of spiritual discernment his [esteem] is very high," he reflected, apparently writing of himself as an archetype, in the third person. "When in the life of the flesh or of the world he is of the inferior grade. Just about the average. So according as he is met in the one or the other sphere is he judged."

Alone on the Heights

Sheldon wrote about failed and obstructed friendships to the near-exclusion of healthy ones, perhaps in part because of the cathartic nature of his "confessional." In St. Louis his favorite companions were Learned, the Unitarian minister; Robert Moore, who served as president of the Society through most of Sheldon's tenure but apparently was not on the scene during the time Sheldon kept the journal; and N.O. Nelson, a lay leader he designated as "N" or "Mr. N." At one time he thought of Nelson as "the one friend of my mature years," but he did not feel fully accepted by him. "I am so unlike other people that I somehow cannot receive the same trust as other men receive," he wrote in a typical entry, adding that "even N only half trusts me." He feared a disagreement would rend the friendship. "How I dread the hour when Mr. N. & myself may come to a radical difference of opinion," he wrote. "With him it will mean 'to part company' for with him convictions are the man. Yet I could love him in spite of convictions. For me if it ever comes it will be one of the saddest moments in my life." He
evidently saw every relationship as doomed; after voicing fear that his friendship with someone called "K" would fail, he asked, "Can men not be familiar without the inevitable decline?"

He often felt that his vocation, his dedication to ethical religion, so consumed him that he could not pledge loyalty to a person. "How this working for a cause hinders the action of the sympathies," he wrote in exploring the decline of one friendship. "I love the man, his joy is my joy, and yet because what would please him would not be well for the cause, or what would be the best thing for his interests would not be best for the cause, I may not encourage or help him. The larger work forbids the sympathies. So it is we are alone for the friend can never be quite satisfied that our love for the cause is not care for our own interests. . . . On the heights one is alone." Sheldon interpreted that sense of being "alone on the heights" as a kind of "consecration" analogous to priestly celibacy. "Why is it that I fail to make men love me," he once asked himself. "I hardly know of any man who has so few have the feeling of love for him. And yet I love others. How much I think of N. of W. [S. Burns Weston, leader of the Philadelphia Society] of V.N. [unknown] of P [probably Paul F. Coste, treasurer of the board of trustees] of Mr. L. [Learned] Is it because I am cold or because I am 'consecrated'?"

He wrangled with his introspection, seeing it alternately as a worthy undertaking and a bar to companionship. On the one hand, he claimed that a man of the spirit "must husband his resources and spend [them] on his own development"; on the other, he reminded himself that "my danger is to excuse myself by the plea of need for my own development." He believed that egocentricity was, in part, an inevitable tendency of aging. "As we mature we become self absorbed in our aims," he observed. "They take our sympathies and we have left less to give to others. In youth with unformed purposes we give our sympathies freely. But the sad part of it is we each see the self absorption in the others and forget that it is also in ourself."

Apart from the few men he deemed intellectual and spiritual peers, he felt he could interact with people only in very limited ways. "We cannot have full friends with men of less breadth than ourselves unless the man be conscious of his lack of breadth," he reflected. "We can be friends with men on their own sphere but when outside of that if they do not know their limitations we cannot be at home together."

He scrupulously avoided making friends out of selfish motives. "Remember the saying of the person in St Louis neglecting people till had need of them then began to go around and renew acquaintances," he reminded himself. "Don't ever do that. When the most successful be the most gracious." And he took to heart Kant's ethical principle that one must treat people as ends in themselves and not solely as means to one's ends:
Q. Are the "men of success" the men of the highest inner moral refinement?
Doubtful. So one will have to choose: one can't be both. "Success" where it has to be won can only be achieved by treating other men as tools or instruments & so sacrificing the "man in the man" in them & thus losing respect for the "man in the man" in himself.

Equal but Separate

Even his relationships with other Ethical leaders, his comrades in the cause, were strained. Adler was for him a father figure whose respect he coveted but feared he would never have. He compared himself unfavorably to Adler, expressing envy of his sagacity, equanimity, and stamina. "I can see the strength of A now," reads one such observation. "It is not in intellect, but in will His heart never sinks. he always appears as tho he felt strong." Likewise, he dreamed of emulating "the masterly way by which A is able to get men to serve him and his purposes and yet to have them feel as though he was doing the favor to them." Sheldon dreaded Adler's visits to St. Louis because the movement's guiding spirit always attracted an exceptionally large audience; he knew an address by Adler would bring out "the ghosts -- the many faces that used to come but now come no more." He was stung by Adler's criticisms -- such as his observation that Sheldon was a "creature of nerves" -- but he fought his inclination to defend himself; he once berated himself because he "did not remain absolutely silent instead of rebelling" when Adler found fault with him. But while Adler's private confrontations were unsettling, Sheldon apparently did not suspect him of backstabbing; he once wrote that "one of the reasons for Adler's success" was that he "never expresses criticism of others."

All of the entries that identify Adler by name or initial are essentially positive. However, contrary to form, Sheldon did not identify the subjects of a few of his most spiteful entries. Most of these do not establish the subject's place in his life, nor do adjoining entries offer any definite clues. But the subject of one such entry clearly was an authority figure in whom Sheldon had a considerable emotional investment; if it does refer to Adler, it shows that Sheldon's admiration for "the chief" was mixed with rage:

Ref. How I do loathe that man. He gives me a moral nausea. I dread to look at him to listen to him. And yet I can obey. But it does make a man sick at heart.

Sheldon also questioned his competence vis-a-vis his other Ethical colleagues -- Salter of Chicago, Stanton Coit of London, and Weston, his one true friend among the leaders. He once advised
himself to begin from "the standpoint of resignation," to admit that he could "never equal Adler or Coit" because he possessed "neither the tact, the capacity for work nor the diversity of sympathies." In a similar vein, he bemoaned that he had not "the worldly tact of Professor A, nor the personal sweetness of W, nor the objective personality of C." Excepting Weston, he felt his fellow leaders did not hold him in high regard. "It cuts hard this distrust of my mental capacity among colleagues," he lamented. "Intellectually I am their equal (of any them) but I lack the gift of showing it, of figuring before men." He continually fought to squelch his instinctive attempts to win their favor. "Work by myself," he resolved. "Make no effort any longer to impress Salter, Adler of what I can do. let them find out for themselves. in their presence unless I feel impelled or am addressed remain silent." Similarly, he vowed to "stop letting Salter, Adler & the rest treat me as a youth and an apprentice. It was needful at the start to learn from their experience. Now it defeats that end. Not that I should not feel young, but I should not continue to go for advice as tho I did not know my own mind."

Sheldon and the other leaders customarily gathered each summer at the Adler-Goldmark estate in Keene Valley in New York state's Adirondack Mountains. Adler led the colleagues in planning sessions and philosophical discussions, but most leaders came primarily for rest and relaxation. Sheldon, however, felt compelled to spend most of his time studying and preparing addresses -- one of his self-critical entries indicates he sometimes read even during meals -- and he frequently complained in his journal that he was distracted by the levity of his colleagues. In one entry he expressed regret at having allowed his love of the mountains to lure him to the gathering, which had been for him "an unsatisfactory working season." Several times he resolved to limit his visit to the duration required by Adler. He once decided he had erred in choosing to spend his summer "among acquaintances where they are at leisure and I at work. Puts me in a false light of seeming discourtesy [sic]. Should go among strangers." The constant interaction at the retreat grated on Sheldon; in a rather playfully ironic entry written during one vacation, he cited the chief flaws of his colleagues: "Salter is too much in the air, Adler too much in himself, Weston too much with ladies, [M.M.] Mangasarian [a virulent anti-Catholic who was to replace Salter in Chicago from 1892-96] too much in Constantinople, Sheldon too much in his cabin, Szycki [unknown] too much in the utilitarianism, Black [unknown] is too much at and too long at one Station. Coit is alone amenable to experience."

Sheldon cherished Weston's friendship. He wrote appreciatively of Weston's gentlemanliness, his "matchless delicacy" in considering the feelings of others. He referred to him as "the only man I seem never to weary of." He was deeply saddened when the friendship fell, at times, to what he called "the bread and butter level," and he repeatedly asked himself what he might do to "fetch it up." He observed that what he perceived as coolness in his friend had the marked effect of "reducing the level of
one's inner life." The shared summers in Keene Valley magnified the tensions in the friendship. "What can I do to sweeten and elevate the intercourse between W & myself," he asked himself in the summer of 1888. "It is argue, wrangle, dispute etc all the time and yet there is deep affection between us. one thing is certain we ought not to take vacation together ... with him it is pure vacation as for me I am still 'moving in worlds not realized' and so the jar." While he later noted with satisfaction that he had gone a full week without arguing with his friend, he concluded at summer's end that he had frittered away his time by engaging in "too much idle chat with Weston." Later that year, he resolved to spend the following summer in London or somewhere else where he might find "companions with strong minds. I dwindle by giving way to so much froth. W. is at his best where at a distance. But I do love the man. He is so pure & genuine."

The Colors in the Raindrop

Curiously, Sheldon explicitly mentioned his mother only once in the journal. That mention -- "the feeling at my mother's death" -- is included in "Things which stick in my memory," a list of eight recurring memories noted without embellishment. The first item in the list -- "the handful of sand when 7 years old" -- may indicate that he witnessed his father's drowning, or that he was playing in the sand onshore when he learned of it. [FOOTNOTE] One other passage -- near the end of the journal but before his first references to his future wife -- likely expresses Sheldon's need for his mother's love: "Oh if only I could go home and put my head on her shoulders for five minutes just rest it there and rest."

The only other entries he wrote about family regarded his Uncle Charles, from whom he borrowed money, and his unnamed brother, for whom he had little affection. He mentioned "the feelings that come on me when I receive the melancholy letters from my brother," but he never named those feelings. His brother had an illness of some sort, evidently a mental illness which Sheldon referred to as "a disease of the will"; typically, Sheldon noted his "want of deep fraternal sympathy" when he learned of the illness and wondered if "this subjective life" rendered him cold. He did feel a certain pity toward him, however, writing of him as "my poor, poor brother" and reminding himself that he must treat him "as a sick man, & sick mind -- not as a natural man." For years he struggled with the question of how far he would go -- and how much he would sacrifice -- to help his brother. "The grand query with me," he wrote, "is in how far I am to let my brother's condition interfere with doing a complete life work. I am not responsible for what he has done. his condition [is] his shortcoming. But on the other hand he is my brother." His brother often reminded him that he -- Walter -- was "much better off" than him and accused him of duplicity for expressing concern about the poor. "He does not understand," Sheldon told
himself. "Comfort is a state of mind, not furniture." Sheldon did give his brother money on at least one occasion, but his brother's apparent spitefulness and ingratitude deprived Sheldon of any satisfaction in making the gift:

"It is true I have not been generous to my brother's family in money. Perhaps I have been wrong but I meant to do right. As long as he spent $2,500.00 he could not be poor. altho always like myself in distress for money because we both spend more than our income. and so as it was a question of inclinations, I did not do it because I took no pleasure in it. Gift was taken as a matter of fact way. [sic] it gave none of the pleasure of the real gift. The constant reminder on their part how much better off I was than they were took the pleasure away of mutual sympathy and giving was no pleasure. And so their charges -- of my selfishness and want of feeling spoiled the relationship. I love my bro -- but his love for me has been so mixed with fault finding that it makes impossible that cordial intercourse."

Sheldon maintained his detachment to the end. He believed that his brother's death was somehow hastened because he had succumbed to his emotions. "A man with a work cannot allow himself to feel or give way to his feelings," he wrote after the funeral. "He must hold his nerves taut. My experience at my brother's grave! He did allow himself to feel and alas the consequences!" His only other reflection on the death was in the form of quoting two lines of poetry on the ephemeral nature of life: "The colors in the raindrop on the grass/ The wind comes, they are gone!"

Sheldon's lack of "cordial intercourse" with his brother's family made for a tense gathering at the funeral. "It's a curious thing a woman's understanding of the world," he wrote, apparently in reference to his brother's wife or another relative. "They wonder why the world does not stop or come to a standstill if a near calamity comes to them. A man involved in numerous responsibilities shakes himself free after a desperate effort goes a thousand miles to offer his sympathy and aid; and then is blamed because he did not arrive a day earlier for the funeral." He noted that the relative thought him "unfeeling" for not dropping everything to travel East as soon as possible. Privately, at least, he defended his behavior. "I can feel," he wrote, "but certainly I do not show it as others show it. I feel in a different way. If only a man could be allowed to be himself."

[FOOTNOTE: The reference to his mother's death is the fifth item on the list. The eighth was mentioned previously: "the feeling I had in Salsbury at Lake D when J came to tell me of his father's injury." The
others are oblique references to experiences in Europe and the Middle East. For readers who might care
to divine their significance, they are: "2) the cigar incident at Grenada; 3) the donkey ride on the Nile; 4)
the letter from Dresden; 6) the supper on the way to Jerusalem; [and] 7) the opera incident at Milan."

An Everlasting Barrier

A well-educated, professional man of meager means, Sheldon felt alienated from both the
working class and the wealthy. He often pondered class distinctions, trying to come to terms with his
mixed feelings and conflicting loyalties. Both in his way of life and his professional service, his sense of
place in the social order was ambiguous.

As evidenced by his founding of the Wage Earner's Self-Culture Clubs, a network of educational
programs, Sheldon was committed to raising the intellectual and cultural awareness of working-class
people. He was genuinely moved by the plight of laborers. From the window of his home on Delmar
Boulevard in the city's West End, he could see a silk factory that, according to his notes, employed 300
women who worked 12 hours a day for 20 to 22 cents an hour. "They have so little," he wrote. "We
have so much." But while "self-culture" was one of his dearest ideals, Sheldon hoped the working
people he served would stop short of acquiring the sensitivities that he felt rendered him vulnerable and
ineffective in the working world. "It would not be safe to have the majority highly developed in soul,"
he reflected. "It weakens the will in dealing with practical affairs. The refined get beaten in the struggle.
A certain rough vigor is necessary because the practical affairs must always constitute the largest part of
life. The refined get driven to the wall."

He praised the grit and ingenuity of working people and rebelled against the snobbishness of the
educated people he moved among. He found it "curious" that the "cultured and refined form a class
which does not admit the more rough shod worker in literature, art, religion. But in the next generation
or century the work of this former rough shod class is the intellectual nutriment of the new refined class."
He cursed "these polished elegant aristocratic followers of religions and teachings or political doctrines
which had their origin down at the bottom or among the common people!" Similarly, he found it
"depressing always so depressing to see so many people (comfortable people) visiting the tombs of the
martyrs (e.g. Savonarola) as one of the 'sights' when these very persons would be the first to begin the
persecution if another [garbled word] those martyrs came forward."

In one of his first entries on the subject of class, Sheldon referred to 1888 -- the year he founded
the Self-Culture program -- as "the epoch when I met and learned about the working class." He quickly
retreated from that assertion, however, bemoaning his difficulty in communicating with people whose experience of life was so different from his own. He fought the temptation to "win the working men by saying things to please them," and he noted with exasperation a colleague's comment that "the working men don't think me sincere because I don't come out!" -- meaning, perhaps, that he taught them but he didn't go drinking with them.

In all, Sheldon was able to accept his status as outsider among working people, but he struggled for a way to move and work among the wealthy without sacrificing his integrity. A populist at heart, he derided the attitude of an old-money family that objected to its daughter's marriage into a family that "had earned its own money," and he found it "curious" that his "two most intimate friends" -- probably Nelson and Weston -- came from "the people enamored of the social aristocracy and now marry there." But although he was committed to the cause of the working class and repulsed by elitism, he identified with the culture of the upper class, and he sometimes admitted a longing to fully take part in it. "The saddest thing to me," he wrote, "is that my peculiar position and work shuts me off from the sympathy of the most refined, with whom I feel most akin. An everlasting barrier stands between us."

His ambivalence is illustrated by his feelings about one John T.D., a "perfect gentleman" who, because he exemplified the class in which Sheldon thought he ought to feel at home, deepened his sense of ostracism. "Yet whenever I see him," he continued, "it brings home to me the feeling how much force has to be whittled away in order to make so perfect a gentleman. Such men make splendid figures to run the machinery but not to invent it. Whittle away just a little more and there would not be force enough to run the machinery." His economic philosophy likewise was shot through with contradiction. He held to the principle that social reform must begin with self-culture, and one of the personal reforms he firmly advocated was to live simply; in his journal, however, he puzzled over the fact that a sharp drop in the demand for luxury goods -- such as the talking dolls that recently had become popular -- would put wage earners out of work.

Philosophically, Sheldon's loyalty to the working class predominated. "I must conquer this desire to be one of the 'classes' and must keep firm hold of the fact that I am to be a man of the people," he resolved. "My lot is with them. It is here the classes have the refinement and I hunger for that, but the people have the energy, the will, the future belongs to them. If the choice comes I must choose the people." In practice, however, he continued to move in both worlds as an alien. On the one hand, he chastised himself for trying to fit in with the wealthy, for "spending my full income and more in order to make people believe I belong to their class." On the other, he despaired of being "left or lost exclusively in the lower class I live among."
In his work, he worried that Ethical Culture repulsed the very class of people for which it was best suited. "Our movement is on a grade for the cultured and conventional classes and they are just the ones who are afraid of it because it is so explicit and 'pronounced,'" he wrote. He observed that people choose religious associations as much for social status as for philosophical compatibility. "There's no hope of getting people from the upper classes," he reflected, "for you must have 'our set.' They will not go just for the thing itself." At times, he voiced fear that the peculiar nature of ethical religion kept it from finding a stronghold in any class: "After all we cannot reach the religious classes. they are afraid. We cannot reach the business men because we are 'theorists.' we cannot reach the workingmen because we are not workingmen."
A Curious Experience

Sheldon's general discomfort with people became acute in the company of women. While he agonized over the difficulties of establishing friendships with men, women were such foreigners to him that his thoughts of intimacy with them were more in the realm of fantasy than intention. He tried to minimize his constant "blunders" in his dealings with women by adhering to the Victorian code of conduct governing relations between the sexes. "One of the mistakes of my life," he told himself, "is treating women without distinction of sex -- rem[ember] that [a] woman has to be treated with a kind of respect totally unlike the respect shown in the presence of men either recognize that fact or do not go into women's society."

His feelings about the possibility of getting married were sharply ambivalent. He often wrote of being "consecrated," marked by fate to live a solitary life. "My God! My God!" he exclaimed, "here I am -- devoted, doomed, manacled as much as tho I had taken the vows or were in prison for life. burning up inside. no way to turn. here I stand I cannot speak what I feel even to the nearest and dearest." Not surprisingly, he had difficulty conceiving of himself as a lover. "How inevitable it is that I shrink from the regular contact with individuals," he wrote. "What a strange person I would be as a married man."

When friends suggested that he consider marrying, he dismissed the notion as preposterous. "They don't know what I feel," he told himself. "I can ask no one to share this awful struggle. I will fight it out alone." Further, he constantly worried that he might be fired or that an emotional breakdown would force him out of the profession, and he wanted to remain "in a position to withdraw if need be with no power pulling me from behind and showing the need of means of subsistence." But believing in the necessity of celibacy did not relieve the pain of isolation. "It is so fortunate that I am not married," he reflected, "and yet so dreary!" Bouts of depression intensified both his relief and his sorrow: "Q. Why is it in all these depressed moods every time it strikes me when I feel myself beaten down, despair coming over me I exclaim how fortunate that I am not married. And yet -- and yet -- Oh my God ---."

In several entries in the latter part of the journal and a cluster of exceptionally long entries at the very end, he confronted his assumptions about his forced celibacy, wrangled with the seemingly bizarre effects of love and sexual attraction on otherwise sane people, and bewailed his own experience of coming under that strange spell:

Q. Why is it that even in the finest natures to receive unrequited affection gives an element of
satisfaction. surely it ought to make them feel only pain in the pain they give by not be [sic] able to reciprocate. Is it because it makes a man or woman conscious that she really has worth to excite that affection ?

Ref. One man eating out his heart for a woman the woman eating out his [sic] heart for another man. The other man eating out his heart for he knows not what. How things do get mixed up

Ref. The crisis of my life has come. A choice seems to [be] upon me. A man thinks in a vague way he can take the consequences. He doesn't know what it means till it comes. Ideally it is grand to have a purpose so high that this or that in one's circumstances don't signify. But it is more serious when the actual experience comes and we taste the reality, what it means to be one of the souls "who stand alone." I hear the voice plainly enough saying "You can't do it because of your vocation." That fixes your condition. You cannot step outside of it. The world which "does what other persons do" has no room for you because you cannot do what others do. That world disapproves of a departure even in politics, it disapproves still more of a departure in social conventions, it disapproves worst of all of a departure in religion. And we must go to the world which welcomes what we want to do. Tho in what we are we may be more at home in the other world the refinement does draw me, the richness of life comes so natural to me. It has what I want but it does not want me, that is, it does not want my work. And yet it is just this work which has refined me. But I must accept the Inevitable. All the soul I have is in the work. I am this or nothing. A man can give up a joy which is only a thought. That is one kind of resignation. But it means something else to give up what he begins to understand by actual feeling what his whole being wakes up to the existence of and craves -- that comes hard.

Ref. Well this is a curious experience it sets at defiance every theory of self dependence. Suddenly almost without reason a man loses control of his mind can't work connectedly can't stay quietly by himself, is [garbled word] & consuming from [desire] to be with another just to get to that other's presence! can't think of anything else, sees that face all the time coming between the book and himself, in defiance of reason with no special occasion to bring it about, no particular community of sympathy, remotely separate in tastes, life interests & convictions, just mastered by a force, or voice, or face
or motion or \textit{personality}. It isn't pleasure it is \textit{pain}. The unaccountable restlessness and longing. And still it is almost purely psychical, save in the wish to be with the other. It may be sufficient if the person is in the room tho there be hundreds of others. The Consciousness is there. A region is desolate if the person is gone. It can't be reasoned away. Reasons have no effect. No wonder it has played a great role in history.

Ref. Think a moment. I know one man who would rather die than go thro another such year. in love with a woman who has said yes and then said no and is in agony because she cannot say yes. I know another woman eating out her heart for years for a man and another man eating out his heart for her in vain. I know a third woman loving another for fifteen years never giving up hope desperate even to the grave. I know a man caring for another woman he can never have. And now I see a father's heart breaking as he sees his child slipping from him to go forever. How can a mortal ever be happy?

Ref. What a curious feeling the intense overpowering desire to be with a certain person, so that one would be willing to circle the globe only to be with that person for half an hour! It seems to have no reason.

Ex. My God My God what can I do what can I do all thy waves have gone over me now. For the first time actually I have tasted the poignancy of suffering. I know now what others feel. I never knew before. Just think! to lean my head up against the window and to cry like a child. In a few short months to have one person take precedence over every other and to shake me all over with a feeling like this.

With those words, Sheldon closed the book. On May 18, 1892, he married Philadelphian Anna Hartshorne, younger sister of Weston's wife, Mary. The marriage no doubt spawned at least some measure of happiness and relief as well as panic and fear, but he evidently stopped committing such experiences to a "confessional" once he found a flesh-and-blood confidante. It is known that Anna, heir to a modest fortune her father had made as a vice president of the Lehigh Valley Railroad, relieved her husband -- and the Society -- of worry over Sheldon's meager compensation. Also, Sheldon did reveal in a letter to his friend N.O. Nelson that the marriage was religiously mixed.
I have an awful confession to make. I feel as tho I had done something unpredictable, wicked and I don't know what else. But during the last few months I have actually found a woman who is willing to take the awful risk of venturing to have her life [garbled word] tied to mine. I am scared in my very soul at the responsibility. I suppose the women of St. Louis will think I have no right to marry a woman, but ought to be married to a man. She comes from Philadelphia. I hope my friends of the Ethical Society will take to the fact as philosophically that she is a devout Episcopalian as she takes it philosophically that I am an Ethical lecturer.

(undated letter from Walter L. Sheldon to N.O. Nelson; from N.O. Nelson papers, Missouri Historical Society)

A Bed of Pain

It is evident from what Sheldon reveals about his "nervous condition" that he was chronically depressed, and possibly manic-depressive. He was never inspired to write when overcome with elation, but entries he wrote in the dark, agonizing depressions that followed indicate that his "high" periods were brief, intense, and precarious. Apart from those highs, he generally felt fatigued and despondent. Unable to find effective medical treatment, he tried to ameliorate his condition by changing his personal habits, bracing himself with stoical declarations, and reminding himself that his pain goaded him to do his best.

Depression hit Sheldon in waves. It came on suddenly, "just like a return of a pain in the body," and grew stronger by the day; as wave upon wave laid him down, it seemed to Sheldon that that it took him longer and longer "to pull out of it." He tried to override his depressions, telling himself to straighten up, to stop appearing before others "in neglige mood" or "in unstrung state of mind." Though compelled to attend closely to his inner life, he was unsure if his introspection was a help or a hindrance. "Is it selfishness this falling in on oneself," he asked, "or is it necessary in order to retain steadiness of purpose and strength [?]" The syndrome was so familiar to him that he did not specify the symptoms -- he simply bewailed its return. The journal is pervaded with exclamations of grief:

Res. Take care about these hours of physical exhaustion in allowing the moments of depression. remember that it is the physical exhaustion which is the cause. go out. go somewhere. remember that the melancholy can prey like a disease and become a disease. it eats out the strength of the will.
Q. What does this mean, this curious silent inner laughter at myself. Last year the tears came to my eyes. This year there is as much cause and the sinking of the heart even heavier yet the eyes are dry

Ref. It is at the moment when I seem nearest defeat that I pull up and do my best work. It seems to require that sense of intense depression to goad me to find the new steps. The nightmare from which I shall never recover are [sic] the B- Me s. ["Me s." denotes "mistakes"; "B-" may be a kind of expletive deleted, such as "bloody."] how it does dig into me. it comes on me with a sense of weariness and prostration similar to that after a long mountain climb and I want to fall back & bathe in the infinite & rest there

"Pain! Pain! Err! forever!" Prometheus

Ref. I wish that I could escape that state of feeling as tho I had lost care for much of anything. Remember that it is often due to physical depression.

Ref. Strange it is. we after all make our own bed of pain. I have enough money. I could retire to the country. live content and comfortable in mind. I would not be miserable. Yet here my life is steady inward mental suffering always pain. I could give it up. No outward force would cause me fear no anxiety about penalties of judgment. What others would say would not trouble me. I am driven on just by my own inward impulsion. The mere shrinking from sinking back, of vegetating The sense that I owe myself to this work -- just naked duty. Is not this the secret of all mental pain. Every man could just live. but he wants more than just to live, and then comes the agony. When I find that I go to sleep readily at night that worries me and I fear that I am slipping back. The thoughts come, the deep feelings, only in these times of intense inward commotion. They tell me I do not like St Louis they blame me for being gone so long. But they don't understand. This pain wears me out

Rem. And still it is true it requires the goad to make us do our best
Ref. How true it is that a mere thought, a *possibility*, which has no ground for it may yet worry the mind like a sliver in the finger

Ex. Tired of thinking: I used to be given to dreaming. Now I can hardly ever do it for a moment save now & then a little of *one dream*. [presumably a reference to the dream of living in the country]

Ref. unhappy me, unhappy me! Surely it is no sin to say it here! I will fight the fight bravely.

Ex. This sense of depression, of gathering oneself together for a pull when one is torn in pieces internally where in the depths have I not been this last fortnight. And yet it is not physical. It has its reason. It is the sense of defect, the littleness of results beside what I have been working for! Oh my God I keep saying it over to myself why not here I suffer so much myself that I have not time to sympathize with the suffering with others

Ref. I suppose a man can shed tears internally just as he can bleed internally

Ex. My God! My God! it is beginning over again

Ex. Sick in mind. Sick at heart!

Ex. The worst difficulty is that I cannot laugh. It is not that I lack the feeling of intensity. But the world is too awfully behind on the road I cannot get over the fact

I know the trouble is in myself But *where? where?* If I could only *locate* it only *mend it*

Ex. I feel as tho I were bleeding all over. I ache in my very soul.

Ref. It would be so pleasant to have all the rest of the world happy because one might allow himself the luxury of feeling wretched himself without thinking that it must be selfish to feel so
Ex. I am so dissatisfied with myself, so disappointed with myself.

Rem. A part of this depression comes from physical exhaustion not enough nerve force to hold up against it. It is curious what silent man this profession makes one and the silence makes the life intense. It wears on the soul. If I speak I say it wrong.

Ref. Oh I'm so sick at heart, so sick so sick. And yet not of love nor grief. This has been a time of acute misery. I am so tired of wearing an even face. Not one mortal in the city knows what I have been feeling. And yet I must keep on hang on. But Oh if only I could get away somewhere anywhere, just creep into a hole and be there and rest. What it does mean that awful sense of defeat, powerlessness. It is more crushing than grief for it leaves not even the self to lean upon. Oh my God my God!

Ref. Well the week is over again. Oh how I shiver! it is cold so awfully cold what a lot of lead can settle in on a man's being and weigh him down and then again I am burning up.

Ex. Just think when will it stop. Each Sunday begins the agony over again. Oh those missing faces. I'm tired and sick. This wearing a smile in the face of failure comes hard. But it is all right.

Ex. It does take will and grit and belief to move on this way knowing what one knows but giving no sign that one does know. Through distrust or trust through criticism or sympathy to move on straight ahead. Oh God I'm tired.

Ex. When I give way it will come with a snap.

Ref. Back again comes the pain. just like a return of a pain in the body.

Sheldon's depressions often included bouts of extreme agitation, a "restlessness" characterized by roiling emotions and confused thoughts. "How I burn inside of me!" he exclaimed. "Up in the brain and down in the heart! There is a meaning in the old figure a 'consuming fire.'" When Adler wrote to
Salter that Sheldon was a "walking volcano" who "must be permitted from time to time to emit fire and smoke," he revealed that Sheldon was not wholly successful in suppressing his turmoil:

N. Alas how I am torn and tossed by this inward conflagration. The man of the world and the man of the spirit. Who would guess that while I am talking calmly I am in that state of tension that I want to stamp on the floor. The cold sombre face of the scholar and thinker but all on fire within. I may be talking intently on one subject and yet being agitated and upheaved by a second wave of thought going on inside.

Sheldon reported moments when his depression lifted, when he felt contented, confident, and vital. Those moments were rare, short-lived, and draining. "What hinders me so is that I am nervously in time, on my height, only for a limited time," he lamented. "Then I feel like a dried sponge." While he usually saw himself as hopelessly ineffectual, times of elation gave him a sense of greater capacities. "A little more worldliness," he wrote, "a little more savoir faire and what mountains I could move!" He found that he sometimes could precipitate such moments by reading edifying books or listening to music, but he regretted the need for such influences. "I am so disappointed with myself," he wrote. "I so seldom get on the heights and can stay there only for so short time. Even then I require a stimulus to draw me up there. My own mind does not furnish the power." Several times he noted that he had dispelled a moment of lightness out of guilt. "Curious," began one such entry. "For a moment I felt as tho things were going to go all right. I felt a surcease of worry. I was contented and happy and then suddenly it was as tho I was a little sorry I did not have something to be anxious about. I felt ashamed to be content."

Sheldon's energy and drive -- what he called "nerve force" -- was forever sapped by "nervous strain." He apparently lived in an almost constant state of fatigue. "The secret of my failure is want of surplus vitality," he wrote. "My strength gives out so soon. if I walk I cannot read. An extra exertion drains every drop of vitality. As limp as a wet rag." He complained of sleepless nights, and sought to find the cause in his diet or other personal habits. He wrote of being worn out from the "up and down movement" of his emotions and from "always working for twice the result I accomplish." Because of his weariness, he often had trouble concentrating on his reading or paying attention to conversation; again and again, he berated himself for teaching classes or leading discussion groups in a state of exhaustion. He exerted a tremendous force of will to push on through. "God, God, God I am so tired and discourage [sic]," he wrote in one of many such passages. "Yet say nothing, say nothing -- work ahead! But oh the weariness of it!" Sundays were especially draining. "It does not seem as tho I could stand another year of this nervous strain," he once exclaimed. "Each Sunday seems to take a month out of my life."
Mindful of his tendency to pack his schedule, working for weeks at a time without a day off, he frequently made conscious efforts to minimize and accommodate his fatigue. Believing himself to be "extremely limited in the am't of steady work" he could do, he reminded himself that when he foresaw a need to be fresh in the evening he would have to remain idle in the afternoon, and that when he needed to be fresh in the forenoon he would have to restrict his work the previous evening. Similarly, he observed that "for every extra strain, be it a Princeton supper or a lecture, I must pay the penalty in the loss of a day after." He repeatedly instructed himself to plan his schedule accordingly. "Rem.[ember] that if I have one day of unusual or very steady creative activity of mind it must be followed by an off day," he wrote. "It is a waste to try to escape the necessity. I lose the rest & yet accomplish nothing." His low store of energy, he owned, made it "inevitable that I cannot do large work in the world and I must take care that wherever I place myself I can limit the am't of work I have to do & so be able to do it well." The insistent repetition of such advice indicates that he never succeeded in countering his compulsiveness.

When he gave rein to his natural patterns of energy and fatigue, he found that his work -- presumably his writing -- was most productive when he stayed at it "without stopping" and then took an extended rest. He did get away once or twice a year -- he mentions a trip up the Mississippi, a visit to Mammoth Cave National Park in Kentucky, and a journey to the West -- with mixed results. While he often returned feeling just as exhausted as before, some trips -- such as one to his hometown of Salisbury, Vermont, where he wrote of being waited on -- had a salutary effect. Successful respites dramatically improved his attitude. "How much difference it makes whether a man is in full physical strength," he observed after a holiday over the traditional post-Christmas break in the Ethical season. "When I leave in the midwinter I feel as tho a feather weight would be just enough to overthrow me. When I go back I feel for the first week as tho a block of granite falling on my head couldn't kill me." But for all his complaints of weariness and his yearning for more vigor, one particularly telling entry shows that he actually saw restfulness as a sign of personal decline:

Me. Am worried at the decline of ambition stealing on me. Is it in the atmosphere? A man is not induced to do his best when his next-best will do as well. but the danger is to myself. I shall shrink to the level of my next best. That is the danger. Am not thin and pale enough at this season. It shows that I am weakening not straining enough. I look too well
One of the ways in which Sheldon sought to accept his "nervous condition" was to correlate its oscillations with the seasons or the weather, taking comfort in the inevitable passage of both. Always fearful of a poor showing at the platform service, he felt utterly desolate when rainclouds rolled in. "On rainy Sundays I enter into the depths," he wrote. "I feel as tho in the Book of Infinite Wisdom, the Almighty [sic] had written me down a fool." He reflected that "ministers must be glad indeed that in heaven at least there can can [sic] be no 'rainy Sunday'-- when a stormy Sunday comes I feel as tho I had been knocked over by a block of wood." To guard against that incapacitating effect, he several times resolved to "absolutely never read the weather bulletin." Upholding that resolution in the face of a near-obsession required "a regular struggle at the end of the week."

While weather forecasts were merely hazardous, the calendar year was a veritable landmine. Several times he referred to January as a time of such heavy exhaustion that "even quantity of sleep does not restore me." But he struggled through "the inevitable state of exhaustion about the middle of the winter" only to face "the invariable letting down of strength and courage as Spring approaches." The Christian holidays were an annual nadir. "My Christmas season of despair is coming on," he observed one year. "Tis a long number of years since I passed a joyous Christmas season." He counted on the summer to provide at least a few "odd moments" of lightheartedness, but he actually felt more himself in the harshness of winter. "In winter," he wrote, "I think I live for the summer and count the days till then -- In summer, I chafe and long for the harness and think I live for the winter." When he did allow himself to shrug off the anxieties of the Ethical season, he felt guilty about it:

R. Curious the contrast. In the summer when I get away by myself I scarcely understand the positive agony of the last season. None of those terrific days of mental pain come over me. I seem just quiet. I was even asked the other day whether I ever was serious. In the winter I ask myself could I ever be anything else but serious. But it seems selfish This momentary lull I am not feeling the world's misery enough.

Sheldon believed that living in St. Louis, which he depicted as a rather dismal frontier outpost far removed from the intelligencia of the East, exacerbated his solitude and depression. "I must remember that I am isolated from other men here in the West," he told himself, "and so must take great care to keep up in general culture." He always looked forward to getting away from St. Louis: "The best substitute for the company of great and leading men -- which I cannot have -- is (1) books & (2) travel but especially travel. that largeness of view that comes of mingling with many men may perhaps be secured to some extent thro travel." His return trips to what he dubbed "the city of restrictions" were less
than joyous. "God! This sinking of the heart on the first arrival in St. Louis," he wrote after one homecoming. "My wings are clipped, my feet are tired. I was repeating over this summer, 'My soul is an uncharted boat.' Where is it now my soul!"

He bemoaned "the blighting effect of St. Louis on ambition" and reminded himself that "the test of work achieved in St. Louis [is] no test of a man's strength." The region's harsh heat waves drove him to spend his summers in the mountains of the East, but he could not altogether escape its mosquitoes; to put up with them for the sake of the cause was for him a mark of sainthood. "Curious," he reflected, "but of all the trials that would come to a man who gave up his life to the poor and lived with them I always think first of the suffering & torture from insects. One can be a St. Francis in enduring pain and giving up pleasure. But this other is terrible." At times, however, he acknowledged that his surroundings could not be the primary cause of his sorrow. "How natural and inevitable it seems here, to fall back and swear at St. L," he exclaimed. "It is in the very atmosphere. Yet it is weak. The trouble is in myself."

Acting on the hypothesis that his "mistakes & lapses" stemmed from his "irregularity of life all round," Sheldon worked to moderate or eliminate personal habits that contributed to his ill health. He tried, apparently unsuccessfully, to keep to a diet of gluten bread and coffee for breakfast, gluten bread and tea for supper, and one full meal per day. He blamed a variety of late-night excesses for his poor sleep: Too much hearty food ("Should just eat crackers"), too much cognac, too much English breakfast tea. Though his notations on daily expenses indicate he was fond of cigars, he was wary of their effects. "Rem. [ember] that when I smoke a cigar one day," he noted, "I am quite sure to lose the most of the next day in reaction." Likewise he wondered if a diminishment of his marksmanship indicated that he was "losing my steadiness of nerve thro too much coffee & tobacco." To compensate for his insomnia, Sheldon tended to sleep late when sleep did come -- and when his schedule allowed. But recognizing that his irregular hours put him out of synch with his colleagues, he instructed himself several times to rise early (like an acquaintance, one Mr. Fusz, who rose at 6 a.m. regardless of when he retired) and begin the day by reciting a poem or taking a walk.

He also tried to cultivate habits that would sharpen his critical judgment ("Res. Put to myself problems for solution or books to criticize when on a walk"), increase his efficiency ("Rem. the immense loss of time through not doing up things at once when downtown"), or help him maintain his vigilance in the face of potential opposition ("Res. Carry Mr. T's letter in my pocket as a warning for the future of the thorns in the pathway"). Recognizing the effect of his environment on his state of mind, he once resolved to add a decorative article to his home each fall -- something in the range of $22 to $50 ("This year it was The Dog"). And in his quest for orderliness, he kept lists of various kinds -- a roster of people he was likely to encounter, inventories of his addresses and the many books in his collection, and
summaries of travel highlights (when in London he stayed at Charing Cross Hotel, and on trips to New York he visited the Statue of Liberty and took in a Broadway production of "As You Like It" that featured Julia Marlowe).

One cluster of entries indicates that Sheldon sought medical treatment for his disorder, but that he found the experience humiliating and exasperating. "How his visits make me quiver," he wrote. "No feeling of sympathy, no helping hand, no 'rejoicing with me when I rejoiced' no 'weeping with me when I weep' just looks me over, feels my pulse, sets me down. . . . God I feel as tho I had been handled over like a piece of goods or used as a foot mat." Whatever advice the physician offered, Sheldon dismissed it as perfunctory: "It is like tapping a vein, taking a bowl of blood flow, then telling a man to go ahead just as before." His relationship with the man was "like an iceberg -- no community of feeling no reciprocity."

In the absence of sound therapy, Sheldon was left to cope with his illness through self-examination and determination. The mysteriousness of the condition frustrated him. "I know the trouble is in myself," he wrote, "but where? where? If I could only locate it only only mend it [sic]." Had he had access to competent medical or psychological treatment, he might have uncovered the source of his anguish and had an opportunity to heal. Psychoanalyst Paul DeWald, former director of the Psychoanalytic Institute of St. Louis and a member of the Ethical Society of St. Louis, analyzed Sheldon's disorder from the information available in the journal; though a century too late to help Sheldon, the diagnosis underscores the intensity of the battle he fought:

"That Sheldon suffered from such a disorder can hardly be seen as a diminishment of his character. On the contrary, his greatness lay in serving the Society -- through "naked duty" -- in spite of it. Though ever tempted to give up his post and find refuge in a quiet country cottage, he persevered, writing, teaching, lecturing, and administering a nascent religious community that would thrive like no other of its kind. He deemed his achievements paltry, but time has proved him wrong.

Before the publication of this book, Walter L. Sheldon was to members of the Ethical Society little more than a portrait hanging in a side gallery at the meeting house. His books and addresses had not been in circulation for generations, and only a few members of scholarly bent had even been aware that the journal was extant. Consequently, these revelations about his suffering, his personality, and his foibles will not demolish a cherished icon. Instead, it is hoped that they will bring to life a man who served his ideals in the face of unrelenting sorrow."
A DUSTY LEGACY

In addition to providing a penetrating look at Sheldon's inner life, the journal shows how this reflective man wove his life philosophy from the threads of his experience. Though he forbade himself to publicly speak or write of his suffering, he freely used the knowledge he gained in his struggle to forge and promulgate ethical religion. From his feeling that, like it or not, he was consecrated to the service of Ethical Culture came this reflection: "[T]here is fixed in our consciousness a feeling that we are to stay in a certain niche and do a certain work. It may be irksome, and we may not like it. If it were wholly a choice for our own sakes, we should not stay there. But it is because of this something outside of ourselves to which we belong, that duty exacts it of us in spite of ourselves." ("Duty -- to One Who Makes a Religion of It," from An Ethical Movement, W.L. Sheldon, Macmillan and Co., New York, 1896; pp. 49-50) His sense that his alienation resulted from his commitment to high ideals spawned this observation in an address titled, "Does High Conduct Bring Happiness?": "The man who sets a high aim for himself must expect to stand squarely on his own feet and do without popularity . . . . In order to be universally liked, you would be obliged to give in to the common weaknesses of human nature." ("Does High Conduct Bring Happiness?" from An Ethical Movement, W.L. Sheldon, Macmillan and Co., New York, 1896; pp. 165-166) Paying heed to the dangers of narcissism he so often fought, he warned his listeners against excessive introspection: "The trouble with much self-culture," he wrote, "is that it drives one still deeper into one's self, -- and thus, in another way, into the 'life of the world.'" ("Methods for Spiritual Self-Culture," from An Ethical Movement, W.L. Sheldon, Macmillan and Co., New York, 1896; p. 202) Finally, this man who believed his heart had grown cold came to believe that the sorrow he shared with all human beings was the very source of religion: "[I]t is in the anguish of our sin-stricken, sorrow-laden souls that we reach out for anything whatever that may lift us away from this awful burden bearing us down," he wrote. "It is because men have suffered and agonized that they have been drawn together, that they are fond of brotherhoods, that they have developed religions." ("The Attitude We Should Take to the Religious Beliefs of Others," from An Ethical Movement, W.L. Sheldon, Macmillan and Co., New York, 1896; p. 78)

During Sheldon's life and for several decades afterward, his writings were cherished by members of the Society. He prepared his addresses with such fastidiousness that they could be published with little revision. Scores of unpublished drafts of his lectures remain in the archives of the University of Missouri-St. Louis, but those he and his listeners considered most signal made their way into print. In 1896, the tenth anniversary of his leadership, he bound the transcripts of 16 of his favorite lectures in a volume titled "An Ethical Movement." Macmillan and Co. distributed the book in both the United States
and England, and clippings in Sheldon's scrapbooks indicate it received at least 18 favorable reviews. "A Study of the Divine Comedy of Dante" comprised transcriptions of a series of lectures he gave on the work in 1905. Dozens of other addresses were printed in pamphlet form and distributed to other ethical societies; many were included in a series of volumes of addresses by various ethical leaders. In a 1919 book titled "Thoughts from the Writings and Addresses of Walter L. Sheldon," Cecelia Boette, a longtime assistant of Sheldon's in the Ethical Sunday School, brought together inspirational excerpts from his works on topics ranging from marriage, family, and friendship to reflections on immortality and the nature of consciousness. His books for children and youth -- "Lessons in the Study of Habits," "Citizenship and the Duties of a Citizen," "Duties in the Home and the Family," and "Story of the Life of Jesus for the Young" -- served as the basis of the Sunday School curriculum for two generations; teachers were guided by two pedagogical books, "An Ethical Sunday School: A Scheme for the Moral Instruction of the Young," published by Macmillan in 1900, and "A Scheme for Class Study and Readings in the Bible," published by Unity Publishing in 1901. As an aid to the habit of meditation he advocated, he also compiled poetic excerpts in "A Sentiment in Verse for Every Day in the Year" and collected pithy sayings from Emerson, Marcus Aurelius, Thomas á Kempis and other contemplative philosophers in "A Morning and Evening Wisdom Gem for Every Day in the Year." Finally, a compilation of the letters and photographs he sent his wife during a 1906 visit to Japan was privately and posthumously published under the title "Summer Greetings from Japan." After Sheldon's death, his widow endowed a fund with which his writings were reprinted, stocked, and cataloged in the Ethical Society library throughout the first half of this century. The endowment was transferred to another fund after Society members lost interest in the founder's works, and only a few volumes remain extant.

Sheldon was more an orator and essayist than scholar. Nevertheless, he made a few well-received contributions to the intelligentsia of his day. In January 1903, he presented an oral overview of recent ethical philosophy before the Academy of Science of St. Louis. Titled "A Bird's-Eye View of the Literature of Ethical Science Since the Time of Charles Darwin," the presentation included synopses and assessments of more than 60 books, which by his estimate accounted for "probably three-quarters of the whole literature and practically all of its leading works." (Sheldon, "A Bird's-Eye View of the Literature of Ethical Science Since the Time of Charles Darwin," Transactions, p. 92, quoted in Hornback, p. 220) Not being one for false modesty, he included in the bibliography his own "An Ethical Movement." In his concluding remarks, he bemoaned what he deemed an overuse of the "doctrine of evolution" in explaining social phenomena and reasserted -- though "softly and in a whisper" -- his belief in free will. (Ibid., pp. 120-21, quoted in Hornback, p. 224)
One of Sheldon's most far-reaching contributions to the intellectual community was his chairmanship of the Social Science Section of the Congress of Arts and Sciences at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904-5. His list of speakers included Max Weber, who was in the vanguard of turn-of-the-century sociology, and Felix Adler. He invited several fair guests, among them representatives of China and Japan, to speak before the Ethical Society and its subgroups.

Redeeming the Bible

Perhaps Sheldon's most fervent intellectual undertaking was the "redemption" of the Bible for the edification of believers and unbelievers alike. He saw in the Bible an unparalleled collection of histories, ethical studies, and literary masterpieces, and he grieved at the decline of its usage because of the bias against supernaturalism among free thinkers. Drawing upon the 19th century's radical scholarly approach to the Bible -- then termed the "Higher Criticism" -- he sought to counterpose the prevalent "believe it or leave it" attitude toward the Bible with a level-headed, unintimidated appreciation of Western civilization's most influential book. Characteristically, he scrupulously avoided challenging anyone's beliefs in scriptural theology or divine revelation; he found in the historical method a way to make the Bible accessible and valuable for every open-minded reader:

There is a splendid freedom for the mind in the ethical attitude -- according to which our one purpose is to find light on the pathway of the true life and to learn how to lead the best life possible. No anxiety need concern us as to where our light comes from on this score, so long as we know that the light is genuine. I feel no hesitation in talking enthusiastically over the literature of the Bible and the light which I find there -- all the more for the reason that I feel no constraint as if I must find the light there, whether it is there or not.

No authority requires it of me that I should place this literature higher in importance than the literature of other religions or other races. I turn to its pages as I would turn to the pages of the literature of the Stoics, or the Buddhists, or to Plato.

(The Story of the Bible from the Standpoint of Modern Scholarship, Ethical Society of St. Louis, 1916, p. 170)

In the late 1890s Sheldon delivered a series of nine lectures that presented, in popular form, the latest findings in Biblical scholarship. He was aware -- and unabashedly proud -- that the Ethical Society
took the lead in publicizing this nascent science in St. Louis. Nevertheless, he wrote in the prefatory note to "The Story of the Bible," the collected transcriptions of those lectures, that the series was "inaugurated with fear and trepidation lest they should prove of little interest." (Ibid., prefatory note) He was gratified that attendance at Sunday platform meetings swelled during the series.

In the early lectures, Sheldon laid out the methodology and some of the principle findings of biblical scholars. His listeners learned that the Bible is not a cohesive book but rather a compendium of an ancient culture's most significant literary works; they learned that the books of the Bible are arranged so as to maximize their impact, not in the order in which they were written; they learned that most of the books are themselves amalgams of disparate documents sewn together and embellished by successive writers. They also learned that the strict science of chronicling history is a relatively late development in Western civilization; apochryphal story-telling was -- to the writers of the Old Testament, at least -- an effective mode of edification that bore no taint of dishonesty.

In later lectures, Sheldon recounted the social and intellectual development of the Jewish culture by interpreting excerpts from the Bible and non-canonical works of the same era. He detailed the slow transition of the Jews from primitive polytheism to a belief in a preeminent God among gods to a clearly defined monotheism. With cool candor, he showed how folk Judaism apparently adopted beliefs in immortality, divine judgment, and heaven and hell from the Zoroastrian religion of Persia in the centuries before Jesus, and he showed how Paul and the author of the Gospel of John recast the teachings of Jesus by drawing upon contemporary Greek philosophy. He put Old Testament prophecy in its place by examining some of the linguistic machinations by which New Testament writers claimed the coming of a spiritual messiah had been foretold for centuries. And drawing upon the historical and sociological training he had received in Europe, he showed how the religious revolution of Christianity occurred at a time and in a manner that is characteristic of all revolutions. In sum, he took part in the demythologization of the Bible that allowed freethinkers to appreciate a book to which rational prejudice had barred access.

Sheldon's principal delight in biblical literature -- and, for that matter, in all theological writings -- lay in its exposition of the sociological development of ethics:

I may as well own first as last that beliefs about God have a fascination for me. I like to meet with them in poetry, in the Bible, in the early classical literature; and whenever I come upon those beliefs my attention is held at once. In fact, I can never let the subject alone. I like it and want to study it, and I find it more and more interesting as the years go on. It continues to draw me, to move me, to inspire me.
What makes the study of the beliefs about God so interesting is just this: By means of those beliefs we are able to trace the steps of growth of the moral sense. That is the secret of my enthusiasm for the study of theology.

(Ibid., p. 88)

Sheldon drew correlations between the evolving God-concepts and ethical precepts of the ancient Jews. He saw in their primitive depiction of a vengeful God a personification of an embattled tribe's defensiveness and hegemonic drive. He found in the Song of Deborah the gratitude of ruthless warriors toward a God of cruelty, and he noted how that God-image was later ousted by the stern God of justice -- the God who taught Jonah a lesson in racial tolerance, and who sent Nathan to chasten David for his inhumanity. The Old Testament depiction of God, he taught, reached its zenith in the psalmists' vision of a God of tenderness and mercy, a God who was pleased not by burnt offerings but by family loyalty, tribal peace, and acts of compassion.

Like Adler, Sheldon exalted Jesus as the greatest revolutionary in the history of ethics. Condemning the formalism, pretense, and hypocrisy of the pharisees, the most legalistic of the prevailing Jewish sects, Jesus taught his followers to "clean the inside of the cup," to cultivate a charitable disposition. Sheldon noted that Jesus, by redefining the essence of the "good life," reinvigorated a people in despair; he proffered both a reason to live and a way to live:

In turning over the pages of this New Testament as the closing portions of the Bible, you feel that the emphasis of the teaching of the New Prophet lay in one supreme direction. It was to call the attention of the human race to the value of the spiritual side of life and to make man feel that the spiritual life as such was the one life worth living. It is this which has made the gospel of Jesus essentially the gospel of the poor, because the import of its teaching is to point to the value of the inside things. When you say in your despair, if you are hungry or houseless, or homeless, if you have lost all you ever had, are penniless and without work -- when you say, "I have nothing, absolutely nothing, it is all gone," then this teaching of Jesus, the New Prophet, gives you reply. The answer comes: "Stand up; you have got your soul, and it is worth more than all the possessions you have lost, or all that wealth you dreamed of and never got." . . . And with that doctrine of the soul in man, went the beautiful, sublime humanitarianism of the New Prophet.

(Ibid., p. 168)
Again, Sheldon rendered no judgment on the validity of belief in Jesus’ salvific death and resurrection. By noting the scholarly opinion that no New Testament writer knew Jesus firsthand, and by elucidating the archaic standards of that era’s "historians," he subtly cast doubt on such a belief, but he made no frontal attack on Christian doctrine. Instead, he sought to shift the attention of his listeners from theology to ethics:

The number who believe in the mystical significance of the death of Jesus, could perhaps be counted by the hundreds of millions of the people today. But the number who undertake to live out fully and completely the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, could be counted in the hundreds with the millions left off. And if Christianity survives as a world religion, it will be owing to these hundreds, rather than to the hundreds of millions.

(Story of the Bible, Page 161)

WORKING FOR THE VISIONS WITHIN

By his own admission, Sheldon brought little original thought to his work in biblical criticism and speculative philosophy. As his sense of ministry developed, his desire to break new ground in modern thought gave way to his evangelical mission. Hornback, in his critical assessment of Sheldon, noted that his predecessor minimized philosophical clarity in favor of heartfelt ideals:

As a philosopher, Sheldon was clearly a popularizer and an eclectic, despite his ability to rise on occasion to competent scholarship and criticism. His sources were . . . varied . . . , and many which he accepted with apparent enthusiasm were mutually exclusive. His sanctions were deeply felt rather than closely reasoned . . .

The guilt or disappointment he felt over the loss of a boyhood Christian faith could be satisfied with nothing less than a heroic demonstration of goodness and love for man, and the repeated assertion that such goodness and love justified his existence.

(Hornback, p. 227-8)
Nathaniel Schmidt, a Cornell professor and an influential writer and speaker in the Ethical movement, believed his colleague’s preference for insight over scholarly sophistication served well the needs of the Ethical Society. In an introductory note to the third edition of "The Story of the Bible," Schmidt praised Sheldon's approach to adult education:

Mr. Sheldon had a rare capacity for making things plain. As lecturer of the Ethical Society of St. Louis for more than twenty years, he covered an astonishingly wide range of topics. But whether he dealt with the Bible or Dante, with Aristotle or Spencer, he always knew how to extract the meat and to give, in a simple and effective manner, what he felt that men were most in need of. He had little taste for subtle distinctions, minutiae of criticism, chronological details, or elaborated elegancies of style. He saw things in the large and took his hearers to the heart of every subject he treated. Everywhere he searched for the moral value; and when he found it, he set it forth interestingly and impressively.


In addition to the edification of adults, Sheldon took an active interest in the moral education of children. He started the Sunday School in the Society’s first year of existence. For several years, he conducted the children’s classes himself. In time, volunteer teachers were recruited from the membership, but he always supervised the school’s curriculum and pedagogy.

Like his mentor in the East, Sheldon was not content to focus all his attention on the welfare of Ethical Society members. From the start, he encouraged the fellowship to take part in philanthropic enterprises. The most influential social program he launched was the Self Culture Halls Association. Begun in 1888, this experiment in "educational philanthropy" gave working-class St. Louisans an opportunity to expand their intellectual horizons through book loans, lectures, debating clubs, and classes in home economics. In the first decade of the century, Sheldon also initiated the Philosophical Club and the Colored People’s Self-Improvement Association. These programs will be detailed in a later chapter. For now, it is worth noting that Sheldon overrode his shy, bookish nature to promote the educational opportunities offered by the society; with the boldness of a cultist, he approached strangers on the street and workers returning from lunch break:
In a word, it has meant work, hard work, indeed, the hardest kind of work, for a long while to bring home to the artisan class the value of the facilities we were offering to them... We tried every method one could think of. I have gone out in an evening to the street corners, and seeing a band of young fellows standing chatting or chaffing with each other, have stepped up to them like an old friend, talked to them like a Salvation Army captain, asking them to come in to an illustrated lecture. As a rule, they are not disagreeable, and may answer, "Oh, Yes, we'll come." You go back to headquarters, and in three cases out of four they never materialize. But here and there one does make his appearance. You begin to get used to averages in all such undertakings.

We worked through individuals whom we knew in special factories; possibly a foreman who believed in our cause, or some exceptional artisan who appreciated it, and would do his best to bring his comrades there. Gradually we got the respect of the superintendent or the office force of large manufacturing establishments. When this was accomplished, a great gain had been made. They have allowed us to go into the factories at noontime and distribute our circulars. Once and again at such times we have mounted a box or a barrel like a stump-speaker, with an assembled throng of working girls or working men around us, just from their lunch, and talked to them for five or ten minutes about our work, the value of self-culture, urging them to come to our lectures, distributing our programs in their midst...

[W]e have kept at it year after year, trying all these methods; going perhaps to meetings of trade unions, getting the privilege of addressing them and telling them of our work; or distributing our programs at the doors of factories when the throng of men and women are coming out at evening time. They may take us for Salvation Army officers, and think that we are distributing tracts. We go on the principle that this is another kind of Salvation Army. I feel no hesitation in going after people in this way, following them even to their homes, catching them wherever possible, and persuading them, if I can, to come and avail themselves of these privileges for self-improvement.

("The Wage Earners' Self-Culture Clubs of St. Louis: A Sketch of their History," ethical addresses, March and April 1900)

True to his principle of devoting oneself to a worthy end, Sheldon spent himself in his writing, lecturing, and organizational efforts. His death at the age of 48 probably was hastened by his untreated
anxiety disorder. He died on June 5, 1907, of heart disease; he had been confined to his sickroom for nearly a year after a strenuous tour of Japan under the auspices of the Ethical Society of Tokyo. These are reported to be his last words: "Goodbye. All is well! My love to you all. Auf Wiedersehen." In dying during the St. Louis Society's infancy, he fulfilled his own definition of "What It Means to Work for a Cause":

It means, most of all, to be willing to work for an outcome that he will never see, to be willing to walk blindfolded all his days, to work for the visions within, and to go down in death while the work is not yet done, while the battle is going on, while not one gleam has come to him of the fruits of his labors.

There can be no banquets for those who are working for the big causes, no toasts to be drunk there, no assemblages of the workers to rejoice over the victory, working without seeing any victory. In those centuries to come as in our day, there must always be the few who work for the big causes, live for them, live in them, die with faith unshaken; and yet who do not see the end.

("What It Means to Work for a Cause," Ethical Address, December 1904)

In a memorial address, William Salter recalled his colleague as an independent and industrious man who lived by the gospel he taught:

Mr. Sheldon was one of the most individual of men. . . . He was so much so that we came near losing him from our movement at an early day, and he always remained a unique figure in it. He would not follow another's lead. He had to map out his own course. He would listen to you and weigh, no doubt, what you had to say, and then go his own way. . . .

[I]t was because he was so essentially and thoroughly a modern and progressive man in his views, that he had the rich, sane influence on his community and time that he had. Intellectually speaking, Sheldon was of no common order. If he had not found a practical outlet for his energies, I surmise that he might have done no mean work in philosophy or some of the social sciences.

But he was not only a thinker. This shy man, with almost the manners of a recluse when I first knew him, had a rare power of seeing men as they are and conditions as they exist. He knew how to estimate a situation. He knew what might be done and
what he had better not attempt. He was prodigious, lavish in his energies, but along practical lines . . . He did not dentify himself with causes that would not go.

But the things he did undertake he pushed to the end. There was something dauntless, untiring about him, as if he would weary heaven and earth rather than not get what he wanted. He did not allow himself to be discouraged . . .

Behind all and deeper than all was the soul of the man with its far-reaching visions, its reverences, its absolute trust. His philosophy taught him that the disposition to mutual helpfulness was a part of human nature and prior to any specific religions -- and love and justice were an immediate reality to his mind. To them he bowed, of them he expected the final victory, in the life found its meaning -- they were to him man's higher self on which he can ever rely . . . Man must act from his highest self -- this was his feeling. It is a new version of the old commandment, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God."

(Walter L. Sheldon Memorial Address by William Salter, Ethical Addresses, October 1907)
St. Louis of the post-Civil War era was an increasingly industrial and cosmopolitan city emerging from its roots as a frontier trading post. Many of the structures and institutions that would shape and characterize the city in the coming century -- the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, the *Post-Dispatch*, the Missouri Botanical Gardens, Forest Park, Eads Bridge, the Veiled Prophet celebration -- came on the scene in the 1870s and 1880s. Religiously, successive waves of immigrants had brought Protestantism and Jewish culture to this once exclusively Catholic city. Some of the city's freethinking intellectuals were drawn to the St. Louis Philosophical Society, which promoted German idealism and educational reform through classes and treatises, and the St. Louis Freie Gemeinde (the German School Association and Free Community), but neither institution could meet the needs of religious liberals from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds. Publicity surrounding the founding of the New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia ethical societies piqued the interest of progressive Jews and other St. Louisans who shared the dream of a religion of ethics. In 1883, Felix Adler reported to the New York board that "some of the best and strongest" citizens of St. Louis were prepared to form an ethical society but lacked a qualified leader. St. Louis remained prominent on Adler's list of potential expansion sites, and he kept an eye open for a suitable leader. The man he chose was an intense, ponderous young apprentice named Walter L. Sheldon.

In April of 1886, the St. Louis group held an organizational meeting at the offices of Charles Nagel Sr., a politically powerful attorney who later served as U.S. Secretary of Commerce and Labor under Taft. S. Burns Weston, leader of the Philadelphia society, advised the group on the formation of an ethical society and introduced his friend Sheldon. The next month, at the group's invitation, Sheldon returned to deliver a series of lectures intended to clarify the aims and principles of the Ethical movement. The lectures were delivered at Memorial Hall in the Museum of Fine Arts, which was then located at 19th Street and Lucas Place. [FOOTNOTE 1] On Friday, May 21, he delivered an address titled "The Possibilities of a New Religious Movement in America" [FOOTNOTE 2]; on Wednesday, May 26, he spoke on "The Old and the New Prophecy"; and on Sunday, May 30, he outlined the tasks faced by the group in a lecture titled "A New Basis for Religious Organization." Each of the lectures was attended by about 50 people. Following the lecture course, a committee set to work to arouse interest in the cause of the Ethical movement and to secure funds with which to begin active work in the fall.
According to the annual report of the inaugural season, "as it was found, during the summer, that quite a number of prominent business and professional men were in sympathy with the proposal, it was decided in the autumn to take the initiatory steps towards final organization." (First annual report of the Society for Ethical Culture of St. Louis; Ethical Society archives)

On November 13, Adler launched the first season of the St. Louis Society with a Memorial Hall address on "The Aims of the Ethical Movement." The address was followed by an organizational meeting at which a committee was appointed to prepare a Constitution and By-Laws for a Society for Ethical Culture in St. Louis. At that meeting, the founding group decided to invite Sheldon to serve as its lecturer for the season, and plans were made for a course of Sunday morning addresses during the winter. On November 21, Sheldon delivered his first address of the inaugural season in the lower hall of the Pickwick Theatre, which was located on the north side of Washington Avenue just west of Jefferson Avenue; reflecting the shift from the theoretical to the actual, the address was titled "Our Society for Ethical Culture." The change of venue was necessitated by the refusal of the museum's board of control to grant the Society continued use of Memorial Hall. Because of the board's reservations about the newly formed band of religious deviants, the Society met at the Pickwick until January 21, 1887, by which time the de facto president of the Society had persuaded the board of control to rent Memorial Hall to the Society for the remainder of the first season. As the Society had use of the hall only on Sundays, it established its headquarters in the parlor floor of Sheldon's centrally located residence at 2646 Pine Street. These rooms served as Sheldon's private office and as a gathering place for educational classes and board and club meetings.

On November 27, 1886, a Saturday evening, the Society for Ethical Culture of St. Louis was formally organized at a meeting in the Pickwick Theatre hall. James Taussig, a law partner of Louis D. Brandeis and principal mover of the organizational efforts, presided. In addition to adopting a Constitution and By-Laws, the group elected its first board of trustees, which in turn elected the first slate of officers. Although commonly acknowledged as the society's chief administrator, Taussig declined the post of president and served instead as vice president. Manning Tredway was elected president in name only. In an unguarded letter to a later president of the board, Sheldon referred to Taussig as "the first real President of the Society ... He was nominally Vice President, inasmuch as he had put up a 'dummy' in the person of Manning Tredway as President, who never acted and never even paid his promised subscription." (Letter from Walter L. Sheldon to Robert Moore, dated Feb. 20, 1896; Ethical Society archives, University of Missouri-St. Louis) Despite his skittishness about bearing the higher title, Taussig provided the encouragement and pragmatic guidance the nascent organization needed. According to Sheldon, "if it had not been for his presidency that year, the Society would have
broken up by the middle of the winter." (Ibid.) Thomas M. Knapp was elected secretary and Paul F. Coste, treasurer. The remaining board members were Nagel, Albert Arinstein, H. Daughaday, Joseph Emanuel, F.H. Hunicke, M. Kotany, and L. Methudy. For practical purposes, this meeting marked the founding of the Society; however, it was on May 14, 1887, that the Missouri Department of State granted a certificate of incorporation to the Society for Ethical Culture of St. Louis. (To reflect popular usage, the community would be formally renamed the Ethical Society of St. Louis in 1896.)

The Constitution adopted at the founding meeting reflected the movement's deliberate shift of what Percival Chubb, then a teacher at the Ethical Culture School in New York, termed religion's "center of gravity": "Whereas, It is our desire and purpose to aid in developing, apart from the churches, a new movement, which shall put morality into the foreground in religion, and shall rest upon a basis of ethics independent of theology; Therefore, We, who are here assembled, do hereby organize ourselves into The Society for Ethical Culture of St. Louis, and adopt the foregoing declaration as and for our Constitution."

The Society's first annual report celebrated the community's departure from tradition:

The phrase "apart from the churches" was not designed to express it as the special purpose of the Society to antagonize those organizations, but simply to express the freedom of the movement from the authority of supernatural revelation, as the final criterion of moral truth. Great as may have been the work which they have accomplished, it is doubtful whether the churches are adequate to meet the religious needs of the advancing world, and to give to ethics a scientific basis. This movement, while it leaves the churches to go on in their own way, desires for itself to try the new methods -- to take a new start -- in the effort to put morality into the foreground in religion, by finding for it the same kind of authority as that whereon rest the truths of natural science.

(First annual report of the Society for Ethical Culture of St. Louis; Ethical Society archives)

In a flier circulated in the first season, Sheldon clarified the Society's distinction from churches, emphasizing its exaltation of conscience:

Ethical Culture recognizes that not only as a matter of right and duty, should personal morality be taught and cultivated primarily, but as affording the only solution of the gravest practical problems which confront the world at the present day. Of all
needed reform the beginning must be made in the moral life of the individual. The movement affirms no creed new or old, and denies none. It does not deal directly with theology. The question whence man derived the power of knowing right and wrong it leaves open to such belief as may be entertained, without concerning itself at all therewith. For Ethical Culture it is sufficient to know the fact that such a power does exist in man, and with the presence of that power it begins, developing moral law and applying it to the affairs of human life independent of Theology and therefore "apart from the churches."

A Moral Commitment

Formal membership in the Society indicated a moral commitment to building one's character and a broader commitment to advancing Ethical Culture and serving the community at large. Only members could hold office, chair committees, and participate in board and by-law elections. A handful of people who became members in the first season looked upon the Society as a sort of fraternal club and resigned when its essentially religious character became evident. To prevent a continuation of ill-informed membership applications, the membership at the end of the second season passed a by-law revision requiring applicants to hold the status of associate member for one year before applying for full membership. There is no record of a membership applicant being turned down. At the time of their acceptance, members made financial pledges, which they paid annually or semi-annually in advance. Originally, the by-laws stated that "every member who has the means to do so shall subscribe something annually to the support of the Society, the amount of subscription to be at the option of the member." At the second annual meeting, acting on the assumption that any sincere membership applicant could afford at least a token donation, the membership voted to strike from that rule the words "who has the means to do so." Annual contributions ranged from one dollar to $300; most members pledged $5-10.

At its inception, the society was made up of 93 members; of these, 86 were full members and seven were associate members. By the summer of 1887, that number had more than doubled to 196, despite the departure of first-year dilettantes. The St. Louis Society's growth outpaced that of its predecessors: New York had had 125 founding members and 178 by the end of its first year; the Philadelphia and Chicago societies, each of which began with 60 members, grew to 100 and 140, respectively, during their inaugural seasons.

The makeup of the Society's membership was democratic but predominantly middle-class and educated. Although all of the charter members were men, women quickly came to make up a substantial portion of the membership. In the Society's first year, the board appointed a Ladies Committee to assist
the general membership committee in soliciting members. With its emphasis on individuality, the Society never was content to enroll only heads of households, as was the custom in New York; each family member who sympathized with the aims of the movement was urged to sign up. For example, six members of the Taussig family had become full members by the Society's second year. In line with the ecumenism of the movement's leaders, many of the Society's early adherents held joint membership in churches and synagogues.

Although the national movement already had caught the attention of the academic and clerical communities, the St. Louis Society sought to enhance its standing in the public eye by enlisting the vocal support -- and, preferably, the membership -- of prominent citizens. In addition to Nagel, notables among the Society's early supporters included Adolphus Busch, president of Anheuser-Busch Companies and for years the Society's largest single contributor [FOOTNOTE 3]; active member John H. Gundlach, a North St. Louis businessman and key civic promoter who later served as president of the City Council; active member Dr. William Taussig, prime mover in the construction of Union Station and principal partner of James B. Eads in the construction of Eads Bridge; contributor John C. Learned, Unitarian pastor of the Church of the Unity and the Society's first ally among established St. Louis clergy; and active member Hugo Muench, a circuit court judge.

An Independent Platform

The pattern of the Society's exercises was the same as that established in the East. A typical Sunday service included an organ recital, a song by a quartet choir, readings, and an address. Announcements of the services were run in the *St. Louis Republican* and the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*. Charles Kunkel, the organist for the first season, directed the music. The song lyrics were written by Ethical leaders, including Adler, to the tune of classical compositions. The readings were selected from the works of Emerson, Wordsworth, Kant and other modern writers as well as from the Bible. Sunday services were held at 11 a.m.

Following the pattern of the Eastern societies, which held services from mid-October to mid-May, the St. Louis Society held its last platform meeting of the first season on April 24, 1887, and wrapped up the season with the first annual all-member meeting on April 27. Before the advent of air conditioning, the summer break was cherished in St. Louis, whose enervating heat each year drove the Society's first three leaders to the highlands of the East. In the summer of 1887, during his first annual retreat in the Adirondacks, Sheldon wrote in a letter to a board member that it had been "hard to think of the insufferable heat of St. Louis, and painful to think of it, too, when I remember the friends out there
who are experiencing its effects. Here in the mountains we are only too glad as evening approaches to put on our heaviest flannels and sit around a warm fire. The thermometer falls close to 50 degrees every evening." (Letter to Paul F. Coste, treasurer of the Society, dated Sept. 1, 1887, from Salisbury, Vt.; Ethical Society archives) His consolation no doubt received a chilly reception.

In the first season's addresses, Sheldon proffered the movement's fresh attitude toward morality as a distinctively religious way of life; he set the Society's approach in contradistinction to that of established religions, while at the same time exalting the wisdom and virtue found in Western religious heritage. Among the topics of his addresses that year were "What Attitude Shall We Take toward the Churches?"; "What Attitude Shall We Take toward Christianity?"; "The Ethical Significance of the Christmas Festival"; "The Poet Shelley and his Idea of God"; "The Success and Failure of the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments)"; "The Historic Jesus"; "The Ideal Jesus and the Christ That is to Be"; and "The Starting Point of the New Ethics." Outside speakers during the year were Adler, Weston, and Learned; William M. Salter, leader of the Chicago Society; and Dr. Stanton Coit, founder of the London Ethical Society and a member of the New York Society's leadership team.

The reception with which the undertaking has met is a plain indication of its need in our city. The inference which is now so commonly made by large numbers, whether true or not, that the teachers in the pulpits may not utter fully and freely the convictions which they have in their study, is threatening to imperil the very existence of moral and religious truth in the world. There is need of a platform which, by its attitude of independence from the original church organization, shall be free of any ambiguous committal to convictions which the modern world in its private thought is not disposed to accept, and yet at the same time have as the aim to preserve and develop that which is eternally true, by putting into the foreground the ethical aspect of religion.

(First annual report of the Society for Ethical Culture of St. Louis; Ethical Society archives)

Children's Classes Begin

The basic adult program having been established, the Society opened its Sunday School in February 1887. The first department organized took in children from 7 to 14. Because the supply of
teachers and instruction materials was limited, the school could not accept all the children who applied for admission. Sheldon had proposed to hold classes on a weekday afternoon, when he was free from his responsibilities to the adult members, but the membership preferred the convenience of having children's classes on Sunday mornings. As an experiment, the students were divided into two classes which met at 10 a.m. Sundays at Memorial Hall. Each was taught by a woman member of the Society. This arrangement continued into the second year, but Sheldon, who considered the direct instruction of children one of his principal duties, eventually reached a compromise with the board under which he held classes at 3 p.m. Sundays at his office.

In the first two years, children's classes centered on a discussion of the ethical values expressed in Aesop's fables and other folk tales. Gradually, Sheldon introduced the older children to stories of the Bible. His approach, which was based on that of other ethical societies, was to emphasize the ethical import of biblical tales without rendering any judgment on their theological content. In some instances, stories were recited and students were expected to remember the details. At other times, Sheldon and his associates used the stories as starting points for broad discussions of morality.

The Sunday School -- or, as it was officially called, the School for Ethical Instruction of Children -- was more formally organized at the start of the Society's second season. A second department was created for children over 14. In addition to instructing children, Sheldon trained the teachers and supervised both departments. To help parents appreciate the program's offerings, and to court admissions, Sheldon devoted three platform addresses in fall 1887 to the ethical education of the young. On Oct. 23, he spoke on "How Shall We Deal with the God Idea in the Religious Education of the Young?"; Oct. 30, "How Shall We Deal with the Old Testament in the Religious Education of the Young?"; and Dec. 18, "How Shall we Deal With the Story of Jesus in the Religious Education of the Young?" On Dec. 25, the pupils of the school took to the platform to render "Ethics for Children," a set of ceremonial responsive readings written by Sheldon.

**A Shoestring Operation**

The Society's expenses for the first season amounted to $2,380.30. That sum was met by 124 contributors, most of whom were members. In the 1887-88 season, the first for which a breakdown of expenses is extant, the outlay totalled $3,235.09. The greatest single expense was Sheldon's salary of $1,200. This was followed by: hall rental, $700; music, $577.90; rental of headquarters, $240; and lecturers' fees and travel expenses, $120. Other expenses included printing, postage and advertising; secretarial help; travel and lodging costs for delegates to a convention of ethical societies in Chicago;
furniture for the Sunday School; and dues paid to the Union of Societies for Ethical Culture. Regular member subscriptions accounted for $2,203 of the second-year income; special donations, and a carryover of $35.80 from the first fiscal year, brought the total to $3,287.20. That left a surplus of only $52.11. More importantly, the Society avoided running a deficit. The board, betraying its uncertainty about the Society's future, adopted a "pay as we go" policy that kept the Society in the black during its formative years.

Sheldon felt an almost morbid embarrassment over the fact that the board set his salary according to the Society's projected income, which meant that membership growth was reflected in his paycheck. Hoping to maintain the purity of his motivation and reputation, he asked Coste, his "right-hand man," to have the figure set without his consultation before he returned for the start of the Society's second season. "If the matter is to come up at all," he wrote, "I wish to ask you to have it settled before I come out so that there need be no further allusion to the matter. I will adjust myself to whatever the board may decide, only I beg to have it decided and out of the way. You cannot realize what an embarrassment of mind it is for me to be harassed by the consciousness that the growth of the Society can be of financial concern to me personally. I do not want to have the consideration in mind." (Letter from Walter L. Sheldon to Paul F. Coste, dated Sept. 1, 1887, from Salisbury, Vt.; Ethical Society archives)

Onward

In its second season, the Society quickly escalated its programs. In addition to the expansion of the Sunday School, the second year saw the addition of clubs for mothers, young men and boys; and committees on finance, music, and printing and publication. The Ladies' Home Club, which met on alternate Wednesday afternoons at the Society headquarters, held discussions on parenthood and family life. Literary works and books on the moral education and nurturing of children served as the common ground of discussion. In the first season, participants debated the merits of Rousseau's "Emile." The meetings drew an average of 25 women. The Young Men's Section was devoted to the study of ethical topics in literature. In the club's first year, the men studied Tolstoy's "My Religion" and Plato's "Republic." The club met on alternate Wednesday evenings. Sheldon initiated both clubs, but he encouraged the members to direct the discussions themselves; although a qualified academic, he generally avoided lecturing to auxiliary groups. The Boys' Debating Club, which numbered about 20, met on Sunday afternoons at the homes of its members. The group's purposes were to facilitate critical
reasoning and foster self-confidence in presenting one's ideas. A Young Women's Section for the study of literature also had been planned but did not come off.

The board elected a new slate of officers in its second year. Charles W. Stevens, a well-known physician, replaced Tredway as president; Albert Arnstein was elected secretary and Leo Levis, treasurer. It is unclear whether anyone held the title of vice president, but James Taussig remained a principal decision maker. Taussig, himself an ethnic Jew, had reservations about the number of Jews on this slate of officers. Mindful of the New York society's early reputation as a sort of liberal arm of Reform Judaism, he wanted to check the participation of Jews on the St. Louis board to ensure that gentiles would feel welcome at the Society. In a letter to Paul F. Coste, who remained on the board after resigning as treasurer, Taussig wrote: "In the organization of the board, in the selection of officers of the board and creation of committees, we ought never to lose sight of the rule not to give preponderance to the Jewish element, although it may be the most enthusiastic in the matter of work and the most available. I think that this rule has worked well in the past and may as well be adhered to." (Letter from James Taussig to Paul F. Coste, dated Aug. 30, 1887; Ethical Society archives) While both Jews and native Germans maintained social cliques within the Society for decades, there is no evidence to indicate that an ethnic power structure ever held sway.

Sheldon had no voting authority on the board, but his opinions regarding its composition were solicited and respected. This, too, caused him no little consternation: "It relieves me of a great embarrassment if I do not have to take part in the selection of men and thus be forced to display a discrimination of persons. For me as the lecturer, there ought not to be the semblance of a 'respect for persons' save as they are each and all members of a Society to which I am responsible. At present, however, I must, I suppose, make my suggestions, as the ideal system can only come in the course of years." (Ibid.) It happens that the one man Sheldon especially wanted to see on the board's second slate of officers was a departing member of the Church of the Unity; out of regard for his Unitarian friend Learned, he quickly withdrew the suggestion.

Services continued to be held at Memorial Hall, which had been secured for Sunday mornings from mid-October to mid-May. In addition to Sheldon, platform speakers included Adler, Coit, Learned, Salter, and Charles W. Stevens, the president. The Society's emerging self-definition continued to dominate the platform. Sheldon's addresses included "The Future of Religion"; "Is Ethics Without Religion?"; "Are We Atheists?"; "Are We Materialists?"; "Why We Cannot Pray"; and "The Substitute for Prayer." Advancing the Society's reputation for radicalism, he also spoke on Charles Darwin and the provocative American freethinker Robert Ingersoll. Salter spoke on "Courage" and "What Have We to Offer in Place of the Old Faith?"; Adler spoke on "Are We Agnostics?" and "The Old Testament from a
Human Standpoint"; Coit spoke on "The Social Responsibilities of Young Men" and "The Social Responsibilities of Young Women." Proposed "Members' Sundays," on which lay members of the Society were to speak on various ethical themes, did not materialize.

The Society's liturgical program received a strong boost in its second year with the installation of William Henry Pommer as music director. Pommer, who had studied at the Leipzig Conservatory of Music and under Anton Bruckner at the Vienna Conservatory, later achieved distinction as a composer, supervisor of music instruction for the St. Louis Public Schools, and professor of music at the University of Missouri. His compositions included piano works, sonatas, trios, choral works, songs, and at least one symphony. While serving the Ethical Society, Pommer directed the quartette that performed weekly. He wrote at least one choral composition based on a lyric statement of the Ethical movement. The quartette also performed similar compositions by musicians serving the New York Society. Some Society members questioned whether such inspirational music was in accord with the Society's intellectualism, but Sheldon insisted it was vital to the effectiveness of the platform service. Still, Society members seemed more willing to receive inspiration than to provide it: Taussig attempted to drum up volunteers to replace the paid quartette, but there is no indication that such a group formed during the founding years.

An Experiment in "Educational Philanthropy"

In its second season, the Society launched the grandest of its philanthropic undertakings, the Self-Culture Hall Association. This program, which Sheldon termed "educational philanthropy," was intended to give working-class people an opportunity to enhance their intellectual life through reading, lectures, discussion groups, classes and concerts. Sheldon formed a committee consisting of himself, Taussig, J.A. St. John, and N.O. Nelson to steer the program. It was agreed the Ethical Society board of trustees would oversee the project, but the association had its own treasurer and accounts. The committee elected Nelson as its first treasurer. Sheldon was director of the project, but he never received any salary from the organization, nor from any of the funds with which it was administered. In preparation for the program, a circular was issued in the fall of 1887 setting out the purposes of the project:

Philanthropy is at its best when it is educational. Our city is supplied with admirable institutions to meet the distress of poverty; but there is missing to a large
degree that other form of charity, which is mainly preventive and curative in its aim. We miss in our city what is known as educational philanthropy.

It is proposed this winter to initiate such an undertaking by opening a public reading room for workingmen. The chief reading room of the kind, the Public Library, is altogether too remote from a large portion of the residences of the classes for whom it is provided for them to be induced to avail themselves of the privilege, although under these circumstances it is largely patronized. Such rooms need to be placed in the neighborhoods where the workingmen live. They ought to be scattered in different localities all over the city, each to become a centre of educational interest for the families in the neighborhood. Ultimately they should become, if properly managed, self-supporting, although this cannot be anticipated at the outset of the undertaking. In reading and educational matters, it is often the supply which creates the demand, and not the demand the supply.

It is probable that the first of these rooms thus started will be under the auspices of the Society for Ethical Culture of this city, inasmuch as the committee who offer the plan are members of that Society. The philanthropic undertakings under the auspices of a similar Society in New York are known all over the country, and receive a large share of their support from people quite outside of that organization. A prominent feature of such readings rooms will be that they will be wholly non-sectarian in religion and non-partisan in politics. The rooms will not be used to give any bias or exert any leading influence in questions of this nature. What is needed is to stimulate the intellectual interests of the working classes. If the means are adequate it may be also advisable to add the feature of lectures and entertainments of Art, Science and Home Culture. For the purpose of making the start in the undertaking it is needed that we raise $1,000, and it is anticipated that the public will meet the plan with their approbation.

Three women, identified only as Mrs. J.A. St. John, Mrs. James H. Green, and Mrs. L.D. Hildenbrandt, canvassed the community and secured pledges amounting to $1,015.50. The largest contributions were $100 from Taussig and $50 from Adolphus Busch; the rest, ranging from $5-25, came from businesses as well as private citizens. In 1888, the committee rented quarters on the second floor of the Union Dairy Co., 1532 Franklin Ave., stocked them with books and current newspapers, and opened
them to the public as free reading rooms on March 3. The suite, which was connected to the street by a private stairwell, included one small room fitted up as a library and a lecture hall capable of seating 100 people. In the beginning, the rooms were open weekday evenings and all day on Sundays.

Once the rooms began to draw a steady number of readers, the committee inaugurated lecture courses on Friday nights. Topics of the lectures were wide-ranging; series were given on American history, art history, the physical sciences, engineering, biographies, and health. The first season's offerings included "An Hour in Picturesque London"; "How Insects Help Plants and Trees to Bear Their Fruit"; "Picturesque Berlin" (by Sheldon); "Popular Readings; Humorous, Dramatic and Poetic"; "English Parliament Buildings and the English Parliament"; and "Astronomy: The Earth compared with other Planets." In this pre-motion picture era, the illustrated travel lectures were among the most popular offerings. Volunteer lecturers included Washington University instructors, public school teachers, lawyers, physicians, clergy, and business people. In the program's first year, tickets to a full course of lectures cost 50 cents; about 100 tickets were sold. The money, which was collected by a committee of workingmen, was spent on books for the library. The classes in "Home Culture" projected in Sheldon's leaflet were initiated Dec. 28, 1888.

Martha Fischel, who later would serve as the first woman president of both the St. Louis Society and the AEU, taught girls domestic skills such as cooking, sewing, housecleaning and laundering. In the following decades, the Self-Culture Halls Association incorporated as a separate entity from the Ethical Society, purchased halls on the North Side and South Side, and added coursework and study clubs to its educational offerings.

Another suborganization founded in 1888 was the Ladies Philanthropic Society, whose first undertaking was the establishment of an "underage kindergarten" for children under 7 (under prevailing Missouri law, 7 was the earliest age at which children could enter the public school system) at the free reading rooms; the concept was still a new one, as Susan Blow had established the nation's first kindergartens in St. Louis in 1873. The first kindergarten class at the readings rooms was held November 26. Mrs. L.D. Hildenbrandt, president of the Ladies Society, oversaw the project.

In the Vanguard

In its second season, the Society formalized its association with the parent organization. The American Ethical Union had yet to be formed, but the first three societies had established a federation called the Union of the Societies for Ethical Culture. At the union's annual convention in November
1887, the St. Louis Society was accepted into the federation after its five delegates endorsed the union's constitution. The union's principal functions were to provide leadership training and an interchange of speakers. Adler held leadership colloquiums at his summer retreat in the Adirondacks, and the leaders also took part in a "School of Applied Ethics" that was held each summer from 1891 to 1895 at Plymouth, Massachusetts. Adler was a leading director and teacher, but the program was not limited to the Ethical Fraternity. Philosopher-psychologist William James, who had a profound influence on Sheldon and other ethical leaders, was a regular participant. Sheldon participated as an instructor in the department directed by Adler.

Another function of the Union was the quarterly publication of addresses by ethical leaders. Subscriptions cost $1 a year, and all Society members were expected to subscribe.

With two full seasons behind them, the Society's organizers felt confident that they had launched a tenable institution. However, they were not self-assured; they knew the Society would advance only if members' steady interest evolved into wholehearted commitment. Stevens and Arnstein, in the board's second annual report, issued a call for that zeal:

We feel that we are in the right direction; that we have the basis on which all religious effort for the future will develop. When compared to the churches, it is true that we are small in numbers; but the greatness of an effort consists not at the outset in the number of its supports, but in the intrinsic worth of the idea which it represents. The numbers come when the work is done. We, however, who believe in it, and are assured that the idea at the basis of our work is to be the basis of the religion of the future, propose, whatever be our membership, to give our strength, our energy and our enthusiasm to doing the work; to be in the vanguard of that great work. Here, and here alone, we feel that we can be loyal to our convictions and faithful to the highest interests of our posterity.

(Second annual report of the Society for Ethical Culture of St. Louis; Ethical Society archives)

[FOOTNOTE 1: Lucas Place was an exclusive residential stretch of Locust Street. It was later made a public thoroughfare and subsumed into the latter.]
[FOOTNOTE 2: While this title is the one found most frequently in historical notes, including Sheldon's memoirs, a few documents refer to it as "The Relative Advantage of America as the Field for a New Religious Movement" or "The Relative Advantages of America Over Europe in Developing a New Religious Movement."

[FOOTNOTE 3: Busch was not a member of the Society and is not known to have attended meetings. He contributed out of regard for William Brandenburger, his director of advertising and a devoted member of the Society.]
In the 1890s, Sheldon developed a fixed course of study for the Sunday School. Equally dissatisfied with secular civics texts and sectarian catechisms, he wrote a series of books for the ethical instruction of children. His task, as he saw it, was to inspire in children the same reverence for Duty -- he habitually capitalized the word -- that the God image commands in explicitly theistic religions. The ethical precepts he taught were recognizably Judeo-Christian, right down to the "thou shalt not" phrasing, but he presented them without reference to supernatural sanction. Rather, he repeatedly referred to them as "the truths of the lessons in ethics which have been found out from thousands of years of experience on the part of the human race." (Lessons in the Study of Habits, Walter L. Sheldon, W.M. Welch Co., Chicago, 1903; p. 16; italics added) Although the Bible was his principal source of moral teachings and illustrations, his frequent use of texts from Buddhism, Confucianism, the Stoics, and modern philosophers of the West bolstered his contention that justice is a universal and self-evident law. The "God problem" was not introduced until the last stage of the program.

Sheldon considered the ethical instruction of children a sacred task. To fail to provide it, or to provide it badly, was for him far worse than common crimes of selfishness. He took to heart the biblical admonition that it would be better for one to "be drowned by a millstone around his neck, in the depths of the sea" than to lead a child astray. (Matthew 18:6; New American Bible) By modern estimation, he took the task too seriously. He clearly delighted in the moral nurturance of children, but his concessions to their childishness were more pragmatic than sympathetic. Cleverly used, songs and lighthearted dialogues served to garner attention and secretly edify even the most unwitting child; fun as fun had no place in the program.

**Songs and Recitations**

The instructional session that Sheldon developed lasted for an hour and a quarter on Sunday mornings. The session began with a religious service that corresponded to the adult program. Singing was a regular feature of the service. Because most sectarian songs were inappropriate, Sheldon relied on songs arising within the Ethical movement, such as Adler's "City of Light." He advised teachers to use innocuous ditties on motivational themes when they were "desperate . . . to arouse the children." To balance such fluff, he wrote, "we may strike a deeper chord, with a faint touch of solemnity in it, as we
introduce a song dealing with the experience of stern, inevitable toil by which men must earn their subsistence, reminding us of the injunction laid upon the whole human race: 'In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread.' (An Ethical Sunday School: A Scheme for the Moral Instruction of the Young, Walter L. Sheldon, Macmillan Co., New York, 1900; p. 8)

The children's service also included a recitation by a student of a poem, essay, or scriptural passage. Another feature was a brief talk by the superintendent or a guest speaker on the "Beautiful Thought" for the day. The aphorisms that formed the bases of these talks were drawn from classic literature of the East and West. For example:

No man securely doth command, unless he hath learned readily to obey. -- Thomas a Kempis

If you wish for anything that belongs to another, that which is your own is lost. -- Epictetus

How long I shall live depends upon accident; but it depends upon myself how well I live. -- Seneca

The superior man thinks of virtue; the small man thinks of comfort. The superior man thinks of the sanctions of law; the small man thinks of favors which he may receive. -- Confucius

Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall. -- St. Paul

What fools say is pleasure, that the noble say is pain; what fools say is pain, that the noble know as pleasure. -- Buddha

(Ibid., pp. 14-15)

Sayings of Jesus were conspicuously absent from the collection: Sheldon wanted those sayings to stand out in the minds of the children from all other classes of literature. When the children regrouped after their formal lessons, the "Beautiful Thought" for the day was recited by a member of each class, and then by all the children in unison. This repetition, of course, was designed to help the students commit the aphorisms to memory.

Frequently, the children's service also included a responsive exercise that called for the children's assent to ethical commands and devotion to Platonic ideals. Sheldon claimed to share in the popular
distaste for rote learning, but he maintained that this exercise was needed to "lodge at once in the minds of the young the few main, fundamental principles underlying our whole scheme of instruction." (Ibid., p. 3) Because it amounts to an Ethical Society catechism, the exercise is worth quoting in full:

RESPONSES

Superintendent:

"Truth is the strong thing. Let man's life be true."

The School:

The Sense of Duty we should place above everything else in the world.

Superintendent:

"Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong, and the most ancient heavens through thee are fresh and strong."

The School:

The Good Life for its own sake, without thought of reward, is what we should most care for.

One of the Teachers: One of the Teachers:

"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

"Though the cause of evil prosper, yet 'tis truth alone is strong."

Superintendent:

COMMANDS WE ARE TO OBEY

The School:

1. Thou shalt not lie.
2. Thou shalt not steal.
3. Thou shalt do no murder.
4. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
5. Thou shalt not covet what belongs to another.
One of the Teachers:  
"The Eternal seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Eternal looketh on the heart."

One of the Teachers:  
"Whoever fights, whoever falls, Justice conquers evermore, Justice after as before."

Superintendent:  
COMMENDS WE ARE TO OBEY

The School:  
1. Thou shalt obey thy conscience.  
2. Thou shalt revere the soul in thyself and in all others.  
3. Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother.  
4. Thou shalt respect the laws of thy country.  
5. Thou shalt make thyself of service to thy fellow man.

One of the Teachers:  
"Look not outside of yourself for a refuge; Thou canst not then be false be a refuge to yourself."

One of the Teachers:  
"To thine own self be true; Thou canst not then be false to any man."

Superintendent:  
WHAT WE ARE TO LOVE

The School:  
We are to love the Good with a supreme love. We are to love knowledge, and to seek Truth wherever it may be found. We are to love the Beautiful; but even more we are to love the Good and the True. We are to love these as if they were one: the True, the Beautiful and the Good.
One of the Teachers: "The Soul itself is the witness of the Soul, and the Soul is the refuge of the Soul; despise not thine own Soul, the supreme witness of men." improvement of the soul."

Superintendent: WHAT WE ARE TO DO

The School:
1. We should think first of our father and mother.
2. We should labor for the welfare of our own home.
3. We should help those who are weak or in trouble.
4. We should work for the good of our country.
5. We should believe in the Brotherhood of Man.

One of the Teachers: "He that is greatest among you shall be as one that serves." May we always be ready to serve.

Superintendent: WHAT WE ARE TO STRIVE FOR

The School:
To be true to ourselves, true to our home, true to our country, true to our fellow-men. We are to strive to be true in everything.

Superintendent: "Truth is the strong thing. Let man's life be true."

(Ibid., pp. 4-5)
In these services, as in their adult counterparts, Sheldon sought to create an atmosphere of reverence. In his instructions for the use of lantern slides, for instance, he recommended dwelling on Greek statues and the madonnas of Raphael to conjure a sense of the sublime. Likewise, he incorporated recitals of classical music, talks on the Egyptian pyramids, and other presentations that promised to arouse "solemn, mystical feelings." These devices, he wrote, helped the children "associate the sentiments belonging to the Eternal, the Infinite, the Absolute, with the distinctions between Right and Wrong, with the thought of the Moral Law." (Ibid., p. 10) He did not put much value on the meditative mood per se, but he believed it made the pupils especially receptive to the serious business of their ethical lessons. He deemed these "warm-up" exercises so powerful that he called for a kind of "cool-down" exercise after the lessons -- perhaps a short story that would "let the minds down' from the high level we have been endeavoring to keep them on during the study time." (Ibid., p.18)

Sheldon's Curriculum

The ethical lessons consisted of Bible stories and studies in ethical duties. The youngest children, generally ages 7 to 9, studied Sheldon's "Old Testament Bible Stories for the Young." Sheldon's rendering of those tales minimizes references to the Deity: "Yahweh," in his rare appearances, comes across as a mythical figure on the order of Zeus. The stories were presented much the way fables are told, without mention of their historicity. Sheldon chose the Bible over other possible literary bases because he found in it a comprehensive collection of ethical illustrations. Furthermore, he was mindful that children of Ethical Society members were being raised in a peculiar religious environment, and he feared they would be at a social and intellectual disadvantage if they never learned the classic tales their peers studied in sectarian Sunday schools.

The next stage of the program introduced the study of personal duties. Sheldon's "Lessons in the Study of Habits," the teacher's manual for this stage, was intended to foster reflective, deliberate character formation. The 31 chapters that made up the body of the text were devoted to expositions of such virtues as truthfulness, perseverance, and bravery, and such vices as laziness, cheating, and exaggeration. Each chapter included a list of applicable proverbs, a list of duties to be committed to memory and faithfully adopted, and an illustrative poem. The substance of each lesson was given in a hypothetical teacher-pupil dialogue, which was intended to help the teacher elicit the students' ethical insights. Those insights, however, invariably were guided toward preconceived precepts; Sheldon's belief in an absolute "Moral Law" was reflected in his presumption that right-thinking students would always arrive at the same moral conclusions. The purpose of these lessons, as Sheldon stated in his
suggestions to parents and teachers, was "to influence the moods and temperament, the feelings or character of the young people." (Ibid., p. 15) Students were encouraged to examine their motives and weigh conflicting values. The loss of friendship and respect is repeatedly presented as the price of immoral behavior. With its Puritan severity and elevation of self-abnegation, "Study of Habits" is something of a children's version of Thomas a Kempis's "Imitation of Christ," one of Sheldon's most revered books on the inner life. An excerpt from the dialogue on "Humility" illustrates that tone:

[W]hen a boy or girl is anxious that other people should look at them, point them out, and say how smart they are, how much more they know than other boys or girls; what persons are they really thinking of most of all? You or me, for example? "No," you say, "they are thinking about themselves."

Yes, but in what way? Is such a person thinking about improving himself, forming better habits for himself, or blaming himself for some mistake? "No," you answer, "that is not it at all. It is self-admiration."

At the age of 10 or 11, Sunday School pupils were introduced to the next stage of instruction, "Duties in the Home and the Family." In this section, teachers stressed the uniqueness and sanctity of family relations. The children were taught that obedience to their parents was the most fundamental of moral commands. "When the final question comes as to why one should obey," Sheldon wrote, "this theme always ends with the one crucial answer: Because they are my father and mother." Obeying the letter but not the spirit of parental orders, or obeying them only when in the presence of authority -- what Sheldon called "eye-service" -- were roundly denounced. Nor did the obligations of a child end with independence: The lesson plan underlined "how mean and base those people are who neglect their aged parents." Furthermore, the children were taught that "obedience is a great, universal rule of life, and that all persons of all ages are obliged to obey."

Turning to sibling relationships, the course promoted harmony and "mutual service." Teachers pointed out that, in some families, brothers and sisters dissolved their ties as they grew to adulthood; the children were exhorted to consciously maintain those bonds. This section also detailed common courtesies, such as table manners and points of thoughtfulness to be remembered during times of sickness and grief. To minimize lapses of attention, Sheldon urged teachers to tell animal stories from time to time. The blood relations of animals, he said, underscore the universality of family ties and point up the superiority of human life. Another relief measure used in this section was the study of holidays -- Thanksgiving, Christmas, birthdays, and memorials. Significantly, Christmas was presented as the birth
of Jesus, whom Sheldon forever held up as the world's greatest teacher, but Easter was described as a timeless festival marking the renewal of life.

Jesus of Nazareth was the focal point of the course for 11- and 12-year-olds. Sheldon collaborated with associate teachers and the mothers of pupils in writing "Story of the Life of Jesus for the Young told from an Ethical Standpoint," which was first published in 1895. The book, a Sunday School staple for decades, portrayed Jesus as an ethical revolutionary, a man of exemplary kindness and mercy. His teachings, which Sheldon termed "the rarest jewels of ethical experience that the moral nature of man has ever evolved," were italicized to facilitate memorization. (An Ethical Sunday School, p. 102) Sheldon drew upon his Palestinian sojourn in describing the story's geographical and cultural setting, and he took broad liberties in extrapolating the thoughts and feelings of Jesus and the apostles from New Testament accounts. Sheldon found that the story of Jesus, which he frequently referred to as "the most beautiful story in the world," illustrated every ethical precept he held dear. He expounded on each of the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, contrasting the "higher way" Jesus taught with the brutishness of what Plato called "the unreflective life." Although he portrayed all the principals of the story sympathetically, Sheldon held up Judas as the archetype of greed and and disloyalty; the Pharisees represented shallow self-righteousness; and Pontius Pilate, haughty indifference. In the story of Martha and Mary, Sheldon found an illustration of his own reverence for the inner life over material comfort.

In keeping with the Society's metaphysical neutrality, the book is innocent of theology. It may be the world's only account of the life of Jesus that makes no mention of God, prayer, miracles, or resurrection. Sheldon defined the "kingdom of heaven" as the inner peace enjoyed by those who live lives of charity. When Sheldon's Jesus was baptized, "he fancied he saw in the sky a grand and solemn face looking down upon him," and the being that tempted him in the desert was not Satan but "the weaker, lower self within him." (Story of the Life of Jesus for the Young told from an Ethical Standpoint, Walter L. Sheldon, S. Burns Weston, Philadelphia, Second Edition, 1909; pp. 33, 38) Miracles also are related in naturalistic terms. For instance, Sheldon wrote that Jesus, with his extraordinary tranquility, calmed his frantic apostles, not the stormy sea; "years afterward," he wrote, "they said that it seemed to them at that instant as if the storm itself had subsided and the sea become calm." (Ibid., p. 64) Likewise, he wrote that Jesus's compassion had such a marked effect on the sick and lame that "many persons, after being visited by him and having felt that gentle hand, dated their recovery from that very moment." (Ibid., p. 59) As always, Sheldon did not attack beliefs in supernatural events, but he gently noted that "when a person of this kind appears in the world, he is so strange and unlike other people, so much above them and different from them, that they only partly understand him; and so
it is that they may be very much confused about what he said and did, and may have told it sometimes in one way when he said it or did it in another." (Ibid., pp. 18-19)

At the age of 12 or 13, students moved on to "Citizenship and the Duties of a Citizen." Based on another of Sheldon's instructional books, this section was intended to inculcate in students a love of country and a determination to uphold the standards of civilized society. Like "Study of Habits," its chapters included teacher-student dialogues and lists of duties to be committed to memory. In this case, the duties included voting, paying taxes, obeying laws, and performing military service. Ethical points were illustrated by historical tales of civil service and wartime heroism; excerpts from classic political orations; and poems expressing patriotic sentiments. Though not intended as a civics text, the book outlined the principles of American government as a base for ethical reflection. The children were taught to extend their regard for the family to the state: "We want to do away with the old, crude conception about 'government being a necessary evil,' by trying to have the young see in their national life a certain element of sacredness," Sheldon wrote. (An Ethical Sunday School, pp. 126-127) He underscored this point by insisting that an American flag be ceremoniously hung in the classroom each Sunday. He pointed out that patriotism demands the willingness to die for one's country, but he emphasized the equal value of living for it by fulfilling civic responsibilities. The course included four to six classes on the history of St. Louis; this segment was capped off by a trip to the Missouri Historical Society to inspect artifacts from the founding of the city. The course was not entirely provincial, however: The final lesson focused on loyalty to the entire human family, and stimulated hope for "the time to come in future ages, far, far distant, when all cities and all states and all countries are to unite in one great, universal, human brotherhood." (Ibid., p. 132)

The next course in the series, "Duties to One's Self," formally introduced students to principles of introspection. Now in their early to mid-teens, the students were taught to attend closely to their thoughts, feelings, and motives. Sheldon's psychology was primitive: he treated the mind, body, "heart," and will as somehow distinct. But he was honest enough to disclaim psychoanalytic authority, asserting instead that character development no more requires intellectual certainty than it does theistic faith. Students were taught to show proper regard for the body in hygiene and dress, but the "mind-life" always was deemed pre-eminent. Likewise, the "rights" of the senses were recognized, but love of knowledge was shown to be a higher and more lasting pleasure than sensual satisfactions. Sheldon was a stern advocate of Self Mastery, and his denunciations of such "evil feelings" as anger and jealousy were lacking in sympathy and delicacy. The principle lesson of the course, he wrote, was to make it clear to the students that "they can control their feelings if they choose to do so." (Ibid., p. 155) He was not entirely devoid of emotional sophistication, however. He took pains to illustrate the way feelings arise
from mental preoccupations, and taught that "we can shut out one subject by calling up another, and in
that way shut out a bad feeling by calling up a good one." (Ibid., p. 155) His proposed dialogue on "The
Importance of Feelings" illustrates his insistence on one's responsibility for one's character:

Where do our feelings come from? "Oh," you reply, "they are born in us, of course; we get them
just as we get the shape of our body or the expression of our face."

All of our feelings, do you mean, every one of them; are they all born in us? "No; perhaps not
quite all of them," you say, "but some of them, at any rate." Yes; you are right; some of them are born in
us. But where do the others come from, if they are not born in us? "Why," you answer, "they come by
growth, little by little, according to what we think or say or do."

* * *

How does it happen that certain feelings that were very weak in us at the first,
became very strong, and other feelings which were very strong became weak and seemed
to die away?

"Well," you answer, "that depends somewhat on the way we conduct ourselves,
on what we do, what sort of experiences we have." Can you give me an illustration of
what you mean?

Do you suppose, for instance, it ever happens that a person who seems to be born
with a good temper, as we say, with no special disposition to be irritable or to become
angry -- do you think it might happen that such a person later on in life might have a bad
temper, be inclined to be cross or out of sorts, to show anger or to be irritable?

"Yes," you say, "it might happen." And how about the other side? Do you
consider it possible that a person might be born with a bad temper, inclined to be cross,
irritable with everybody, and yet, when the person grew up, really not to have such a
temper at all? "Yes," you reply, "that might be possible."

Which happens more often, do you suppose -- the change where a person loses a
bad temper; or where a person not born with it, acquires a bad temper? "Oh," you
answer, "probably it more often happens that a man gets a bad temper, instead of losing
it." I am afraid that you are right. At any rate it appears, after all, that all the feelings we
have do not depend wholly on the feelings we were born with; some of them we get
ourselves.

(Ibid., pp. 150-152)
The final course in the Sunday School dealt with religious beliefs. This course was for 15- and 16-year-olds, though Sheldon worried that, even at that age, the students may be too young to grasp the subtleties of religious thought. Naturally, the course presented no metaphysical creed; its purpose was to give an overview of religious history and to "start certain tendencies of thought or belief" that would evolve into a mature transcendentalism. Sheldon felt it was critical to point the youngsters in the right direction before they entered the world. Without the proper start, he wrote, they might become "out-and-out atheists" or "go off on a side-track and return to a supernaturalism that suggests the fetish worship of thousands of years ago." (Ibid., p. 176) The course traced the development of cultural beliefs about gods and God. It included a study of the Bible, the Koran, the writings of Confucius, and the Buddhist "Path of Virtue." The students were taught to hold these writings in special regard.

A brief account of anthropological history set the stage for the study of beliefs about divinity. The students traced the evolution of beliefs from primitive nature worship to pantheism to monotheism. They examined the ways in which theistic beliefs can affect human behavior -- sometimes inspiring virtue, sometimes inspiring bizarre rituals and irrational acts. They studied the manifestations of superstition in contemporary culture. Through it all, they drew correlations between the evolution of the God-concept and the growth of ethical sophistication. For instance, Sheldon noted that the belief in a plethora of capricious gods was matched by a philosophy of "every man for himself." By contrast, he taught that the most advanced religious attitude -- that is, appreciation of the interconnectedness and ultimate unity of things -- had found expression in the comparatively orderly civilization of the Industrial Age. Sheldon took no stand on the existence of a Supreme Being, but he taught that beneath the prevalent belief in a Judgment Day lay a reliable intuition that "the Universe, or the Power behind it, supports the Cause of Right." (Ibid., p. 186) He left it to parents to tell their children whether that Power is personal or "too grand, too lofty, to be described by any one word or any one name." (Ibid., p. 206) The belief he counted as universal and self-evident, the culminating assertion of the course of instruction, was that Duty, "the God who speaks on the inside," is deserving of unqualified devotion.
Chapter ??

CULTIVATING CHARACTER
The Self-Culture Halls Association

As a body, the Ethical Society of St. Louis has not consistently engaged in activism. In this regard, it stands in the shadow of its parent, the New York Society, which has had a pronounced impact on its community through a variety of service projects. For most of its history, the St. Louis society's chief contribution to community welfare has been in the field of communication: By sponsoring forums for provocative speakers and social events that foster the cross-fertilization of activist plans, it has helped socially conscious individuals direct their energies to worthy tasks. On occasion, however, the fellowship has undertaken community service as a body. The society's most activist era was its first few decades, when the spirit of Felix Adler came to town in the person of his protege Walter Sheldon. Like Adler, Sheldon believed a religious fellowship is hollow unless it is bound together in action:

The enthusiasm for unity and brotherhood . . . will mean nothing unless it calls forth a unity and brotherhood to some definite purpose; otherwise it will sink into an old-time religious emotionalism. I see no purpose in religious organization unless it can alter and refine the very foundations of human society.

("The Religious Beliefs of Others," An Ethical Movement, pp. 81-82.)

Sheldon's most expansive undertaking was the establishment of free community schools called the Wage Earners' Self-Culture Clubs. As noted earlier, this program began in 1888 as an experiment in "educational philanthropy"; it offered educational opportunities that were then available only to the affluent. Program offerings included reading rooms, lectures, course work, debating clubs, excursions, concerts, and social gatherings. The program employed no examinations and bestowed no certificates. Cultural and moral edification, rather than training in employment skills, was its object:

What we wished to call out or foster was the latent manhood or womanhood of the artisan class, which tends to die away or never appear at all, owing to the monotonous grind in the routine of daily toil, or to the restricted sphere in which their lives are cast, or to the cheap and often vulgar amusements to which they are attracted. It was the belief of the management that opportunities for intellectual self-improvement worked in the direction of upbuilding of character. By opening out a wider area of
interests, connecting what they know of the present by a knowledge of the past; by fostering interest in the physical world around them through the study of natural science, an element of soul is called forth, the man or woman side is aroused, a sense of personal dignity and self-respect is awakened, and the individual from that time forth stands on another plane of life. What he gets may be the most fragmentary knowledge, scraps of information, only a glimpse here and there into history, literature, or the laws of nature. He may come to us for only a few months, and disappear forever from our ken. But I venture to say that in almost every such instance a new impulse has been given, or the foundation laid for higher possibilities of advance in that one man. He will never be quite the same commonplace creature he had been before."

("The Wage Earners' Self-Culture Clubs of St. Louis: A Sketch of Their History," By Walter L. Sheldon, Ethical Addresses, undated volume; pp. 45-6.)

Although administered by Sheldon and Ethical Society members, the Self-Culture program was not an exercise in Ethical Culture propaganda. In fact, Sheldon insisted the program maintain strict neutrality regarding religion and politics. Neither religious organs nor anti-religious periodicals were permitted in the reading rooms. Believers and unbelievers were equally welcome in the program, and no attempt was made to sway their beliefs. As with the theological neutrality maintained by the Ethical movement itself, this policy did not mean that religion was a taboo topic or that clergy were unwelcome. Priests, ministers and rabbis were frequent lecturers, but Sheldon noted that, to his knowledge, they said nothing "which could be considered as denominational language that might in any way jar on the people who come there, representing practically all the religious phases in St. Louis." Unless they had special academic knowledge to share, clergy were asked to offer their listeners non-doctrinal folk wisdom. In the 1895-96 season, for instance, Bishop D.S. Tuttle of Christ Church Cathedral spoke on "How to Enjoy Life in a Sensible Way"; and Rev. S.J. Niccolls of Second Presbyterian offered advice on "How One Can Get the Most Pleasure Out of Life While Having to Work Very Hard."

At the outset, the program consisted of free reading rooms at 1532 Franklin Ave. which were open weekday evenings and all day Sundays. The rooms were stocked with the St. Louis daily newspapers; weeklies such as Nation, Harper’s Weekly, Scientific American, Age of Steel, Puck, and Judge; and monthlies such as North American Review, Forum, Arena, Century, Scribner’s, and Popular Science. In its first season, the program expanded to include lectures by Washington University professors and other local professionals. Proceeds from the lectures were used to build up the rooms’ nascent library. In the program’s second season, weekly classes were added. The first of these were
classes in Domestic Economy under the direction of Martha Fischel, a prominent member of the Ethical Society.

When the project outgrew its quarters in 1892, it was moved to 1730 Washington St., a former residence on the southeast corner of 18th and Washington. This building, also rented, became known as Self-Culture Hall. In addition to a library -- which now boasted 1,200 volumes -- and reading rooms, it had a lecture hall, baths and a gymnasium. It housed a piano for use at concerts and parties. Sheldon continued to supervise the project, but in the fall of 1892, the Ethical Society hired E.N. Plank Jr. to assist him both in his platform duties and in the direction of the Self-Culture program. To maximize his availability to program participants, Plank lived at the building.

On June 1, 1893, the Self-Culture Hall Association was incorporated as a distinct entity. The association's board of trustees was composed of 10 to 12 "representative citizens of St. Louis," which meant that not all of them belonged to the Ethical Society. Among its long-term presidents were James Taussig, the first administrator of the Ethical Society; and Dr. William Taussig, a brother of James, who was president of the St. Louis Bridge and Terminal Association. The board selected the director and superintendent, and gave them virtually free rein in developing educational programs. Most of the trustees were middle-class philanthropists, but eventually a few blue-collar workers undertook administrative responsibility after participating in the program and serving as officers of workers' social clubs. The newly formed corporation's first item of business was the purchase of the headquarters building on Washington.

In May of 1895, the association and the Ethical Society board agreed that the association would henceforth assume full responsibility for its increasingly demanding financial affairs. In its official capacity, the Society's board of trustees no longer helped the association raise or administer funds. Nonetheless, the association's volunteer administrative force continued to be drawn primarily from Society membership. The following October, Plank resigned from his posts as associate lecturer of the Society and resident superintendent of Self-Culture Hall. He was replaced by William H. Lighty, who also served the Ethical Society as superintendent of the Sunday School.

After experimenting with a satellite program in rented quarters at 2004 1/2 South Broadway, the association in 1895 purchased a building at 1921 South Ninth St. to serve as a second Self-Culture Hall. At the opening ceremony on October 17, St. Louis Mayor Cyrus Walbridge spoke on "What We Can All Do to Improve St. Louis." This building, which came to be known as the South Side Self-Culture Hall, had about 10 rooms, including a lecture hall that accommodated nearly 200 people. It also had a classroom, a reading room, a kitchen for cooking classes, and a basement equipped with showers.
The next fall, the association moved its headquarters from the Washington Street building to a larger facility at 1832 Carr St. on the North Side. The Carr Street building, which previously served as a hospital, had 27 rooms and a basement equipped with shower baths and a rudimentary gymnasium. The two largest rooms served as lecture halls, each with a seating capacity of about 100. Other rooms included a library; a reading room; a game room for children; a men's club room equipped with pool and billiard tables; and club rooms for women, girls, and boys. A photographic darkroom eventually was added. Both halls had playgrounds equipped with swings and see-saws; the grounds were planted with flower beds to which the children attended. Lighty and his family lived on the second floor of the North Side Hall; a "lady superintendent" also resided in the building. Each of the permanent halls had a librarian who performed clerical work and stocked and issued books. The North Side Hall served as a sub-station of the St. Louis Public Library: Neighbors filled out request slips, and the janitor retrieved the necessary books from the main library every few days.

The association also conducted satellite programs at several rental halls. Over the years, these included Marten's Hall, 921 Old Manchester Rd.; Apollo Hall, 3809 North Ninth St.; and a hall in the Tower Grove neighborhood. In addition, it was given free use of Power House Hall, an entertainment hall located over the power house of a streetcar firm at 3700 N. Broadway, on condition company employees could participate in all Self-Culture programs free of charge. Reflecting the association's sober idealism, these auxiliary programs were initiated where and when the need existed and were allowed to lapse when neighborhood interest declined. Some lasted for only two or three years.

Classes and Study Groups

In the association's heyday, lectures were offered five or six evenings a week at various locations. At each of the permanent halls, separate evenings were reserved for men's and women's lectures. Addresses at satellite sites were open to men, women, and children alike. The schedule followed at the Washington Street site in 1892 was typical: The debating club met Monday evenings; Tuesdays were for entertainment and talks for boys ages 10 to 15; Thursdays, lectures and entertainment for women; Fridays, lectures and entertainment for men and their families; and Saturdays, Domestic Economy classes and social gatherings. Women generally preferred lecture courses in art, literature, and family relations, while men preferred courses in history, law for the layman, engineering, and architecture. The men formed a weekly study group in civil government; over the years, this group examined the U.S. Constitution, studied biographies of statesmen, and investigated city government. In this latter effort, the men used the city charter of St. Louis and the mayor's annual report as their guide; the project was aided by a series of speakers from City Hall. Women's study groups focused on the plays
of Shakespeare; the history of painting, aided by a collection of stereopticon slides that came to number more than 1,000; and biographies of great women such as Florence Nightingale, Charlotte Bronte, and Joan of Arc. If both sexes expressed an interest in a course, lecturers were asked to repeat it. For instance, when a female physician -- a rarity in that day -- captivated the women with a course in "Physiology and Health," it was repeated for the men at their request -- but by a male physician. Some courses were more inspirational than educational; one season, a series of notable citizens addressed the topic, "Why Some Men Succeed and Other Men Fail." Sheldon and his associates, eager to sustain interest in the program, were responsive to participants' requests. If attendance fell, they changed the topic, sometimes disrupting a sequential course to inject an isolated lecture by a charismatic speaker. Sheldon considered a single-sex lecture a success if 50 to 60 people attended; lectures open to men, women and children sometimes drew as many as 200 people.

By the turn of the century, fifteen to thirty study groups, each with its own volunteer teacher, were in progress at a time. Membership ranged from five to 20 participants per group. Courses in reading, elocution, and English composition were taught to those who already had a command of the language; courses in French, German, Spanish, Italian, and English as a second language were offered as demand warranted. In addition to academic subjects, lessons were offered in singing and dancing; calisthenics and gymnastics; and piano, mandolin, and guitar. The association also offered a few classes in employment skills such as stenography, bookkeeping, and mechanical drawing, but Sheldon minimized these offerings, and stretched a point in calling them elements of the program's "general upbuilding method."

Once the association acquired permanent quarters on both the North Side and South Side, Fischel implemented an elaborate curriculum in the Domestic Economy Schools. Each Saturday, 100 to 150 girls attended the school at each of the permanent halls. Each location had its own superintendent. Twenty-five to thirty volunteer teachers served the schools; an early member of the South Side volunteer corps was Lilly Anheuser Busch, the wife of Adolphus Busch, president of Anheuser-Busch Cos. Courses were taught in cooking, sewing, laundering, money management, and other aspects of homemaking. Reading and music were provided while the girls worked "in order to bring to bear the special refining effect that comes from such influences"; often the girls sang while they worked. A few years into the program, Fischel started advanced classes designed to help older girls make a transition into the adult Self-Culture program.

At the North Side hall, four or five rooms were set apart for the exclusive use of the Domestic Economy School. In the furnished bedroom and parlor, the students learned how to sweep, dust, clean lamps, make fires, polish furniture, manage house plants, and decorate. They studied cooking in the
kitchen, which was equipped with essential appliances and utensils and adorned with cooking charts. In
the dining room, they took turns setting the table, waiting on their classmates, and clearing the table. At
the smaller South Side hall, these arrangements were simpler and temporary. Housekeeping lessons
included lessons in applied science: "Poetry is thrown into the menial task of making a fire, when at the
same time they learn about the match that is used to kindle it, ... where the wood comes from, what
materials are used, and how many different persons are employed in the manufacture of every single
match. When they are washing the tumblers they learn about the making of glass . . . ." (Pamphlet,
always, Sheldon made it clear these classes were intended to teach the girls skills for personal use, not
for employment. Success was marked when a girl attended class in a dress of her own making, not when
she got a job as a seamstress.

In the association's formative years, other children's activities were limited to the Underage
Kindergarten, run on weekday mornings by the Ladies Philanthropic Society of the Ethical Society for
children ages 3 to 6; and supervised use of playgrounds, gymnasiums, and game rooms during after-
school hours. To counterbalance the Domestic Economy Schools, the association experimented with
boys-only courses in handicrafts and military exercises. That program was slow to gain steam, probably
because it lacked a director of Fischel's vitality. Sheldon, however, laid the early failure of the boys'
program to the inherent rowdiness of boys. "Only after they have gone to work," he wrote, "and some of
the wild animal spirits in them have been toned down by the routine of toil, do they usually begin to
show ambitions in a higher direction." By 1908, however, the association offered children of both sexes
a full program of after-school and Saturday-morning activities, including boys' classes in carpentry,
woodcarving, iron working, basketry, and gymnastics; girls' classes in cooking, sewing, basketry,
singing, and gymnastics; and co-ed classes in story-telling, dramatics, clay modeling, and dancing. In
addition, association volunteers took the children on field trips and led them in organized games.
Participation in the program cost only 10 cents a month; pupils paid an additional 10 cents for piano
lessons and 2 cents for use of soap and towels for taking baths.

Another educational experiment of the Self-Culture program was the debating club. The young
men who took part in this club met once a week, usually under the supervision of a public school teacher
or administrator, to discuss topical issues. It was a rule with the club that every person present give his
opinion on the subject. Participants chose the topics of debate by vote. Among the issues they debated
were: "Should the Education of Children be Made Compulsory?"; "Is the Employment of Women in
Stores, Factories, and Workshops Detrimental to the Best Interests of Society?"; "Should the Right of
Suffrage be Extended to Women?"; "Has the Invention of Machinery been Advantageous to Wage-
Earners?"; and "Is a Protective Tariff Immoral?" Sheldon encourage debating clubs as a spur to critical reasoning, but he noted that they never lasted long: "Only a limited number care for such a department; still fewer care to talk; and the result is they talk themselves out and tire of listening to each other."

Culture and Frugality

In addition to educational programs, the Self-Culture association sponsored a variety of cultural events. Classes in civic history were augmented by field trips to the Missouri Historical Society museum. Excursions also were made to the Museum of Fine Arts, the Washington University Astronomical Observatory, the prehistoric mounds of southern Illinois, and manufacturing plants. Each June, the association sponsored a train trip to a rural area for a day of recreation; these "Country Rambles" drew several hundred picnickers.

In the late 1890s, the association began offering concerts at its halls and satellite sites. The St. Louis Musical Club, the Union Musical Club, and the Rubinstein Club volunteered their services in various years, and scores of other musicians provided solos and accompaniment. Sheldon reported that the working-class people who attended the concerts found that they enjoyed "really good music as well as the cheap worthless kind they often hear elsewhere in the city." Program participants who were learning to play instruments at the Self-Culture Halls sometimes gave concerts of their own; Sheldon charitably noted that, at those concerts, "it has to be taken for granted that the music cannot be of the same high order." In its quest to upgrade the use of leisure time, the association also sponsored dancing classes. These doubled as incentives for studiousness: Only those who had attended a class or lecture within the preceding seven days were permitted to attend. Dances and other social gatherings had no such strings attached.

In an effort to encourage thrift -- yet another of the Puritan virtues Sheldon extolled -- the association opened a Savings Department. When a participant succeeded in squirreling away the tidy sum of $3, the money was deposited in the St. Louis Union Trust Co. to draw interest. Children who participated in the Penny Savings Department received account books when they saved one dollar. To dispel participants' fears for the safety of their savings, the association found three "influential citizens" to guarantee the fund up to $10,000. In the 1901-02 season, 36 participants deposited a total of $2,793.70 in the fund. Of the 137 children who took part in the Penny Savings Department that year, 43 succeeded in opening bank accounts.

The Wearisome Details
The Self-Culture Clubs -- the social units of program participants -- were loosely organized. Members elected an executive committee and a secretary for both the men's club and women's club associated with each of the permanent halls. The presidents, however, were appointed by Sheldon or his associates. To charges that this practice was autocratic, Sheldon responded that pure democracy was inappropriate in a club that existed primarily for educational purposes; he considered it his duty to ensure that authority be vested in the best-educated members. The issue itself was academic, since it appears the clubs had little more than an advisory role in curriculum planning and the management of volunteers. However, they did take part in putting out a monthly bulletin. Begun in October 1897, this eight-page publication contained essays on moral character by Sheldon and other program administrators; announcements of lectures and special events; items of news regarding the association and club members; literary quotes; and letters from members. A 1901 edition contains an essay on the good life by John Lovejoy Elliott, founder and director of the New York Ethical Society's Hudson Guild; a listing of the more than 200 lantern slides acquired in conjunction with a lecture series on the Civil War; plans for holiday celebrations; a message chiding a club member for skipping classes after his nuptials; a note of thanks for donations of potted plants and a photographic exhibit; and announcements regarding the formation of a glee club, an instrumental musical group, and a needlework guild.

More than 500 people belonged to the four permanent Self-Culture Clubs at the turn of the century. Separate clubs were formed by the Stationary Engineers Brotherhood, which met monthly at Power House Hall, and by participants in a satellite branch at the manufacturing town of Leclaire, Ill. Now and then, the clubs' organizational structure disintegrated entirely, but Sheldon was unconcerned; he valued group cohesiveness only insofar as it facilitated the institution's educational aims.

Like the platform services of the Ethical Society, the educational programs of the Self-Culture Halls Association were suspended over the summer. The season ran from the first of October until the first of June. Even still, Sheldon noted, it required "the greatest possible exertion not to have the lagging time begin by the middle of April." During the off-season, women's clubs continued to hold informal meetings and social gatherings about once a week. As for the men, however, "it would . . . be practically impossible to drag them inside the building for any educational work during the summer months."

The program cost about $5,000 a year. Most of the budget was raised through donations of $2-50 annually from private citizens. Formal appeals stressed the program's non-sectarianism and promotion of good citizenship. In addition to cash donations, books and periodicals were contributed regularly by business people and the St. Louis Club. Fund-raising was the principal responsibility of the trustees who served on the finance committee; when their efforts fell short of budgetary requirements, they often made up the difference out of their own pockets. Club members also did what they could to
offset deficits: When the furnace at the North Side Hall went on the fritz in the 1902-03 season, they raised the $600 needed to replace it by throwing a bazaar.

To encourage the broadest possible participation, program fees were kept to a minimum. Most lectures were free and open to the public, but participants who wished to join study groups, take field trips, or use the halls' recreational facilities were required to enroll as club members for a fee of less than a dollar a year. About three-fourths of the teachers were volunteers, and their classes were free. For classes taught by paid teachers, the association charged enough to at least offset the additional cost. Students paid for their textbooks and study materials. At Power House Hall, where participants numbered 300 to 400 a year and operational costs were especially high, club members bought booklets containing coupons for each lecture and concert in the season. Fees for the use of the shower baths and gymnasiums covered the cost of maintaining those facilities.

Volunteers made the program possible. Had all the teachers and assistants been paid, Sheldon estimated the program would have cost at least twice as much. By Sheldon's count, more than 300 volunteers had taught classes, given lectures, or performed music for the association by the turn of the century; an additional 100 to 150 volunteers assisted in putting on the concerts. In an average year, about 50 teachers volunteered their services once a week; 70 to 80 people gave occasional lectures; and dozens more provided auxiliary services. Most of the lecturers were Washington University instructors, physicians, lawyers, clergy, and other local professionals; some were prominent citizens, ranging from postmasters to foreign consuls. Among their number were Gen. John W. Noble, secretary of the Interior under Harrison; Judge B.R. Burroughs of the Illinois Appellate Court; F. Louis Soldan, superintendent of the St. Louis Public Schools; Bishop D.S. Tuttle of Christ Church Cathedral; composer William H. Pommer; and Congressman Richard Bartholdt. Sheldon credited these volunteers with making the program a success:

I can recall the devotion with which business men ran up and down the city, canvassing for funds, or labored in the executive management, attending to the wearisome details essential to such a complex institution. And I know today also, what hearty devotion our committees are rendering, and what labor their efforts involved, and how much they are doing for us. Looking over the long list of co-workers, helpers in the cause, who have rendered service in many ways, it certainly stirs a feeling of the profoundest gratitude to one and all of them -- although naturally most of all to those who have sacrificed not only a single evening in the season, but whole days or scores of evenings in our cause.
What, after all, makes the success of such work is not the management at the head, but the devotion of the colleagues, the superintendents, and the volunteer workers. And if there has been anything unique in our institution, it has been the intense ardor of those who have served the institution in this way in devoting themselves to its purposes. The superintendents take hold of it as if it were a matter of life or death. The work itself seems to arouse a certain inspiration and love for it, which grows as the time goes on.

(Ibid., pp. 77-78.)

Coaxing the Latent Soul

Most of the club members were laborers. Censuses taken on random evenings turned up carpenters, tailors, cooks, machinists, factory workers, telephone operators, and teamsters. A smattering of teachers, clerks, and other white-collar workers also took part. One census showed that participants represented about 161 businesses and factories. Few construction workers took part in the program, leading Sheldon to question whether "the irregularity in employment among the building trades does not foster a certain indifference to self-improvement." In its first year, the program was open only to men; in successive seasons, the proportion of women and men in the program was about even. Membership was higher at the North Side site than on the South Side, which had a higher proportion of non-English-speaking immigrants.

While Sheldon boasted that "members of nearly all the races who speak the English language" participated in the program, he bemoaned its exclusion of African-Americans. Missouri had abolished slavery only 23 years before the Self-Culture program began. Many St. Louisans — some of whom had sided with the Confederacy — refused to mix with blacks in any social setting. In Sheldon's words, "the peculiar conditions here in a locality once a part of the South, make the race lines very sharp, and it would be practically impossible to carry on clubs where the two elements were thrown together." (Ibid., p. 45.) To offset the effects of white exclusiveness, Sheldon inaugurated the Colored People's Self-Improvement Federation in 1893. This institute adopted Booker T. Washington's attitude that blacks could overcome their harsh disadvantages only through the slow process of education. According to an 1893 Ethical Society pamphlet, "the main idea underlying their plan is to encourage that race to look to themselves for the advancement of their cause, instead of constantly appealing to the white race for assistance." (Pamphlet, "Ethical Society of St. Louis: What It Is and Its Work.") An average of 200 people took part in the federation's annual lecture course. Lectures were held fortnightly at Central Turner Hall.
In all, tens of thousands of working people took advantage of Self-Culture programs. In its annual report, the Self-Culture Hall Association listed the following attendance figures for the 1900-01 season:

Total attendance at all branches.................37,035
Total attendance at weekly lectures, concerts, socials......................10,531
Total number baths taken (over 12 months)......................9,693
Total attendance in adult classes..........................8,562
Total attendance in boys' and girls' classes......................7,528
Total number men enrolled in classes........................259
Total number women enrolled in classes......................297
Average weekly attendance, Domestic Economy School:
North Side Hall.........................110
South Side Hall..........................107
Daily average at free reading rooms........23
Estimated daily playground attendance.......40-50

The following season, total attendance rose to 39,351. Despite these figures, Sheldon lamented what he deemed intellectual sluggishness among working-class people. He never expected Self-Culture to catch on like the phonograph, but he worried that industrialization was smothering the native curiosity of urban laborers:

It is often said that people are hungering for opportunities of enlightenment. But our experience was precisely to the contrary, and to many would have been profoundly discouraging. It has never struck me that there was any great rush for self-improvement from the artisan or any other class in this country.

It was not that the wage-earner opposed us . . . but the latent soul I have spoken of, is often very latent, indeed, hidden far down under the surface, out of sight even of the person who may have it. This element of higher manhood doesn't come surging to the front at the start. The conditions of life have seared it over with the majority of boys and girls in these classes, before they have entered their teens. The soul for them was nipped in the very bud.
Ibid., pp. 49-50.)

Sheldon and his cohorts approached prospective participants on the streets and in factories; they distributed leaflets and spoke of the value of self-culture, taking pains to ensure their listeners that they were not being lured into some sort of religious meeting. In one instance, Sheldon reported that more than 100 young women attended a lecture after he spoke to them in their work place, but his joy was dashed when only two or three of them returned the following week. When discouraged, he took consolation in the belief that the association had a leavening effect on the entire community. "The working class of the city are generally aware that there is an important educational institution known as the Wage Earners' Self-Culture Clubs," he wrote. "The very fact of the existence of such work is an impulse, or suggestive of a standard or possibilities of self-improvement, to thousands who may not come directly under the influence of such a movement. I believe the effects of the existence of this association can be seen on the artisan class at large in St. Louis." (Ibid., p. 67.)

A Clubhouse for the People

In 1888, the year the first reading rooms were opened, the Ethical Society board of trustees noted in its annual report that the rooms had become "a kind of neighborhood Guild" and projected that, in time, "the entire neighborhood may look to them as a literary centre of refining and educating influence for the families of the neighborhood." An 1892 flyer referred to the Washington Street facility as "A Club House for the People." Throughout its existence, the association was directed according to that model, as distinct from the social settlement model according to which New York Society members had built Hudson Guild. The association never offered food, housing, or job counseling to the thousands of immigrants arriving in St. Louis in the late 19th century. It stuck to Sheldon's principle of inviting participants to expand their intellectual horizons; it provided the impetus, rather than the tools, to better one's lot. Sheldon considered adopting certain features of the settlement-house model, but he demurred on the grounds that such a program "can only be fully successful here and there in the rare instances where a peculiarly and unusually gifted individual of independent means can take the lead, and throw his whole life into the work." (Ibid., p. 47) However, he added, "those who may not have gifts for strictly charitable work, or know how to go into the homes of people in the slums and give assistance there, may yet have intellectual gifts or knowledge of some special kind, making them willing and glad to do some work for the self-improvement of their fellows." (Ibid., p. 47) Some of Sheldon's colleagues believed that the association's approach to bettering lives was the key to a just and egalitarian society. Sheldon's
assessment of its value was more restrained, but he did contend "that it can render a profound service in this direction." (Ibid., p. 78) Sheldon measured the success of the program in barely perceptible changes in character:

Now and then it goes to one's heart in special instances where a truly fine, noble nature turns up out of those surging throngs pouring out of the doors from the factories at evening time. Here and there an individual of this other higher type welcomes the privileges, and shows himself glad at heart for the opportunities. And as the months go by, we can see the manhood coming out through the crust which had hidden it under the surface. I have known, too, of young women whose lives seemed to have been transformed by this means. Some of them who had been attending our clubs for years have remarked on the peculiar change coming over the young people after they have attended our lecture courses for a few months; the sense of dignity appearing in them in a way that had not shown itself before; an unconscious improvement in their conduct toward one another.

(Ibid., p. 52.)

Sheldon continued to head the Self-Culture Halls Association until the fall of 1905, when he retired from the work and turned over the reins to the resident superintendent; he continued as an ex-officio member of the association's board of trustees until his death. Lighty, suffering from ill health, resigned later that season after 11 years of service; his resignation "was most reluctantly accepted by the Trustees, who felt that they were losing a worthy, able and conscientious co-worker, whose enthusiastic and philanthropic spirit, coupled with intelligent discrimination, pervaded the whole institution." (18th annual report of the Self-Culture Halls Association, 1905-06) Drawing on his experience in St. Louis, he later helped develop the extension program of the University of Wisconsin, one of the country's leading ventures in adult and community education. Lighty was succeeded by Roger Baldwin, a professor of sociology at Washington University who, in league with John Lovejoy Elliott of New York and Jerome Cook and Rose Jones of the St. Louis Society, would later establish the American Civil Liberties Union. Because Sheldon was confined to bed during the year before his death, he and Baldwin never met; however, Sheldon's wife, Anna Hartshorne Sheldon, did work with Baldwin in the Self-Culture program.

The South Side Hall evidently closed in the 1905-06 season. The North Side Hall was subsumed into the Neighborhood Association, which has endured to this day.
Lighty resigned both his posts in the spring of 1906, but he retained his enthusiasm for Ethical Culture. While working in the extension program of the University of Wisconsin in 1911, he submitted to the American Ethical Union a plan for a correspondence bureau to serve residents of cities that had no ethical societies; he proposed to direct the program from Madison. The plan was not adopted.

Roger Baldwin, a teacher of sociology at Washington University and later director of the American Civil Liberties Union, replaced Lighty as director of the Self-Culture program. Baldwin oversaw the institute's transition into the wholly independent Neighborhood Association. Although he was a frequent guest speaker at the Society for decades, he did not serve in the capacity of associate leader.
The Society was anything but cautious in its experiment in ethical religion. The ambitiousness of the Self-Culture Halls Association was reflected in all the community's endeavors, including the formation of study clubs and the presentation of public lectures. Every new, untried idea backed by a few faithful supporters was enacted in the spirit of adventure; while some projects petered out, others were to endure for generations. Before Sheldon's tenure drew to a close, members of the community acquired faith in the institution as well as the man.

**Power to the People**

In the Society's early years, Sheldon was chief administrator as well as minister and lecturer. He handled most of the Society's financial transactions, including renting and furnishing meeting quarters; he was, reluctantly, the political kingpin, making decisive recommendations for board officers and committee chairmen; he oversaw the Sunday School, even writing the texts that formed the curriculum; and he supervised the Self-Culture program and the Society's other philanthropic ventures. When he was exhausted by these responsibilities, as he often was, he complained only to his "confessional." However, he worried that the concentration of authority in his person placed the Society's future in jeopardy. He wanted members of the Society to recognize the institution as theirs, not his. At the end of the fifth season, he put out a call for greater cooperation and initiative. Asking that the Society "regard itself in a certain degree independent of him and his work," (Fifth Annual Report, 1891, drafted by Paul F. Coste) he handed primary responsibility for administration to the board. He called for an end to the Society's policy of planning its projects only after counting its receipts. Instead, he wanted Society members to dream of long-term endeavors and then dig down deep to fund them. He insisted the board institute a permanent management system so the Society could "feel that it has a root here for all the coming century." (Ibid.) He also asked that committees assume more responsibility, and he assured them their authority would be respected.

This transition of authority was made possible by the emergence of a circle of dedicated laymen who, true to Sheldon's wishes, looked upon the Ethical movement as a personal mission. In practical affairs, Sheldon often turned to Paul F. Coste, who served the Society as treasurer off and on from its inception until his death in 1906, and to Joseph S. Taussig, who began a long stint as secretary in 1889. In the development of the Sunday School, he collaborated with William Brandenburger, director of advertising for Anheuser-Busch Cos., whom he "loved as a younger brother," and, later, Cecelia Boette.
But the man to whom he turned for guidance in matters of philosophy and ethical ministry was Robert Moore, who began a 30-year term as president of the board in 1891 after stints by Tredway, Stevens, and Nagel.

[FOOTNOTE 1] Sheldon, geographically isolated from the Eastern Ethical leadership, considered Moore his truest colleague. "Down in my heart," he wrote Moore in a letter, "I have had the feeling as if you and myself were the educational leaders of the society, rather than myself alone, so that I think of you as an associate lecturer for our cause, as well as the president of our society." (Letter from Walter L. Sheldon to Robert Moore, dated May 2, 1899; Ethical Society archives)

Moore was an engineer and professor of engineering at Washington University; he served for a time as president of the American Society of Civil Engineers. He was a Renaissance man who regarded the reflective life as highly as he did the laws of nature. In his leadership of the engineers' society, he frequently stressed the necessity of broad education and character development. Perhaps his most succinct expression of those values is found in the speech he delivered at the laying of the cornerstone for Cupples Hall No. 2, which housed Washington University's School of Engineering:

The saying that man cannot live by bread alone is nowhere truer than in technical education. Fed on the bread-and-butter studies alone, the mind is narrowed and the soul starved. The lawyer, the physician, the engineer, to reach the highest success even in his own profession must have a broad general knowledge of other things. He must know something of the experience of mankind and its lessons as taught in history; he must know something of what the world's thinkers have thought as taught in philosophy, something of Plato and Aristotle, of Kant and Spencer; he must know what science has revealed concerning the history of the earth and the relation of man to other forms of life. He should be trained not only to think for himself but to enter with full sympathy into the thoughts and feelings of others, into the dreams of the poets and into the moral ideals of the prophets and apostles. In the high society of all who have led or uplifted the world he should feel himself at home . . . . For the highest success, the professional man needs the widest outlook based upon the broadest culture.

(Pamphlet issued by Washington University, dated May 25, 1901.)

In addition to his service to the Ethical Society and the engineers' society, Moore served on the St. Louis Board of Education from 1897 to 1913, a period during which it molded an antiquated school
system into a national model of excellence. In 1906 and 1910, he served as president. During his tenure on the board, he lobbied for state legislation that substantially upgraded public school facilities; supported compulsory education, the provision of free textbooks, manual training in high schools, and medical supervision; and fought for the establishment of a teachers' college, facilities for special-needs students, and the center for juvenile delinquents that came to be known as Bellefontaine Farms. As in his leadership of the engineers' society, Moore constantly exalted character development. In a report to the board, he noted that excellence in education required teachers who were "qualified not only to train the minds of their pupils, but also to inspire them with the love of that which is noble in character and the desire to serve the community in which they live." (Quoted in address by Edward C. Eliot at the memorial service for Moore at Sheldon Memorial, October 8, 1922. Ethical Society archives.)

Moore's zeal for ethical religion seems to have matched that of Sheldon. In his talks before the membership and conventions of the Union, he hailed the movement as the religion of the future. His handwritten draft of his 1895 report to the membership reveals his depiction of a religion based on spiritual laws that he deemed as real and uncompromising as the physical laws that bind engineers:

No result of the great awakening of the human mind which has characterized the last hundred years has been more marked, nor at first blush more melancholy and disastrous, than the havoc which it has wrought upon all current forms of religious belief. When examined in the clear light of modern scientific criticism, the sacred histories of the nations have been one by one resolved into incoherent masses of unverifiable traditions, and the theological systems which have been erected upon them, in some cases with masterly skill, are left without foundation. Much as we may regret this result -- and to one reared in the old faith, as most of us have been, it is at first, and very naturally, a source of deep disquietude -- there is no help for it. For one who has followed with any care the results of modern historical investigation there can be no returning to his old creed in theology any more than to the Ptolemaic system of astronomy or to the chemistry of the alchemists. The old temples, once overthrown, cannot be rebuilt. But in the midst of this overthrow, which seems at first to leave nothing unshaken, two great facts stand forth immutable, whose importance and significance as we study them continually grow. These are the physical universe, the wonders of which science is just beginning to unfold, and the universe of mind, glimpses of which we catch in the varied powers of our own minds but to the possibilities of which, under other conditions or in other beings, we can set no limit. As we study the outer world, we find it to be animated...
with ever-unfolding life and governed by unchangeable laws. And turning to the study of man, who combines in one being the properties of both mind and matter, we find the same thing to be true. His life is an orderly development.

Animated by hidden but irresistible forces, it is unfolded to a plan and governed by laws from whose jurisdiction there is no escape. On the physical side, obedience to these laws brings health, beauty and strength of body; on the spiritual side, obedience to the laws which govern in that realm means health, beauty and strength of soul; whilst in either realm disobedience brings in its train disorder, disease and ultimate death.

A recognition of these elemental facts of the moral life, sometimes dimly, sometimes clearly seen, has been the animating principle of all religions worthy of the name, and sustained the souls of the saints and heroes of every age and nation. The only error has been in mistaking their origin and significance. They have been heretofore treated as arbitrary enactments by some power outside the soul itself and made known to man through some supernatural revelation. So that any questioning of the reality of this revelation has been thought to place the moral law itself in question.

A deeper study, however, has made it clear to many in this latter age that the laws which govern man's spiritual nature are a part of the very essence of things and are no more supernatural than are the axioms of mathematics or the laws of number. They are natural as human life and the external world are natural, and divine only as these may partake of the divine nature.

To read these laws as written in the individual consciousness and exemplified in the lives of men and the history of nations, to help each other so far as may be to embody them in our own actions, to teach them above all to the young, to stand in a world infected with moral skepticism as a witness to this deepest and most comprehensive of all faiths, faith in the essential righteousness of the universe, is the mission of [a] society like ours. Surely no work can be more worthy of our best endeavors, none more attractive to one anxious to help bring in the new age of nobler manners and better laws.
Sheldon also had two formal associates in his career. The first, E.N. Plank, was hired in the fall of 1892 as resident superintendent of the Self-Culture program. He lived at the first Self-Culture Hall on Washington Street. Sheldon remained director of the program, but he delegated much of his administrative authority to Plank. Although Plank's title was associate leader of the Ethical Society, his duties apparently were confined to educational outreach. Plank resigned in May 1895, and was succeeded the following October by William H. Lighty. Unlike Plank, Lighty was employed directly by the Self-Culture Halls Association, now an independent corporation. In addition, he served as superintendent of the Ethical Sunday School from 1895 to 1904.

Ironically, though he did not inherit Plank's title of associate leader, he directed several of the Society's in-house educational programs and often presided at Memorial Hall services in Sheldon's absence. Lighty resigned both his posts in the spring of 1906, but he retained his enthusiasm for Ethical Culture. While working in the extension program of the University of Wisconsin in 1911, he submitted to the American Ethical Union a plan for a correspondence bureau to serve residents of cities that had no ethical societies; he proposed to direct the program from Madison. The plan was not adopted. (Roger Baldwin, who replaced Lighty as director of the Self-Culture program, was a frequent guest speaker at the Society for decades, but was not a member and did not serve in the capacity of associate leader.)

Besides his formal associates and advisors, Sheldon maintained friendships with two local colleagues in the liberal ministry, Rabbi Samuel Sale of Temple Shaare Emeth and Rev. John Calvin Learned, first pastor of the Church of the Unity. In 1894, Moore eulogized the latter as "a preacher of righteousness and a shining example of a simple, manly, and noble life . . . . Though not formally connected with our movement, he was always our hearty co-worker and friend." Sheldon's regard for Learned is underscored by his compilation of a book of excerpts from Learned's writings, which, like Sheldon's, revered conscience as "king of the creeds."

**Stooping to Conquer**

As the Society grew more stable, its self-consciousness gave way to a broader attentiveness to ethics. Instead of continually defining the Ethical Society, Sheldon turned his attention to social mores and political institutions. Never one for the scientific detachment of the sociologist, Sheldon interpreted history as a series of moral progressions and regressions. In his frequent addresses on American statesmen, for instance, he asked the audience to ponder the moral character of the men and women
whose ideals shaped American government. He also spoke on controversial issues such as race relations, the growth of trade unions, and municipal reform.

Sheldon attempted to maintain a balance among addresses on religion, the inner life, social criticism, and literature. A talk on "The Pursuit of Happiness" was followed by one on "The Plays of Ibsen" or "The Meaning of Justice." He had difficulty accepting the mixed receptions with which his addresses were met: Cerebral members appreciated his scholarly style, but he perceived that some members found him stiff. In an 1891 letter to Moore, he expressed his resolve to give his addresses wider appeal:

I have made up my mind that it would be necessary for me to be a little more popular in my methods and subjects Sunday mornings. It is essential that the Society be first built up in point of numbers. You and Mrs. Moore will therefore be a little disappointed in the material that will be given at Memorial Hall this winter. I have during the past years "struck high," but there is a certain need that, without descending morally, I should be willing to "stoop to conquer." Particularly I shall choose subjects that will be interesting to the Germans of the city, as they are the more easily reached at the start. Later on, I hope to reach the American element. But I see plainly that we must first get the Society on its feet in point of numbers.

(Letter to Robert Moore, dated Nov. 10, 1891; Ethical Society archives; Western Reserve Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri-St. Louis.)

Ethical leaders regularly toured the circuit of societies. During Sheldon's tenure, frequent visitors included William M. Salter, who alternately served as leader of the Chicago and Philadelphia societies; S. Burns Weston, founding leader of the Philadelphia Society and later a publisher and managing editor of the International Journal of Ethics, as well; Stanton Coit, leader of the West London Ethical Society; and John Lovejoy Elliott, of the New York Society. Adler came to speak every year or two. Sheldon also invited academics to address the Society. Among the regulars were Frank Taussig and Josiah Royce of Harvard; and Charles Zeublin, Paul Storey, and J. Laurence Laughlin of the University of Chicago.

Study Clubs

Although the platform service was the centerpiece of the Ethical Society, Sheldon considered it a relatively weak form of intellectual stimulation. He ceaselessly urged Society members to read books on
philosophy, religion, ethics, and politics, and he formed study groups to facilitate discussion. Although a man of strong convictions, he often refused to voice his opinions before the groups he moderated; he believed the greatest service he could render was to encourage participants to think for themselves.

Carrying his fascination with character development from the platform to the classroom, Sheldon in 1890 oversaw the formation of the Biography Club, in which young adults read and discussed the lives of exemplary people. The club, which met once a month on a weeknight, initially concentrated on the American founding fathers -- George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, and Patrick Henry. Participants presented short papers on the subjects' lives and work, and then assessed the ethical development of each man. After its first season, the club elected a more varied reading list. When Lighty took over the group in the 1895-96 season, it began meeting on Sunday mornings, before the platform service, in the Society's rooms at the museum. The following season, Lighty expanded the young adult program with the formation of the Young People's Union. This group, which first met on February 3, 1897, conducted Sunday evening lecture courses and musical and dramatic entertainments. During the off-season, it held poetry readings on Sunday mornings. The club's membership ranged from 75 to 100.

On October 20, 1891, Sheldon conducted the first session of a women's study group called the Greek Ethics Club. In the group's inaugural season, the women met fortnightly on a weekday afternoon for lectures and discussions on Greek thought regarding politics, theology, art and architecture, and women and the family; the authors they read included Sophocles, Euripides, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Homer, and Pericles. In its second year, the club undertook Roman ethics as taught by the Stoics, the Cynics, and the Epicureans. In successive seasons, the women studied the evolution of Western philosophy through the writings of Spinoza, Leibnitz, Kant, Hume, and contemporary writers. The group's discussions were considerably more personal than those of a strictly academic class. Participants weighed ethical theories and dilemmas in light of their own experience. For instance, the study of "Antigone" led to a debate on the rightness of defying laws and customs. Sheldon called it a class in "applied ethics." The Greek Ethics Club, which kept its name even after turning to non-Hellenic literatures, became one of the Society's most popular attractions; attendance averaged 150-200.

Sheldon's experience with the Young Men's Section taught him that men were more interested in current political and business affairs than in abstract ethics. Accordingly, he initiated for them a Political Science Club in the fall of 1892. The men also met fortnightly, but on a weeknight. At times, the group devoted itself to a systematic study of political science based on a reading list drawn up by Sheldon. In the group's first season, Sheldon delivered a series of lectures titled "Outlines of Economics." For the benefit of men who had not attended college, Sheldon also invited professors from Washington.
University and the University of Missouri to give detailed lecture courses on politics and economics. In addition, local lawyers, businessmen and government representatives shared their firsthand knowledge of politics. Among the group's guests were St. Louis Mayor Cyrus P. Walbridge; David R. Francis, a former Missouri governor; Charles Nagel, President of the St. Louis City Council and former president of the Society's executive committee; John W. Noble, a Civil War general who had served as secretary of the Interior from 1889 to 1893; and James O. Broadhead, a former U.S. ambassador to Switzerland. In addition to attending lectures, club members debated timely issues in light of the political and economic thought of writers ranging from Aristotle to John Stuart Mill. Discussion topics included: "Slavery: Its Origin and the Service it has Rendered in History"; "War: Its Causes, Basis and Justification"; "The Origin of Private Property"; and "Should Immigration Be Restricted?" The club built up a library on economics and political science, and subscribed to periodicals such as Quarterly Journal of Economics, Political Science Quarterly, and Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. Attendance averaged about 50 men per meeting. The club did not command as much loyalty as the Greek Ethics Club, but it continued, in one form or another, until 1900.

Sheldon and Moore were greatly encouraged by the success of these study groups. In his report to Society members at the 1894 annual meeting, Moore said that "nothing . . . can be more gratifying or more full of promise for the future than the prompt and hearty response with which our appeal to young men and women has been invariably met. The Greek Ethics Club and the Political Science Club . . . have been particularly successful, both as to number of members and the quality of the work done, and both bid fair to become permanent ethical schools of the utmost value not only to the members themselves but to the whole community."

The Political Science Club was succeeded by the Men's Philosophical Club, which held its first meeting on January 29, 1900. This club shifted its form and focus several times. Initially, it invited academics from the University of Illinois and the University of Missouri to deliver isolated lectures. For several years, Professor Frank Thilly of the University of Missouri delivered a course of lectures on the history of philosophy. Later, the group conducted a formal class under the direction of Professor A.O. Lovejoy of Washington University. In the 1905-06 season, the club formed a study group in experimental psychology under Professor Edgar J. Swift, also of Washington University. In its later seasons, the club had about 20 active members. Beginning in the fall of 1902, it was augmented by the Men's Discussion Club, whose weekly meetings drew as many as a hundred participants.

For those more interested in Paracelsus than Parmenides, the Nature Study Section was formed in 1902. This club met once a week on a weeknight, and had an average attendance of about 150. In addition to holding lectures and classes, the group organized summertime field trips for young people.
In addition to spawning the Self-Culture Halls Association, the Society sponsored numerous short-term educational programs for the public. Beginning February 5, 1893, it conducted an annual series of four Sunday afternoon lectures on science. For the first two seasons, the lectures were held at the Grand Opera House; in 1895 and 1896, they were held at the Entertainment Hall of the Exposition Building. In the first two seasons, St. Louis scientists spoke on astronomy, earth science, microbiology, and electrodynamics. In successive series, lectures on birds, fishes, insects, and prehistoric human races were delivered by scientists from the Smithsonian Institution, the American Museum of Natural History, and several Eastern universities. Like the Self-Culture program, these courses were intended primarily for wage earners. Attendance ranged from 600 to 1,000 per lecture. In the first season, tickets for the full series cost 50 cents; about 1,200 were sold.

In later years, the Society broadened the scope of its public lectures. In 1898, the Greek Ethics Club sponsored a series of three lectures on "The Meaning and Scope of Sociology" by Professor Franklin H. Giddings of Columbia University. Held December 29-31, the lectures drew 284 subscribers. The following year, renowned educator John Dewey of the University of Illinois delivered a three-lecture series titled "Child Education." This series, also held under the auspices of the Greek Ethics Club, was conducted December 7-9, 1899, at the Odeon Theatre. To accommodate interested schoolteachers, the lectures were given in the afternoon. In 1901, the Ladies' Auxiliary Committee of the Ethical Society sponsored a three-lecture series on "The Story of the Pentateuch" by Nathaniel Schmidt, a Cornell University professor and associate leader of the New York Ethical Society. This series had been requested by the Greek Ethics Club, which, inspired by Sheldon's Sunday morning series on biblical criticism, had devoted that entire season to study of the Bible. Held February 27-March 1 at the Odeon, each of these lectures drew about 200 people.

In 1903, the Society sponsored an eight-week series of Sunday evening lectures. Professors from the University of Missouri delivered lectures on a variety of topics. Attendance averaged about 100. Shorter Sunday evening courses were held in other years. One season, local clergy delivered a series of talks on their respective religious denominations. One of the most popular offerings of the Ladies' Auxiliary Committee was its 1903 course on "Facts about Health and Sickness," in which local physicians delivered talks and answered health-related questions. Held on five consecutive Tuesday mornings beginning March 3, these presentations each drew 250 to 300 women.

The blockbuster of the Society's lecture offerings was its introductory series on the World's Fair in 1904. Each Tuesday morning from January 26 to February 23, directors of various departments of the
Louisiana Purchase Exposition gave illustrated lectures on the exhibits and programs they were planning. An average of 500 people attended each lecture.

In addition to openings its (rented) doors to the public, the Society frequently reached out to the community in the person of its leader. Besides giving more than a dozen lectures a year in the Self-Culture program, Sheldon chaired a branch of the St. Louis Civics Club and frequently addressed such organizations as the Knights of Labor, the Single Tax League, and the Nationalist Club.

A Little Esprit de Corps

In its first decade, the social interaction of Society members was largely limited to participation in educational programs. Sheldon was ill at ease in social settings, and he had no inclination to organize any gathering that might be termed lighthearted. Fortunately, Moore appreciated the value of socializing for its own sake, and he initiated the Society's first strictly social events. On March 4, 1896, he orchestrated an all-Society party at the site of the first free reading rooms. That suite, located above the Union Dairy Company at Jefferson and Washington, had been taken over by the Wednesday Club, an elite women's association that included many Ethical Society members; Martha Fischel was a founding member. At Sheldon's prompting, five women formed a Hospitality Committee to make arrangements. In a letter to Moore regarding these preparations, Sheldon acknowledged that "in this whole matter of a social gathering, if ever there were a fish out of water, I am that fish." (Letter from Walter L. Sheldon to Robert Moore, dated Feb. 20, 1896; Ethical Society archives.) Reflecting his own distaste for parties, he noted he would appeal to several Society members to attend "as an act of personal friendship." He did admit that a successful gathering would "at least start a little esprit de corps such as we have not had before." Moore placed great significance on the party. In his address at the 1896 annual meeting, he reported:

[I]ts complete success in bringing pleasantly together a large number of our members who had before been strangers to each other was to all a delight. It proved that we were in closer sympathy with each other than we knew; and if the hint which it gave as to the duty of holding such meetings at more frequent intervals hereafter be followed out, it will mark the beginning of a new era of good fellowship and mutual helpfulness, the value of which to the members and to the society as a whole it would be hard to overestimate. For what better basis is there for enduring friendship than a common pursuit of high ideals; what more helpful than the fellowship of those with like aims?
And what better work for a society like ours than to give an opportunity for such fellowship and a house for such a brotherhood?

(Ibid.)

Brainy Women from Big Cities

Also in 1896, the Society's tenth anniversary, it held its first convention of the Union of Ethical Societies. Billed as an "Ethical Congress," the convention included five public forums. The first of these, "Woman's Influence on Public Affairs," garnered the greatest share of public attention. A newspaper story under the subheading "Gathering of Brainy Women from Five Big Cities" noted that the audience on the morning of April 23 was full of "young women and elderly women and women betwixt and between, but all of them earnest and thoughtful. They represented the intellectual side of woman's life in St. Louis, and in the cities of the Union." ("Ethics Under Discussion," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, April 23, 1896.) A handful of men also attended the conference. Of the more than 200 people in the audience, only about 25 represented ethical societies.

The keynote speaker was Lydia Avery Coonley, president of the Women's Club of the Chicago Ethical Society and a vocal suffragist. Coonley examined the detrimental effects of sexual inequality and urged her listeners to be diligent in acquiring political power: "The farmer did not cease to sow his grain because his first planting failed to come up," she said. (Ibid.) Coonley also asserted that winning the vote would not radically change the role of women; they would wield substantial social influence only when they regained some of the monetary control they customarily relinquished when they married, she said. Coonley was followed by Mary H. Wilmarth, also of the Chicago Society. Wilmarth applauded the industriousness of women in starting the Women's Sanitary Commission, which cared for the wounded during the Civil War, and the temperance movement. By participating in efforts such as these, which fell neatly into women's traditional roles, women acquired the savvy needed to expand their sphere of influence, she said. By way of illustration, she noted that politically active women had initiated the drive for highway improvements in Chicago. Wilmart also urged women to take advantage of their increasing opportunities for higher education. The Rev. William Short, rector of St. Peter's Episcopal Church, took a conservative stand on the role of women: "Woman is the natural home-maker, and the home is the cradle of civilization," he said. "From her home, woman saw dirty streets. She set about securing clean ones." (Ibid.) The wife of the Rev. J.C. Learned, pastor of the Unitarian Church of the Unity, supported Short in contending that "woman's influence should be felt behind the scenes." (Ibid.) The Post-Dispatch noted that the next speaker at the colloquium, the Rev. Jenkin Lloyd Jones, head of
the People's Church of Chicago and an advocate of women's suffrage, was known, "half-humorously and half-solemly, [as] the 'moral cyclone' of that city." ("An Ethical Congress to Assembly in St. Louis," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, March 29, 1896) [FOOTNOTE 2] Jones championed the provocative position that "women had the ascendancy over men and . . . it remained for woman to raise man up from the unwholesome places into which he had fallen." ("Ethics Under Discussion," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, April 23, 1896.) Ethical Society member Martha Fischel rounded out the symposium with an account of her experience with the women's reform movement in New York and St. Louis. U.S. Labor Commissioner Carroll D. Wright had been slated to deliver a paper on "Woman in Industrial and Mercantile Life," but he apparently did not attend.

The second public forum of the assembly focused on municipal reform. Held the afternoon of Friday, April 24, the meeting was attended primarily by St. Louis lawyers and businessmen. Speakers included Albion Small, head of Chicago University's Department of Social Science, and W.A. Giles, a prominent Chicago businessman. The evening session on "Ethical Views of Life" also was open to the public. That meeting was addressed by William M. Salter, leader of the Philadelphia Ethical Society; M.M. Mangasarian, leader of the Chicago Society; and G. Stanley Hall, president of Massachusetts' Clark University.

Along with the conference on women, the big public draw of the assembly was a symposium on "Moral Education in the Schools" held Saturday morning, April 25. Among the educators who addressed the meeting were Hall; F. Louis Soldan, superintendent of the St. Louis Public Schools; J.M. Greenwood, superintendent of the Kansas City Public Schools; and Washington University Chancellor W.L. Chaplin. In his keynote address, Hall urged that children be taught to appreciate -- and even revere -- nature, and warned against the early indoctrination of children in religious beliefs. Although a firm theist, Hall held that love of "the creator" should be allowed to arise naturally from a child's sense of wonder at clouds, trees, and flowers. Likewise, he said, moral principles develop as children, through the study of biology, discover "the universal kinship of all living things." ("Moral Teaching in the Schools," St.Louis Post-Dispatch, April 25, 1896.)

The concluding conference of the assembly on the morning of April 26 also was open to the public but, like the conference on "Ethical Views of Life," it attracted mainly Ethical Society members and delegates. Speakers included Sheldon, Salter, Weston, and Elliott.

In an era marked by burgeoning collectivism in the form of government bureaucracy and labor organizations, Sheldon and Moore intended the Ethical Congress to underscore the value of individual character and moral values. And against the cynicism prompted by widespread political corruption, they held up personal reformation as a vehicle of hope. Moore, reflecting Sheldon's dissatisfaction with
calculating social science, said in his welcoming speech that "ethics, or the science of duty, is
distinguished from all other sciences by the fact that it deals not only with that which is real but with
ideals by which the present reality may be surpassed and urges us to this realization. It is the science
which points toward the better. It gives the upward impulse; it is the spirit of evolution; it is the life of all
life." (Welcoming speech of Ethical Congress, Robert Moore, handwritten notes dated April 23, 1896,
Ethical Society archives) He deemed the success of the congress indicative of a bright future for Ethical
Culture:

In number of delegates, in importance of the subjects discussed, the ability with which they were
treated and the consequent interest on the part of our own members and the public at large, [the congress]
was by general consent the most important gathering of the forces of the Ethical movement which has
yet been held, and its effect in deepening the interest of our own members and extending the influence of
the ideas for which we stand cannot but be great and lasting. It was a further demonstration, if such were
needed, that the times are ripe for an organization of the moral forces and aspirations of men which shall
be based not upon history or tradition or any outward authority but upon the living words of reason and
conscience as revealed to us today. More and more, men are saying in those early words of Emerson,
spoken now sixty years ago, "Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why
should we grope among the dry bones of the past . . . ? The sun shines today also. . . . There are new
lands, new men, new thought. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship."

But whilst the number of those who join with us in these words is rapidly growing, we
must not shut our eyes to the fact that we are yet a very small minority, and that nothing
moves more slowly than the minds and hearts of men; so that for many years all the zeal
and faith and patience we can command will be required to uphold and advance the
standards under which we have enlisted. (Minutes of Annual Meeting of the Ethical
Society, May 4, 1896)

[FOOTNOTE 1: Actually, Moore was known as chairman. He was the first to hold that title; just before
his election, the executive committee was renamed the board of trustees, and the office of president was
renamed chairman. Years later, the office again became known as the presidency.]

[FOOTNOTE 2: Jenkin Lloyd Jones was a cousin of architect Frank Lloyd Wright.]
No Stepping Back

Despite the enthusiasm reflected in the congress, the study clubs, and the Self-Culture program, the Society was financially strapped. The establishment of the working surplus Sheldon had called for was stymied by the severe depression that hit the nation in the 1990s. Humbled by those developments, Moore regularly congratulated the membership on minimizing the Society's debts and maintaining its credit. While attention shifted from progress to solvency, Moore projected substantial growth would follow the depression: "With a larger expenditure we could so greatly improve and extend our work that we do not permit ourselves to doubt that, upon the return of business prosperity, our members and friends will rise to the occasion and place larger resources in the hands of the committee." (Annual report of the Ethical Society for 1893-94; read at May 14, 1894 annual meeting) The fellowship relied almost solely on contributions; admission fees rarely exceeded the costs of educational programs, and club dues amounted to only a few hundred dollars after expenses.

The Society was not averse to coaxing members with shame and honor. Beginning in the early 1890s, on treasurer Joseph Taussig's initiative, the Society distributed lists showing each member's annual contribution. This list, said Taussig, would "enable members at a glance to see what others are subscribing, and should they find their friends and equals in means in a higher class than themselves, possibly thereby to become induced to raise the amount of their own subscription." (Letter from Joseph Taussig to Robert Moore dated May 19, 1892, Ethical Society archives) A finance committee was responsible for soliciting and collecting members' pledges, but its members generally served reluctantly and without enthusiasm; when impending debts spurred panic, the committee habitually asked a handful of reliable members to close the gap. Giving patterns were grossly lopsided: Of the $5,355 contributed in 1895, $1,755 came from 199 members who gave from $1 to $50; the remaining $3,600 was given by 23 members who contributed from $50 to $500. In an effort to even the burden, Sheldon regularly invited visitors to become members and pressed members to meet their pledges. The Society also looked to civic-minded non-members, distributing solicitation tracts warning that deficient funding threatened the Society's community programs. To encourage regular giving by non-members, the executive team of Moore, Coste, and Joseph Taussig started a program called the Envelope Fund. Begun in 1898, this initiative provided contributors with numbered envelopes to be deposited weekly at Memorial Hall; the offering in each coded envelope was credited to the sum promised by the corresponding contributor. This system allowed non-member contributors to make the equivalent of a yearly pledge without committing themselves to formal membership.
In the Society's first 20 years, its annual receipts rose haltingly from $2,400 to nearly $6,400. Expenses exceeded receipts in eight fiscal years in that period, though all but two of those deficits were covered by carryovers from preceding years. The depressed economy, erratic Sunday collections, and reliance on one-year pledges that often went unfulfilled discouraged the board of trustees from initiating long-term projects. To offset that uncertainty, a small group of Society members in 1896 signed three-year pledges totaling $1,600. Because the signers -- who included Moore, Nagel, J.W. Morton, and Adolphus Busch -- had been reliable contributors for years, the promise added little to the board's confidence.

Sheldon was particularly disturbed by the Society's precarious finances. He envied the permanent facilities of sister societies and was frustrated by the fellowship's inability to commit itself to buying quarters of its own. The situation improved in the fall of 1895, when Sheldon succeeded in securing the museum's western basement room for the Society's exclusive use. The quarters were still cramped, however, and in 1897 Sheldon asked members and friends of the Society to contribute $5-$25 a year beyond their regular subscriptions to help fund a proposed museum addition which would provide permanent space for the Society. In the ensuing year, less than $400 was contributed to the fund -- hardly enough to influence the museum's board of control.

Sheldon's patience ran out in November 1898 when the board decided on a policy of retrenchment. Harried by encroaching debts and the deaths of several major contributors, the board decided to sharply reduce funds for printing, visiting lecturers, and professional music -- the Society's costliest non-essential expenses. A newspaper account referred to these areas as "the favorite departments of Prof. Sheldon," (St. Louis Globe-Democrat, Dec. 11, 1898) but it is difficult to imagine alternative cuts that would have met with his liking. In the 1898-99 budget, after the lecturer's salary of $3,000 and rental fees of $1,000, the largest single expenditure was $461 for the Sunday School -- Sheldon's dearest love. Sheldon simply would brook no retrenchment. On Sunday, November 27, a few weeks after the board meeting, Sheldon announced from the platform that he intended to resign at the end of the season. In a statement published in the Globe-Democrat the next day, he laid his decision entirely to the Society's finances:

It is true that I contemplate resigning, but I have not resigned. The talk to that effect grew out of an announcement which I made yesterday morning. I thought that it was best to prepare my people for action in that direction. I will probably leave the city in May or June, and did not wish to leave without preparing my people for action in that direction. It is not true that I have already resigned. To resign I will have to go before the
board of directors and tender my resignation. No such action has been taken by me as yet. I could not resign to the congregation attending the services Sunday morning. I could only indicate to them my intention of doing so.

The reason I have for wishing to resign is that the society has decided upon a policy of retrenchment in some directions, and I have felt that such a policy could best be carried out by a new man. The movement will not be affected in any way by my action. It will go right ahead as before, except that a new man will be at the head of the movement. There has been a constant deficit which the society has had to face each year, and I have been expecting the action taken by the directors for some time. The directors felt that, in view of this deficit, it could do nothing less than retrench in some particulars. As the action has been expected by me for some time, I did not have to consider long, and that is the reason why I acted so promptly on the matter.

*(Globe-Democrat, November 29, 1898)*

Paraphrasing Sheldon more bluntly, the newspaper reported that "he took the stand . . . that he had had a hand in the building up of the society, and he did not propose at this time to be a party to tearing it down." (Ibid.)

The announcement stunned the membership. Sheldon's contention that "the movement will not be affected" by his departure convinced no one: Despite his protests to the contrary, to many members Sheldon was the Ethical Society, and his departure would portend dissolution. Moore called an emergency meeting of the membership on December 8 to address the crisis. Sheldon had asked that the meeting be held before December 11, when he planned to follow the platform service with an informal social hour; if the emergency meeting were not held before that date, he feared talk of his departure would dominate conversation and mar the spirit of the affair. In his suggestions to Moore regarding the membership meeting, he reiterated his wish that the members concentrate on the preservation of the Society without regard to his presence:

[It would] be well to summon [the meeting] without any reference to finances but just with the announcement that such a meeting was necessary in order to make plans for the future of the Society in consideration of the announcement I had made with regard to the step contemplated by me at the end of the season. What our members need to feel is that they and not myself constitute the Ethical Society; that they and I together
have been supporting a common cause and that it is *their* Society rather than mine. It is important that there should be another tie between our members than the indirect tie through my personality. This has been a serious misfortune on our Society here in St. Louis. A good many of them have felt that they were helping me in the cause rather than helping their own cause itself. They ought to feel therefore that it is their cause which is at stake now and disconnect it from my presence or absence with it. It would be a great deal better if they would look upon me as the one who had been their lecturer for the time being, while the Society was theirs as a movement which they had to carry on and keep a going [sic] for generations to come. I think you and I both feel that we should like to believe that the Ethical Society in St. Louis would be in existence 100 years from now....

I believe that it would be worthwhile for the Executive Committee to say outright at such a meeting, bold and explicitly, that the financial side of the Society had broken down, so that the members shall fully realize the whole situation and not feel that they could tide it over just by raising enough money to pay for the [lecturers'] Exchanges this year. I am simply trying to think out a way... by which those who belong to the Society may feel in every possible way that it is their cause rather than just mine; that it is a cause which ought to be able to go on independent of me.... To you and me, this cause is a religion.

(Letter from Walter L. Sheldon to Robert Moore dated Dec. 2, 1898; Ethical Society archives)

Those attending the meeting promised to contribute a total of $700 above their standing pledges, and members who could not attend sent in promises of several hundred more. In addition, a committee consisting of Leo Levis, Louis Bry, Julius Seidel, F.A. Bayer, and Cornelius Skinner was formed to solicit more three-year pledges. In the pledge appeal circulated in January, members were told the Society needed a guaranteed income of at least $6,000 a year. However, the current year's pledges, minus those of major contributors who recently had died, provided a guarantee of less than $4,500. Of that year's 265 pledges, 60 were for amounts less than $5, and 143 were for amounts from $5 to $10. At the same time, the Society spent about $21 per capita. The appeal asked members to carry their fair share of expenses and to sign multiple-year pledges, thus providing the stability Sheldon demanded. Coste slated another meeting for February 23, 1899, to "determine what kind of an assurance the [Executive] Committee may be able to give [Sheldon], with a view towards convincing him of the
Society's financial ability to go on without yielding any of the ground which has been gained." (Letter from Paul F. Coste to Robert Moore dated Feb. 20, 1899; Ethical Society archives) By March, Moore was able to report to the membership that the crisis had been averted:

[Y]ou have been informed of the fact that in consequence of the loss by death of several of our most valued friends and supporters, the finances of the society had reached a crisis which threatened a restriction of its activity, and the possible loss of our leader. In view of these dangers, the committee appealed to every member and well-wisher to aid in averting results so disastrous to the Society and to the cause of a purely ethical religion.

To this appeal the response has been so general and so earnest that the Committee are able to report to you that the difficulties which threatened us, have been so far overcome, that they feel assured that the Society will be able to go forward without retrenchment and with no change of leadership.

This, however, does not mean that everything necessary to secure our future has yet been accomplished. It means rather, that with a continuation of the interest and activity recently manifested by our members, and particularly by our young people, whatever is necessary can be accomplished. It means that the permanent establishment of the Ethical Society in St. Louis as a home for the highest truth, both old and new, and a fountain of good influences for the whole community, is within our power, and that your Committee believe it will be attained. Resting upon this assurance which we have given him, Mr. Sheldon now sees his way open to go forward as our Leader, with enlarged plans for an aggressive campaign. It remains for us to justify his faith.

Whilst, therefore, we wish to sound the note of hope and confidence, it is only to call you to renewed activity. Though the Society is stronger today than ever before, we must not forget that to live, we must grow, and what we have done, must be counted as but the beginning of what we hope to do.

(Statement read Sunday morning, March 5, 1899, by Robert Moore; reprinted in Globe-Democrat March 6, 1899)

Despite Sheldon's public pronouncements, it is doubtful that the Society's finances were his only reason for contemplating resigning. The despair and vocational doubt he revealed in his journal, coupled with the relative financial freedom he attained through his marriage, may have prompted him to consider
another career path; he probably feared that the Society's financial woes reflected a lack of charisma on
his part. At the time Sheldon forced the issue at the Ethical Society, the Rev. John Snyder, a colleague of
Sheldon's in the liberal ministry, was under fire for failing to increase attendance at the Unitarian Church
of the Messiah. The drop-off in that congregation's revenues was so great, and so widely attributed to
Snyder's pastorate, that he was forced to resign in January 1899 after occupying the pulpit for 26 years.
The Ethical Society, by comparison, was growing -- its membership numbered about 300 at the turn of
the century -- but contributions had not kept pace with the head count. If Sheldon worried that he, like
Snyder, was held responsible for the fellowship's poor financial health, the strong response to his threat
gave him the approbation he sought.

However, as he had feared, the rise in contributions was short-lived. In the 1899-1900 fiscal
year, Sheldon won most of the assurances he had sought, including funds for decorating and furnishing a
room that was to serve as a fellowship parlor; fees for retaining William Henry Pommer, the most
capable of the Society's choral directors, as well as a professional string quartet; and increased
expenditures for study-club teachers, newspaper advertising, and the printing of lecture extracts. In
addition, the Society agreed to pay half the salary of an educational assistant to serve under Sheldon in
both the Ethical Society and the Self-Culture Halls Association. But contributions dropped the following
season, and the Society ended the 1900-1901 fiscal year with a small deficit. Again, the deaths of early
stalwarts accounted for most of the loss. The surplus that had been raised in response to Sheldon's threat
more than covered the debt, but the drop-off indicated that the year-to-year struggle for survival would
continue. To ease the threat of deficits, the board set up an Emergency Fund. In 1905, Moore and
Joseph Taussig gave the fund a tremendous boost by donating $5,500 in U.S. Steel Corporation bonds
which bore 5 percent interest.

The End of the Beginning

The first years of the century saw a marked increase in membership. By the end of the '02-03
season, the membership mark topped 360. Moore credited the Society's younger members with bringing
in most of the newcomers; he found in that increase "evidence of vitality and recuperative power that is
of great promise for the future." [Annual Report of the Chairman and Treasurer, fiscal year 1902-1903,
archives] The rise in membership kept the Society in the neighborhood of solvency, but the substantive
improvements Sheldon had envisioned -- a permanent building, additional full-time associate leaders,
and a broad expansion of the Society's community services -- were not to be realized in his lifetime.
Its modest growth notwithstanding, the Ethical Society of St. Louis had become a remarkable success. The fellowship overcame the inevitable misgivings of a conservative community by providing an arena for free thought. The Self-Culture Halls and the Society's lectures and study groups earned the fellowship a widespread reputation for progressive intellectualism. The Society's Sunday School, its most concerted experiment in ethical education, offered a unique alternative to sectarian religious instruction. In short, the fellowship lived up to its name by helping men, women, and children learn to cultivate "the good life."

In a rare display of gregariousness, Sheldon arranged a celebration of those successes on May 5, 1906, the close of the Society's twentieth year. The celebration consisted of a few addresses in Memorial Hall followed by a reception in the art gallery. Moore presented an overview of the Society's history, and representatives of the Women's Auxiliary and Greek Ethics Club briefly addressed the fellowship. To speak for the younger members of the Society, Sheldon called on Ernst B. Filsinger, a board member and international trader. [FOOTNOTE 3] In preparing for the event, Sheldon pleaded with Moore not to focus attention on him:

[T]here is one particular favor I beg for most beseechingly and that is that in all the exercises, there may be as little reference as possible to me or my name. I should wish this for my own feeling's sake and also as a matter of principle. We should take the occasion to make the members feel that they personally constitute the Ethical Society and that the lecturer is simply an officer of it for the time being, while the real future of it is in their hands. On the other hand, any strong personal word with regard to myself would only distress me. Such a meeting as I witnessed in New York in connection with the anniversary there, would have given me the blues or made me sick for months after, if I had in any [way] been the center of it. Whatever regard or good will may be felt for the lecturer should be taken for granted and... not [be] voiced on such an occasion. They key note should be rather "our" Society, "our" care for it, "our" hopes for its future.

Sheldon's words were unknowingly prophetic: The anniversary celebration marked the last time he would mingle with the community in good health. Shortly afterward, he embarked on a seven-week tour of Japan that ended in his incapacitating illness. Upon his return to the States, he initially went to his summer home in Vermont. He later decided to return to St. Louis, whether to work or to die. During the 1906-07 season, though confined to his sick room, he continued to oversee the work of the Society, choosing visiting lecturers, selecting platform readings, and advising board members. According to
Moore, "Those who visited him during these weary months found him always cheerful, always interested in what others were doing, with almost nothing to say about himself. So that such a visit, however saddening, was even more inspiring. For one could hardly fail to catch something of the faith which animated and sustained him -- a deep and abiding faith in the ultimate triumph of the true over the false, of the better over the worse." Sheldon yearned to address the community one more time. On May 5, the closing Sunday of the season, he managed to sit on the platform during Adler's address and then read "in clear, strong voice" (Annual Report of the Ethical Society for the 1906-07 season) the closing words of the service -- a poem by William James Linton that served as his parting words of encouragement:

Be patient, O be patient, go and watch
the wheat ears grow
So imperceptibly that ye can mark
nor change nor throe;
Day after day, day after day till the ear
is fully grown,
And then again day after day till the
ripened field is brown.

Sheldon died on June 5. The memorial service on October 12, a Saturday, was the first fellowship meeting of the new season. Moore presided over the service, which included tributes by Adler, the Rev. George R. Dodson, successor to Sheldon's friend J.C. Learned as pastor of the Church of the Unity; Rev. Samuel Sale of Temple Shaare Emeth, the rabbi who taught Sheldon Hebrew; Professor M. Anesaki, a member of the Tokyo ethical club that had sponsored his tour of Japan; Dr. William Taussig, longtime president of the Self-Culture Halls Association; William A. Brandenburger, a board member who grew up in the Society and who recently had become superintendent of the Sunday School; and Fanny M. Bacon, principal of the Marquette School and a participant in the Greek Ethics Club.

In his report to the membership for the 1906-07 season, Moore set out the buoy that was to guide the Society during its only leaderless era:

The year has, indeed, been a very anxious and critical one. But the Society has borne the test in a manner that is full of hope for the future. The additional funds necessary to meet our increased expenses have been promptly and willingly contributed; the attendance upon the Sunday morning lectures has been undiminished; and above all
our Sunday School, thanks to the admirable organization perfected by Mr. Sheldon and to the unwearyed and unselfish labors of the Superintendent and the teachers, has more than held its own. So that today the Society is more united and stronger than ever before.

During the next year we shall greatly miss the presence of our Leader, but the memory of his life and work will remain with us as a continual inspiration; and we cannot suppress the hope, which with him was a conviction, that each year will find us stronger, and that for years to come the Society will continue as a source of strength to its members and a living witness for all that is best in life and character.

(Annual Report of the Ethical Society for the 1906-07 season)

[FOOTNOTE 3: Filsinger was fated for adverse notoriety via his stormy marriage to St. Louis poet Sara Teasdale. The wedding was performed by Percival Chubb, the second leader of the Society. Teasdale left Filsinger before committing suicide.]
Chapter ??

A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Sheldon's death required the lay members of the community to do what he had wanted them to do -- take charge. For four years, Robert Moore and other members of the executive committee ran the Ethical Society without benefit of a formal leader. The Program Committee brought in platform speakers, and other committees tended to social programs and adult education. Cecilia Boette, a Sheldon protege, took the reins of the Sunday School. Sustained attendance at Platform meetings and in the Sunday School allayed fears of disorganization and dissolution. Contributions dropped off, and study clubs grew less active, but those setbacks were expected consequences of the loss of leadership. In time, panic gave way to sober, plodding labor. This period marks the maturation of the community; members who had looked to Sheldon as their father and guide now exerted the initiative he had instilled in them.

As the community's family feeling grew stronger, more and more members adopted Sheldon's dream of building a permanent home. The New York Society was proceeding with its plans to build a school and meeting house on its property on Central Park West, and the West London Society was preparing to acquire a church building. The Ethical movement was becoming an established force in religious life, and St. Louisans wanted to share in this new phase of growth.

Ironically, the World's Fair, which had so captivated Sheldon and the community, indirectly forced the executive committee to think more concretely about finding a long-term home. In 1905, Halsey C. Ives, director of the St. Louis Museum and School of Fine Arts, had announced plans to sell the museum building at 19th Street and Lucas Place and move the collection into the Forest Park structure that had served as the Palace of Fine Arts during the fair. As those plans progressed, the Ethical Society's tenancy became precarious. In 1908, the executive committee began negotiating with Temple Shaare Emmeth, Rabbi Sale's congregation, for use of its building at 620 Washington Ave. on Sundays. The talks hit a snag when the congregation refused to change the schedule of its Sunday School to permit the Ethical Sunday School to use classroom facilities before the platform service. Temple representatives suggested the Society conduct its Sunday School in the afternoon, a move that Moore said "would probably disband the school." (Letter from Robert Moore to Temple Shaare Emeth, dated June 30, 1908, archives) The executive committee, anxious to secure adequate quarters in a central location, raised its offer from $1,500 a year to $2,000 -- twice what the Society had paid for the use of Memorial Hall. Noting that the offer "goes to the very limit of our resources, and possibly even beyond the limit of prudence and safety," (Ibid.) Moore pleaded with the congregation to reconsider. It did not, and the Society contracted with Memorial Hall for another year.
Society members agreed that buying or building a structure would be a preferable solution, but the community's finances indicated that that dream was many years away. In the year following Sheldon's death, pledge contributions dropped nearly a thousand dollars to $4,917. That figure was augmented by Sunday collections, interest on bonds, a donation from the Greek Ethics Club, and a fund-raising entertainment put on by the Sunday School, but total receipts still lagged behind previous years. The termination of Sheldon's salary, which had been the largest single budget item at $3,200, offered some budgetary relief, but the Society paid out nearly that much in the 1907-08 season for guest lecturers and a $1,200 stipend for Sheldon's widow, Anna Hartshorne Sheldon. As the old habit of dodging deficits continued, constructing a building seemed far beyond the Society's means. Most members agreed that only substantial membership growth could provide the funding needed for a permanent home.

A Generous Challenge

Anna Sheldon was not a party to that pessimism. She believed that the members and friends of the Society had the necessary funds, and that all that was needed to make the dream a reality was a sharp impetus. In March 1909, she provided that impetus by offering to donate $37,000 toward the erection of a building. The offer was made on two conditions: The Society had to acquire a suitable lot with separate funds, and it had to secure enough pledges to complete the estimated cost of the building. To ensure swift action, Anna Sheldon said the offer would be open only until Nov. 1, 1909. The executive committee lost no time in responding to her challenge. Moore, Rudolph Schmitz, and Joseph Taussig formed a Site Committee, and a Ways and Means Committee consisting of George Durant, Jesse Williams, and Ernst Filsinger began drumming up funds.

In a report delivered to Moore at the end of March, the Ways and Means Committee estimated the total cost of the lot, building, and furnishings at $90,000. Subtracting Anna Sheldon's gift, the committee set its goal at $53,000. The executive committee officially lowered the total estimate to $75,000, presumably to make the terms of the gift more nearly attainable, but it left the goal at $50,000. In a flyer sent to members in April, the executive committee noted that the goal was about ten times the amount received yearly in pledges. Acknowledging that few members would be able to contribute ten times their yearly pledge, the committee called on members of means to give at an even higher rate. Pledges were to be paid in three installments -- the first on the call of the executive committee, and the balance in equal payments one year and two years after the date of the first call. By tying its actions to pledges instead of cash, the committee hoped to begin construction within a year.
At that time, the Society had about 400 members. Of that number, about 50 provided two-thirds of the Society's income. Acting on the assumption that the same core would contribute the lion's share of the building fund, the Ways and Means Committee called for a membership meeting at which the largest pledges could be announced. The hope was that a healthy start would inspire all members to contribute to the fund. At that meeting, held April 9, members pledged a total of $10,350. The need for extensive fund-raising being evident, Moore appointed a Building Fund Committee to take over the work of the provisional Ways and Means Committee. The larger committee was made up of Moore, Schmitz, Durant, Filsinger, William Brandenburger, C.W. Staudinger, W.E. Fischel, Fred J. Herzog, O.L. Teichman, George Levis, Herbert Morrissey, Mrs. R.M. Noonan, Bertha Buddecke, Mrs. J.H. Amerland, and Joseph Dormitzer. By the next membership meeting on April 29, this committee had succeeded in matching the first round of pledges. The total pledged, including Anna Sheldon's gift, came to $57,425. The biggest contributors were Moore and his wife, who gave $3,000; longtime contributor William Morton, $2,000; and Mr. and Mrs. Rudolph Schmitz, Dr. and Mrs. W.E. Fischel, William Brandenburger, and Mr. and Mrs. George O. Carpenter, each of whom pledged $1,000. About 20 individuals and couples gave amounts ranging from $200 to $600. An update released a few weeks later listed pledges of $1,000 from Adolphus Busch, a longtime business associate of Brandenburger's, and $250 from August A. Busch. Boette passed along $15 contributed by five Sunday School students and $100 from a charitable fund to which students had been contributing for 10 years. The Young Women's Self-Culture Club, though independent from the Ethical Society, contributed $25.

Even as the pledges were being counted, the need for a permanent home was becoming more urgent. The Palace of Fine Arts and the collection it housed were dedicated to the city in 1909, and the collection housed at Memorial Hall was moved to the new structure. The St. Louis School of Fine Arts, which belonged to Washington University, was preparing to join in the move to the new campus on the city's western boundary. The Society was assured it could retain use of the museum building during the 1909-10 season, but it was put on notice that its lease would be nullified as soon as the building was sold. Solicitors, holding up the specter of eviction, implored Society members to help erect a new building for the start of the 1910-11 season -- a dream even they must have recognized as impossible.

By June, a total of $67,000 had been pledged. Contributions continued to trickle in over the summer, and by the start of the new season the Society was only $2,700 short of its official goal. The executive committee closed the gap by pledging that amount from the general fund. Anna Sheldon's gift now was assured, but the executive committee called for an additional $15,000-$25,000 to ensure that the building would be first-rate. In September, the executive committee called in the first round of pledge
payments. Because Anna Sheldon's gift could be used only for the building, the Site Committee could
not negotiate for real estate until a substantial portion of contributors made their payments.

The Site Committee concentrated its search on Washington Avenue and Lindell Boulevard
between Grand and Spring avenues. It settled on a lot on Lindell near Spring, but its best offer was
refused. It then negotiated for a lot on Lindell just east of the St. Louis Club -- the site later occupied by
the American Auto Association of Missouri -- but its offer of $25,000 cash again was turned down.
Finally, in January 1910, the Society bought a site on the south side of Washington just west of Grand.
The lot then consisted of two rental properties designated as 3646 and 3650 Washington; the compromise
address was 3648. The Society paid $25,000 for the property. First-round pledge payments covered the
$1,000 paid up-front and the $12,000 that came due upon the execution of the deed, but according to the
terms agreed upon, Anna Sheldon would not release her gift until the lot was paid off. However, not
wishing to postpone construction by insisting on literal compliance with her terms, she agreed to take up
the $12,000 deed and advance $20,000 for the start-up of construction; these payments were to be
considered part of the gift she originally pledged. Again, she tendered the offer conditionally: She was
to select the architect, and the executive committee was to pass a resolution restricting the use of the
building's auditorium to "spiritual, literary, scientific and educational purposes, to the exclusion . . . of
dramatic or similar entertainments or performances." The executive committee agreed to those
conditions. (Fortunately for the Society's future standing in the arts, the resolution permitted "the
rendition of sacred and classical music and the like.")

Building a Worthy Temple

Anna Sheldon chose as the architect Louis Clemens Spiering, a native St. Louisan who had
studied at l'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. Spiering had helped design structures for the Louisiana
Purchase Exposition; he had served as a staff designer for the fair for a year and a half, and had been the
supervising architect for the French and Austrian governments. He later had served as a consulting
architect for the Missouri Capitol. Among his other accomplishments were Stephens College in
Columbia, the Soulard branch of the St. Louis Public Library, and a number of Central West End
residences. From 1903 to 1910, he taught in the School of Architecture at Washington University.
Unfortunately, Spiering became ill after beginning work on the Sheldon Memorial. His illness
postponed the start of construction. He died in March 1912, just a few months before the project was
completed. William B. Ittner was hired to supervise the completion of the building. Spiering had
worked for a commission of 5 percent of the total building cost; Ittner's wages were deducted from the
fees Spiering had yet to collect, and Spiering's mother, mindful of her son's passion for his last project, donated the remainder to the Society to be used in cultivating a garden.

With Anna Sheldon's gift in hand, Moore appointed a Building Committee to oversee the design and construction of the building. Moore was chairman ex officio; the other members were William Brandenburger, Charles W. Staudinger, Rudolph Schmitz, and Fred J. Herzog. In June, Spiering distributed his preliminary plans to construction bidders and Building Committee members. He based the exterior of the building on a classic Greek design, with two-story columns and a facade of Bedford stone. The spacious, two-story auditorium, the heart of the structure, would be encased in a steel skeleton. An assembly room would be situated above the auditorium. Two flights of stairs would connect the ground-floor vestibule with the auditorium balcony and the landing that led to the assembly room. On the first floor, behind the auditorium, would be the leader's study, a committee room, and a library large enough to accommodate 6,000 books. On the second floor, the rear of the building would be occupied by two study rooms and a large conference room. The assembly room on the top floor would accommodate about 500 people and would include a stage, dressing rooms, restrooms, a kitchen, and a storeroom. Classroom alcoves would line the seating area.

Fund-raising efforts continued in 1910. Most of the new pledges came in small amounts from first-time contributors, but some of the largest contributors increased their subscriptions still more. Moore raised his pledge by $1,000, Rudolph Schmitz by $2,000. The Women's Conference, successor to the Women's Auxiliary, conducted benefit dinners. The Society also asked the community at large to contribute to the cause. Local publisher William Marion Reedy wrote an editorial in The Mirror, an international literary magazine, calling on "St. Louisans of advanced tendencies" to "emulate their orthodox fellow citizens . . . by coming to the support of the project . . . . All who strive for social justice can and should help to build for it here a worthy temple . . . ." [The Mirror, June 16, 1910]

Even before the construction bids were in, executive committee members realized the cost estimates they had used to fulfill Anna Sheldon's challenge -- $25,000 for the lot, $50,000 for building and furnishings -- were much too conservative. When treasurer Joseph Taussig expressed his anxiety over the looming debt, secretary Fred J. Herzog responded with worldly calm: "There is not doubt [sic] that the cost of the building will exceed our subscriptions, but almost every institution or business must have some kind of debt or else they don't seem to be healthy, and if we were to be able to pay for our building outright without any debts hanging over us, I think we would feel too comfortable for the next two or three years." (Letter from Fred J. Herzog to Joseph Taussig, dated March 17, 1910; Ethical Society archives)
When the bids were opened in August, the committee's fears were confirmed. The lowest bid for general contracting was $75,771; six other bids ranged from $80,666 to $89,990. The lowest possible total, using the low general-contracting bid and including the lowest bids for electrical work and heating and ventilation, plus the costs of fixtures, seats, decorations, organ, and the architect's fee, came to $105,780 -- more than twice the executive committee's estimate. The committee rejected all bids, and Spiering began modifying his plans. He estimated his revised plans, including the substitution of a cheaper heating system, would bring the total cost down to around $84,000.

In the fall, the executive committee issued the second call on pledges and urged another round of fresh giving. Most contributors honored their pledges, bringing the building fund up to about $30,000, but the call for still more money went largely unanswered. Despite that disappointment, the committee decided to begin construction with available funds. Committee members privately banked on the belief that once the structure was begun, Society members would be compelled to see it through to completion, if only to spare themselves embarrassment.

On April 1, 1911, the Building Committee contracted with J.W. Wilson & Son and the other low bidders in the second round of bidding. The cornerstone of the building was laid on the morning of July 12. Present were executive committee members Moore, Brandenburger, Herzog, Rudolph Schmitz, Otto Teichman and George Levis. In a steel box set beneath the cornerstone, Brandenburger placed Sheldon's ashes and that day's editions of the Globe-Democrat and the St. Louis Republic.

In the fall, the executive committee reported that expenses already incurred or contracted for amounted to just under $80,000. Existing pledges nearly matched that figure, but another $35,000-$50,000 would be needed to complete the building. As the available cash disappeared, the committee decided against its plan to let the project fall idle. Instead, it began shopping for loans. With the membership's approval, it borrowed $40,000 from A.G. Edwards & Sons at 5 percent interest. The loan was made in the form of a bond issue. The final price tag for the project -- including the costs of the lot and building, fees for architects and engineers, loan costs, insurance, landscaping, and seating, -- was $120,000. The final pledge total was $82,848, but actual receipts fell a few thousand dollars short of that. Since the first year's interest on the loan was paid out of the building fund, still more cash was needed for the finishing touches. The final fund-raising campaign, in 1912, solicited gifts of specific furnishings and decorations. The costliest memorial gift was the organ, which was donated by secretary Fred J. Herzog and his aunts and uncles in memory of his mother, Carrie R. Herzog. Herzog selected the organ, which was built by George Kilgan & Son and modeled after that used by the Second Baptist Church; it was amplified by an experimental tone chest which, in later years, defied repair.
Ethical Society members got their first chance to inspect the building at a music recital and reception held there in September 1912. The crowd of 300 strolled through the auditorium, climbed the elegant staircases to the assembly room, and poked into the alcoves and club rooms that they soon would occupy. An acoustics expert had been hired to advise Spiering on the design of the auditorium, and members were anxious to test his success. On the consultant's advice, the seating area had been built to slope toward the speaker's platform, which jutted into the hall, and a two-foot pocket of air was left between the floorboards and the foundation to facilitate the reverberation of sound; the balcony was made concave -- at the cost of additional seating -- so it would absorb sound rather than deflecting it back into the auditorium. According to an article in the *Globe-Democrat*, a test of the acoustics proved satisfying: "Addresses were plainly audible throughout the building, and the most delicate tone shading in selections by the Waechtler Quintet could be heard in every part of the auditorium." (*Globe-Democrat*, September 13, 1912) In his greeting, Moore commended the community for completing the structure and expressed his hopes for the progress it made possible. "It now is our ambition and hope to make this home of ours the center of the best and noblest thoughts of the community," he said. "We want Sheldon Memorial Building to be recognized for the influences for good which radiate from it. Here should be the focus of the spread of intelligence in St. Louis." (Ibid.)

Once the building was completed, attention turned to payment of the Society's debt. In addition to the yearly interest charge of $2,000, the community would have to pay off $3,000 of the principal each year beginning in 1914. In the spring of 1913, the executive committee sold a $1,000 bond held in the Emergency Fund to help make the interest payment. As a more permanent method of meeting the debt, executive committee member Otto Teichman proposed the establishment of a redemption fund. Teichman opened the fund by donating two $500 bonds. Moore, Herzog, and Levis formed a committee to administer the fund.

The most extravagant fund-raiser in the whole campaign was a three-day "Bazaar of the Nations" held November 6-8, 1913, at Sheldon Memorial. The event featured music, entertainment, exotic food, and a flea market. Sale booths were decorated with the traditional ornaments of seven nations. Lighthearted plays showcased Ethical Society talent, and the Young People's Association presented "vaudeville that is at once charming and free from all objectionable things on the score of vulgarity." (flyer, Ethical Society archives) Dozens of students and amateur musicians took part in performances of classical and popular music. For the children, the bazaar featured story-telling, Punch 'n' Judy shows, and carnival games. Organizers called on all hands to participate in the event: Those who could not act or sing were commissioned to cook, donate goods, or wait on tables. The bazaar was such a success, financially as well as socially, that it became a regular event on the Ethical Society calendar.
Love and Leadership

While preparations for the Sheldon Memorial were under way, the executive committee also was charged with replacing its namesake. Given that Sheldon was widely regarded as a departed father, choosing a new leader was a touchy matter. Some members wanted a leader who, like Sheldon, would lecture regularly and devote himself to the Society's educational programs. Others, pleased with the variety of speakers they had been exposed to since Sheldon took ill, wanted a more administrative leader who would continue presenting that variety. Moore first asked Adler about possible replacements in January 1907, when Sheldon's death was inevitable, but the search did not begin in earnest until the following year. While the search was under way, Moore and Anna Sheldon filled the ceremonial role of the leader. Anna Sheldon was paid a stipend of $1,200 in the 1907-08 season, but it is unclear what duties she performed. She also was allotted $250 a year for a "young lady assistant." She was paid $800 for her services in the 1908-09 season, but she later returned the money.

During these years, virtually every leader in the Ethical movement addressed the Society, some for two or three consecutive Sundays. The membership took the opportunity to assess the qualifications of these people, and one or another's fitness for the full-time post was a frequent topic of discussion. In 1908, the Society offered the position to Alfred W. Martin, a member of New York's seven-person leadership team. Martin, a Harvard Divinity School graduate and former Unitarian minister, had made a powerful impression on the membership, but he preferred to remain in the East. John Lovejoy Elliott, Adler's endeared assistant and director of the Hudson Guild settlement program, also was asked to consider the post. Elliott, a native of Illinois, found the proposal appealing, but Hudson Guild was in debt and heavily dependent on him. However, he said the offer, though tentative, had "perhaps brought me the greatest satisfaction and one of the greatest trials of my life; satisfaction in that you thought I was in any way fitted to undertake such work, and a trial that I must say that even if such an offer were made me I should be obliged to decline it." (Letter from John Lovejoy Elliott, apparently written to Jesse Williams, dated Nov. 4, 1908; Ethical Society archives) The executive committee also considered offering the post to the Rev. George Rowland Dodson, pastor of the Unitarian Church of the Unity and a frequent guest speaker at the Society. Anna Garlin Spencer, the only woman on the New York team, apparently was not considered for the job. In his response to Moore's first inquiry about possible candidates, Adler's only reference to Spencer was: "As Mrs. Spencer, I suppose, is excluded, . . . ." (Letter from Felix Adler to Robert Moore, dated Jan. 22, 1907; Ethical Society archives) Spencer, a suffragist and a vice president of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, was admired by the membership in St.
Louis. Nevertheless, it seems Ethical Culture, for all its liberality, was not ready to accept a woman as sole leader of a society.

Percival Chubb, assistant to Adler and a teacher in the Ethical Culture School, had been a candidate from the start, but his love of teaching outweighed his interest in pastoral work. In addition, Adler had reservations about his leadership qualifications. In a charitably worded response to Moore, Adler said of him: "... as to fitness, I say this of course confidentially, the question has been raised whether Mr. Chubb possesses the executive ability necessary for the sole Leader of the Society. He is fine-grained and most capable in the place he fills; but a position largely executive might not be suited to his particular genius." (Ibid.)

It is a fact of life, even for Ethical Society members, that weighty decisions are not made by reason alone. The Society's ultimate decision to hire Chubb, and Chubb's ultimate acceptance of the post, were to some extent precipitated by a more private decision: in July 1910, Chubb married Anna Sheldon. He had been a friend of Sheldon's and had spoken in St. Louis almost annually since becoming an Ethical leader in 1905. He was a widower with three children; his first wife, the former Louise Walston, a native of Decatur, Ill., died in 1905. After the wedding, the couple lived at Anna's summer residence in Vermont and Chubb's home in New York. Chubb's candidacy for the St. Louis role had been batted about, but he told a Post-Dispatch reporter in June that he planned to stay in New York for at least a year, "and for that time Mrs. Sheldon's St. Louis friends will have to possess their souls in patience." (Post-Dispatch, June 25, 1910)

In November, the executive committee directed Moore to offer the position to Chubb. After a few weeks of thought and consultation, he accepted. His response explained that his reluctance to leave the classroom had been his sole cause of hesitation; St. Louis, he said, had given him an opportunity to fulfill "the hope that I might bring my work in this field to a fitting and effective close by devoting myself mainly to the ethical work which has had a comparatively small share of my energies." (Letter from Percival Chubb to Robert Moore, dated Dec. 19, 1910; Ethical Society archives) In accepting the offer, Chubb took a substantial cut in pay. Together, the New York Society and the school paid him $4,000 a year; lecture fees and a part-time lectureship at New York University added another $1,000. St. Louis was to pay him only $3,500 in the first year, with a vague promise of an additional $500 in subsequent years.

Chubb accepted the post on a condition that pleased most members of the executive committee: He would not deliver more than about 12 lectures per season. "I am not primarily a speaker or a platform man," he wrote. "My methods are rather those of the writer; and I should not wish to have to put too much time on the preparation of lectures when there are other valuable forms of work to be undertaken."
He said his experience in New York indicated that a broad spectrum of platform speakers, alternating with one frequent lecturer, would best satisfy the membership's needs. Moore responded that the additional expense of this condition had concerned the executive committee, but added that "the advantages of this plan seemed to be on the whole so great as to fully warrant undertaking it." On January 10, 1911, the committee unanimously ratified the decision to hire Chubb.

Percival Chubb was born in Davenport, England, in 1860. Educated at Stationer's School in London, he received a technical education for English civil service and served for 10 years on the Local Government Board of London. A writer and political activist, he was a founding member of the Fabian Society, a precursor of the British Labor movement which sought to establish socialism through gradual reforms. He was raised in the Church of England, but his exposure to Emerson and Matthew Arnold led him to more liberal religious communities. Among these was London's South Place Chapel, an independent free church that joined the Ethical movement when Stanton Coit, an American disciple of Adler's, took the helm in 1887. Coit, who organized the International Foundation for Moral and Religious Leadership, recruited Chubb into an informal leadership role. Chubb gave a lecture tour in the United States in 1890, and returned a few years later to teach in New York. He started at the Manual Training High School, and later joined the English department of the Ethical Culture School. In 1899, he became principal of its branch school. He was named assistant leader of the New York Society in 1905. Unlike Sheldon, Weston, Coit, and other members of Adler's early circle of colleagues, Chubb had little formal education. He acquired his command of literature, philosophy, and politics through reading and conversation. His participation in British reform led him to associate with such thinkers as playwright George Bernard Shaw and psychologist Havelock Ellis.

A Home of Religious Freedom

Chubb undertook his duties in St. Louis on October 1, 1911. A year later, he organized the dedication of the memorial to his predecessor. The weeklong celebration began October 6 with the commencement of the American Ethical Union's annual assembly. In addition to Chubb, speakers at the dedicatory service included Adler, Weston, Moore, and leader Horace J. Bridges, who then was serving the South Place Society in London. Weston's speech, a tribute to Sheldon, preceded the unveiling of a bronze bas-relief tablet honoring Sheldon. The tablet is inscribed with a quote from Sheldon:
"It is good to have lived and loved and labored. It is good to be missed from the ranks while the march is going on. It is good to have worked with all the energy at our command; and it is good to rest when that work is done."

Between the addresses, the Waechtler String Quartet performed such works as Mozart's "Ave Verum," Bizet's "Adagietto," and Tchaikowsky's "Andante Cantabile." Students of the Children's Sunday Assembly, dressed all in white, sang a dedicatory hymn as they walked in procession down the aisles:

Spirit of Truth, we raise to thee
This temple built in trust and hope,
That nurtured here, our lives may be
Of finer strain and ampler scope.
(Unidentified newspaper clipping)

On the evening of October 6, visiting delegates addressed the inaugural supper held in the Assembly Room. A "Civic Dedication" on October 7 featured addresses by St. Louis educators and civic leaders, including Mayor F.H. Kriesmann and Ben Blewett, superintendent of the St. Louis Public Schools. On October 9, ministers and congregations from St. Louis churches and temples were invited to take part in a "Fellowship Dedication." A chamber music concert was given October 10, and a celebration of the Young People's Association the following night included a dance and a performance of scenes from Shakespeare's "As You Like It."

In his dedicatory address, "Our Faith and Its Future," Chubb hailed the structure as a symbol -- and a vehicle -- of religious progress:

We reach our maturity and go forth from the home of our childhood into one especially provided to meet the needs of maturity . . . . We represent a new type of religious attitude. We are not adding to the religions of the world upon the same basis as that upon which they have multiplied in the past. The path of advance takes a new turn. We signify the fact that the more progressive spirits of our age have outgrown the religion of dogma . . . . We are happier and freer because we have no compromises to make, no hostages to give, no difficult explanations to offer, no fine distinctions to draw . . . .

We are in the direct line of religious evolution, and trace our ancestry through Emerson and the advanced Unitarianism of William Ellery Channing, to the natural expansion of thought for which great figures in the history of culture stand -- a Spinoza,
a Lessing, a Goethe, a Kant, a Coleridge, a Wordsworth, a Shelley, a Carlyle and an Arnold -- to mention a few of the most suggestive names. These may be styled the prophets of modern humanism. He who reads the writings of these sages and seers is conscious that he breathes a distinctly modern atmosphere of freedom. To read the writings of the man who more definitely than any other proclaimed the advent of ethical religion, our own Emerson, is to breathe the ampler air of the high regions where these great men dwelt.

Not only is the ethical movement and our ethical religion the natural outgrowth of these forces, but it is essentially the logical counterpart of that movement of thought which issued in democracy and the political embodiment of democracy which has been wrought out in this country . . . . When kings were dethroned, so were the Gods who had been appealed to as the sources and justification of kingly rule. Henceforth the many of democracy were to supersede the one or the few of monotheistic, trinitarian or oligarchic religion. It is impossible to develop the bearing of a thorough-going democratic faith upon religious conceptions, but one thing seems clear, . . . that it leads to the abolition of sectarian religion in favor of a new universal type based on the underlying fact of manhood, by virtue of which each one of us is regarded as possessing the right to life, labor and the pursuit of happiness . . . .

There are undoubtedly those who, like Cardinal Newman, cannot conceive of religion apart from dogma, but since Newman's time, there has emerged into clear light that view of human life which, logically interpreted, makes stationary dogma an impossibility for the finer intellectual conscience. Life, according to the evolutionary reading of it, means essentially growth, progress. Man's long history is the history of slow growth from an originally brutal state. The future must also be a future of continuous growth, and the man who jeopardizes his growth, who cries "Halt" in his quest after truth and knowledge, is guilty of intellectual impiety . . . . The stand which the ethical movement takes in instituting a religion without dogma is, we believe, the necessary consequence of assimilating that view of the world which has taken shape practically within our own time . . . .

The basis of our human faith is deeper than any dogmas to which we subscribe . . . . We of the Ethical movement maintain that there must be . . . a religious organization which shall permit of fellowship on the ground of our common allegiance to the great uniting ideas of human character.
Our new home is to be the home of such a faith for all those who feel its great and inspiring appeal. It is to be a home of religious freedom. The home of a faith for the free.

(Typewritten draft of address, "Our Faith and Its Future," by Percival Chubb; Ethical Society archives)
Chapter ??

PERCIVAL CHUBB:
A PASSION FOR UNITY

Percival Chubb was fired by love of the human family, "a mystical sense of union with his kind as deep as the ecstasy of the theological mystics." (On the Religious Frontier: From an Outpost of Ethical Religion, Percival Chubb, Macmillan Company, New York, 1931; p. 124) A self-professed radical, he came to America to take part in what he saw as a courageous uprising -- a drive toward emancipation from repressive creeds and the founding of a revolutionary religious democracy. Relentless in his criticism of an aimless society, he acquired local renown as a proponent of ethical values, cultural sophistication, and progressive politics.

Chubb published several books -- including an English textbook, a book on producing festivals and plays, and collections of writings by Lincoln and Twain -- and countless pamphlets and pastoral letters; his magnum opus was "On the Religious Frontier: From an Outpost of Ethical Religion." Though published in 1931, "Frontier" remains a provocative piece of humanist literature. In imaginative, impeccable prose, Chubb declared creedal religion impotent and proclaimed the time ripe for a new model of spiritual community. The "frontier" of the title refers to the "border land between the zone of orthodox religion and the region beyond, where men live unattached to any distinctively religious institution and are not united in any religious fellowship." (Ibid., p. vii) Like the settlers of the westward expansion, these rebels have left behind old ways of living and must cut a new path. To them -- the dubious and the disenchanted, the liberated and the isolated -- Chubb offered "a new simplified type of religion which exacts no conformities of creed, is hospitable to new knowledge, fronts the challenges and perplexities of the life of to-day in all their concreteness, and allows for fluctuating diversities of individual conviction." (Ibid., p. vii)

Chubb hailed the rationalists of recent centuries who, through their advances in science, history, and critical scholarship, cleared ancient superstitions from the path of intellectual progress. He averred
that science had rent biblical creationism and supernaturalism; more fundamentally, the spirit of the scientific method -- with "its fearless disinterestedness and inquisitiveness; its demand for convincing verification; its exaction of doubt and its exactitudes of proof" (Ibid., p. 19) -- mocked the innocent faith that sustained creedal religion. History and anthropology, by broadening the scope of human vision beyond the Judeo-Christian chronicle, forced a reinterpretation of humanity's relation to the universe. The evolution of civilization, said Chubb, "is a connected and self-explanatory story, which discards those interventions of managing divinities assumed by the earliest religions"; appreciation of humanity's struggle to control its environment -- and its own animal nature -- obviates such doctrines as the Fall and the Atonement. Finally, wrote Chubb, advances in comparative religious studies debunked Christianity's claim to uniqueness by bringing to light its cultural creditors; furthermore, biblical scholarship pushed aside the fantastical legends and philosophic biases that veiled the historic Jesus, revealing "something greater and more humanly helpful than the Christ of Christology." (Ibid., p. 22) But Chubb was no mere iconoclast: He rejoiced in liberation from the constraints of dogma because it made possible a clear, expansive world view. Ethical religion, he wrote, "seeks to build a new edifice for the spirit of man in which there need be no cramping of the mind." (Ibid., p. 25)

Chubb was bolder than his predecessor in challenging the validity of the traditional Western God-concept. After Darwin, he wrote, "Nature could no longer be regarded as the beneficent power which the eighteenth century had conceived it to be; she revealed a battleground, a slaughter heap, on which the unfortunate and unfit had perished." (Ibid., p. 110) Adopting the critical perspective of science, modern thinkers acknowledged that natural events occurred without reference to supplications and moral values; divine providence was dismissed as a gratuitous interpretation of the evidence. For Wordsworth, Bergson, and others, the image of an external God who intervenes in human affairs gave way to a God of immanence, an inscrutable power that underlies evolution, human character, existence itself. "This change," wrote Chubb, "helped us to seek the supreme revelation of the power at work in the world, in human reason and love, and not in a Nature external to man. . . . [I]f God is to be conceived
as reason and love, he is to be so conceived by virtue of what we know of reason and love in man -- the only palpable knowledge we can have. The gateway is Man." (Ibid., p. 121-123)

Apart from this apprehension of the highest realities as manifest in the human person, Chubb minimized the "quest for God." He was not averse to metaphysical speculation, but, mindful that philosophic knowledge is always tentative, and scientific knowledge always incomplete, he vowed that the religion he espoused would never sanctify opinions with the stamp of eternal verity. Though he rarely used the word, he was an enthusiastic proponent of agnosticism. Preoccupation with ultimate answers, he reckoned, was a guarantee of hopeless anxiety. Conversely, he taught that deep tranquility can be found by shifting one's attention from the meaning of life to the living of life:

If we . . . try to run down this issue of the place of belief in the economy of the spiritual life, we may state it in most general terms as turning upon the assumption of man's intellectual responsibility for solving the problem of the universe. It is as if we conceived of the universe as serving notice on man that he is expected to find out its meaning, that there is only one meaning, and that he is in peril if he does not find it. He must justify his presence in the universe by solving the riddle it propounds. . . . The universe is not his affair. He has been mysteriously born into it. He doesn't know why. It was not with his consent. He was not consulted. (Ibid., p. 142)

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It is, I say, with a blessed sense of relief from this anxiety as to belief that the mind is freed when the axis of the mind is changed from belief to conduct. The challenge is now thought of as the challenge of life to meet its problem, How to live? And man, if he accepts life, does so with the faith that it will justify itself by virtue of the
satisfactions it will bring in the endeavor to meet its practical problems. To ask why life is, why anything is, is vain. Why am I here? Why am I at all? are equally futile questions. Faith is the acceptance of life as carrying its own justifications, or as promising to do so. Man's dealing shall be with life as adequate to its own meanings. Life is a sufficiently impressive fact, and needs no authentication by an extraneous scriptural and pontifical authority. He will deal with it at first hand; and will refuse to believe that it is there only to puzzle him and to force him to recognize the ascendency of an authoritarianism or a priestism into whose only keeping the solution, the carefully guarded and otherwise unsolvable secret, is given. (Ibid., p. 143, 144)

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Hence the objection urged by critics of a "mere" religion of ethics, that it doesn't believe anything about the universe, or its Maker, or its guarantee of immortality, becomes a leading recommendation. It has dismissed the fear of misbelief. Its spirit of tranquil acceptance is combined with a supreme faith in the value of the effort to live aright. The gate to belief is active loyalty to the human task. Acceptance is not resignation; it is an acceptance of the invigorating call to life and the challenging demands of living. (Ibid., p. 148)

In his insistence that belief is subordinate to conduct, Chubb considered himself in good company. He was fond of quoting Jesus' admonitions that "you can tell a tree by its fruit" (Matthew 7:20; New American Bible) and "anyone who says he loves God but hates his neighbor is a liar." Regardless of whether a higher being may inhabit the cosmos, Chubb was confident that no purpose could be higher than the service of humanity, which "is at the same time the service of that something in man whereby he can erect himself above himself to the height of some superself, some ideal, some Highest." (Ibid., p.
Like Sheldon, Chubb honored Jesus for his singular attention to charity, his advocacy of living by love instead of straining to satisfy legalistic mandates of belief and behavior. Conversely, he condemned Jesus' spiritual heirs for reconstructing -- in his name -- the very sort of pharisaic devices he had railed against. The most contemptible crime of these heirs, wrote Chubb, is "the enlistment of hate and cruelty in the enforcement of doctrines arrogantly held to be necessary to salvation. . . . It is a pitiful and revolting record this, which identifies religion with the bloody compulsions of dogmatic violence." (Ibid., p. 31)

Though Chubb had scant regard for metaphysical beliefs, he validated mystical experience, the "heightening of the sense of being" that "may be linked with that consciousness of a deeper and wider selfhood." (Ibid., p. 58) Like Wordsworth, he sought to nurture "the enveloping consciousness that this life by which we live shares in the life that flows through all things and throbs in our hearts as it pulsates in the motions of the far-off galaxies." (Ibid., p. 26) Most of all, he advocated a profoundly humanistic mysticism, a perception that "comes of our imaginative, spiritual identification of ourselves with man, flesh of his flesh and soul of his soul, in all its heights and depths." (Ibid., p. 124) He considered all mystical intuitions natural, and cautioned against giving them supernatural interpretations. Their touchstone, he taught, was finer conduct -- not strengthened belief.

**The Spiritual Illumination of Common Things**

Ethics, according to Chubb, is the conscious nurturing of health and wholeness. It is much more than morality -- more than distinctions between right and wrong, more than rules, compulsions, and conformity. Pointing out that the word derives from the Greek ethos, meaning the character of an individual or group, he defined ethics as "the interrelation and interplay of all those subtly interdependent powers of sense and soul, of intellect and emotion, of reason and imagination which go to the make-up of
character, disciplined -- yes, firmly disciplined and organized character, whereof the fruit is to be
masterful personality expressed in right conduct." (Ibid., p.52) Unlike Sheldon, he discerned nothing
evil in human emotions. In contrast to Sheldon's instructions to "shut out a bad feeling by calling up a
good one," Chubb advocated the transformation of base impulses through consistent exposure to sublime
ideals. The life project of the ethical person, he wrote, is to "accomplish his second birth into the spirit,
aiding the transmutation of these rude endowments of energy and impulse into the image of the
archetypal man -- desires into ideals, appetites into aspirations, wonder into science, fumblings into art,
and sex into love." (Ibid., p. 83) To foster a taste for "the values by which alone men can live
harmoniously together," (Ibid., p. 43) to transform "impulsive love" into what Dante called "love
intellectual" -- that is the business of ethics.

Chubb held that those preeminent social values -- which he enumerated as truthfulness, justice,
and good will -- are "self-commending." Like the rights enshrined by the framers of the Constitution,
they require no external validation: "No God can authenticate these values; for there is nothing more
ultimate by virtue of which they can be authenticated. Like Beauty, they are their own excuse for being.
They live by the spell they exercise on the souls of men." (Ibid., p. 44) Furthermore, he taught that
"virtue is its own reward," and that the attempt to elicit it through sanctioned incentives and threats
belittles that reward. Truthfulness, for Chubb, included "integrity, sincerity, candor, and the courage
required in the exercise of these virtues." (Ibid., p.40) It also connotes a humble devotion to learning:
"We have not believed that the truth (always some particular brand) should make us free, because truth
is a growing, expanding force in a growing nature; besides which, the truth has found diverse and
conflicting expressions in the rival religions and philosophies of man. Rather is it the spirit of
truthfulness, deep down in character, that we have cherished." (pastoral letter by Percival Chubb, June
10, 1932) Good will he defined as "the spirit of fellowship in pursuit of the Highest Good, which is the
Good Life, a collective Good. . . . [It is] the passion for perfection in that finest of the fine arts, the art of
living." (On the Religious Frontier, p. 136, 137)
The religion Chubb espoused was as big as life, encompassing and integrating all areas of human experience and conduct. Like Zen masters and Christian mystics, he taught that one's religion— one's "way"— is lived in every action. "Our high task is the spiritual illumination of . . . common, concrete things," he wrote. "The religious man is he who handles nobly and well, not just his Bible or his Sabbath, but his life and himself— his citizenship, his family, his business, his war; who is bent on qualifying, not for another world, but first for this, -- 'one world at a time.' " (pastoral letter by Percival Chubb, September 1, 1918) He knew that ethical religion, to be viable, must address "the old eternal and primal facts of our human drama, birth and death, and labor and sorrow, and all the great recurrences that are the warp upon which we weave the patterns of life." (On the Religious Frontier, p. 94) It must minister to those in grief, despair, and confusion, and it must do so bravely and directly, without attempting to invoke miracles. To the common criticism that "mere ethics" cannot satisfy the human longing to be comforted, he replied that genuine religion "is not . . . an escape, a refuge, a narcotic, a compensation; it is an incitement to the handling of life so as to educe from it the highest spiritual values." (pastoral letter by Percival Chubb, September 1, 1918)

Chubb believed that the supreme service of religion is to bring people together; he never wearied of exalting the strength and joy found in solidarity. Just as traditional preachers insist one can be whole only by achieving union with God, Chubb taught that wholeness consists in human communion. "Our organization would not exist were it not for the primal need of fellowship in making the best and most of ourselves," he wrote. "We can get the greatest thoughts by remaining at home with a book; but that is to miss the human presence and the choral participation in human striving." (pastoral letter by Percival Chubb, Sept. 1, 1930) Although the Ethical Society's intellectualism is one of its distinctive virtues, Chubb worried that it discouraged the warm human contact Society members secretly sought. However, when, within a year's time, his wife died and he suffered a confining illness, the outpouring of sympathy he received revealed to him the community's latent kindness. In a 1924 pastoral letter, he underlined the
need for a religious association and urged Society members to more consistently offer each other their support and concern:

[Y]ou have made me feel so deeply this year, so many of you, how rich is the wealth of warm human sympathy that exists among us, that I have been asking myself whether such resources might not be made to count for more in coloring and bracing our common life. Never again shall the charge that the Ethical Society and its members are "cold" go without my instant and confident contradiction; for I am now full-armed with demonstration that it is not so. But can we not make this less timidly apparent? Cannot this warm-veined humanity be more of an encompassing power with us?

As many of you know, I had unexpectedly to go into hospital captivity this summer, to find myself one of a large company of those who suffer and must face darkness and peril. Again, -- in a more public way -- I was deeply impressed by the forces of rescue and comfort, of love and friendship and compassion, which rally at the call of distress. And this led to further meditations on the possibility of a larger and bolder ministration of these forces, -- especially among groups of people associated, as we are, to make life mean, through our fellowship, more than it might otherwise mean in fineness, fullness and elevation. Cannot this fellowship be more vividly humanized, -- quite simply and naturally, -- without fear of social complications and embarrassments? Can we not have more social-heartedness to give soul to our social-mindedness?

* * *

So I saw with new clearness how much we all need some such larger world to live in as our spiritual association in an Ethical Society tries to provide. We need a
varied human world outside of and overarching our family world, and above all, outside our "set"; yes, above our business or professional, our club or party circle, each of which tends to stereotype its typical grimace and gesture upon us. I say "spiritual association" as hitting at the unique and supreme feature of such a religious group, -- namely, that it supposes that we meet above the plane of our ordinary selves, on the plane of our best selves, our total selves.

The Cleansing Fires of War

That Ethical Culture was founded one hundred years after the Declaration of Independence held great significance for Chubb, for he considered the movement the perfect religious parallel to America's fresh political venture. Like American democracy, Ethical Culture was founded on the inalienable worth of the individual; it respects the convictions of each, and accords dominance to none. It is a democratic religion, "an all-inclusive fellowship in which all men of good will may find a place." (On the Religious Frontier, p. 78) His model of leadership echoed the American ideal of the statesman as a servant of his equals: "I have never regarded myself as pastor of a congregation, but as a member and functionary of a fellowship," he wrote. (pastoral letter by Percival Chubb, June 10, 1932) But as much as Chubb loved America, the birthplace and paradigm of ethical religion, he was disappointed in Americans, for they had failed to heed their native son Emerson. Instead of directing its course according to the principles it ostensibly espoused, this people had devoted its energies to profit-making and militarism. During Chubb's tenure at the Ethical Society, the nation faced a series of ethical challenges -- World War I, women's suffrage, Prohibition, the Great Depression. Again and again, he urged his listeners to reassert the primordial virtues of the American character.
Chubb saw the Great War as "a religious scandal," (On the Religious Frontier, p. 11) an indictment of the institutions that failed to avert a horrifying conflict. "Our trust in humanity and in the efficacy of reason, justice and goodwill suffers the rudest shock," he wrote. (pastoral letter by Percival Chubb, September 21, 1914) In accordance with his view of religion as "an incitement to educe spiritual values," he told Society members that "the paramount ethical task of the hour . . . is to live through this awful crisis in human affairs so that we may wring from our distress and our doubt the full measure of spiritual discipline. . . . The fires in which the world is being tried must be for us cleansing fires, burning up the dross of our smaller selves, and clearing to a steady light upon our path of duty." (pastoral letter by Percival Chubb, Sept. 27, 1915) In the first years of the war, before the United States entered the fray, he taught that Americans could best serve the cause of peace by maintaining the nation's exemplary tolerance. "Our American citizenship calls on us to lift our thinking to the highest plane of international disinterestedness and inclusiveness," he wrote. "We must confront the national antagonisms which rend Europe by our American conception of the pacific world-state in which these racial antagonisms are transcended and silenced, and by our actualized fellowship here of Teuton and Slav, Latin and Saxon, Jew and Gentile." (pastoral letter by Percival Chubb, September 21, 1914) He frequently spoke on the war in platform addresses, stressing America's overarching commitments -- to "union and unity; to democracy and not to feudal or class government; to republicanism and not to kings and princes by divine right; to industrialism and not to militarism." (pastoral letter by Percival Chubb, September 27, 1915) He took pains to avoid antagonizing the many German-Americans in the community, and he urged partisans to listen to reason over "the cries of ancestral blood." (Ibid.)

As the sentiment to enter the war intensified, Chubb grew more vehement in his call for restraint. On June 3, 1916, he helped organize an "anti-militarism" demonstration on the steps of City Hall; the rally was intended to counterbalance a parade held earlier that day to whip up support for war preparedness. An estimated 5,000 citizens attended the peace rally. (Globe-Democrat, June 4, 1916) Chubb, then vice president of the Missouri Peace Society, was the principal speaker. His address, as
reported in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, reflected the socialist position that the drive toward war was fueled by the profit motive:

Chubb said in his address that as the "matter and clatter of the preparedness parade of the afternoon had subsided, everyone could now consider the country saved."

"That great swashbuckler of politics, the big noise -- the Colonel, came here to prepare us for the preparedness parade," he said. "He prepared us by spreading bad feeling and calling those who are most loyal to the peace and happiness and welfare of our country traitors."

"History repeated itself in the pre-parade here, for it was the same as that of New York -- the slaves of big business were the marchers. The business houses herded their employees together to make a showing for a sentiment they favor because of business reasons."

Chubb said the parade was composed completely of "poor fellows" who "marched to please the boss," and "society dames, whose pictures we so frequently see in the newspapers."

He said the purpose of the meeting he was addressing was to make it known in "a quiet way that there are tens of thousands in St. Louis who protest against this abominable business."

Preparedness, he said, is the same bloody banner under which millions have marched to slaughter in the European war. Those who advocate it, he declared, are traitors to the pacifist traditions of America.

Preparedness cannot be for peace, but must be for war, he said. It is the duty of the United States to insist that the quarrels of nations henceforth be decided on the
principles of right, justice and humanity and not to carry a message of further preparedness for war, he declared.

"We are asked to make a change to militarism at a time when our friendship is more precious to the nations of the world than ever before," he said.

(St. Louis Post-Dispatch, June 4, 1916)

Many Society members shared Chubb's pacifism. In January 1917, as the United States stood on the threshold of war, the Society hosted a rally conducted by the National League to Enforce Peace. Once the war was under way, however, the Society supported the military effort: The Women's Auxiliary contributed heartily to relief projects, temporary leader George O'Dell promoted the purchase of liberty bonds from the platform, and the Red Cross was offered free use of the Assembly Room. (Minutes of Board of Trustees meeting, April 1918) About thirty of the Society's young men -- including Chubb's son, R. Walston Chubb -- fought in the war; Y.P.A. members sent them letters and gifts, accorded them ceremonial honors, and welcomed them back to civilian life. For his part, Chubb attempted to wring wisdom from the cataclysm; he hoped the tragic results of irrationality would prompt a reconsecration to reason. "Making democracy safe depends upon making it think," he wrote. "The war is an inescapable challenge to straighter and stronger thinking. Bad thinking or the absence of thinking is its principal cause; only better thinking can deliver us and give us a more rational, just and humane world." (pastoral letter by Percival Chubb, September 1, 1918) In his platform lectures, he addressed the ideals over which the war was being fought; the social reconstruction indicated by international hostility; the changing conceptions of death and divinity in the face of unrelieved suffering; and the duties of citizens in wartime. Upon the war's denouement, he delivered an address titled "The Religion of Young America During the War -- and After." In it, he predicted the war would change irrevocably the nature of American religion. First, the nation's crisis had unified its citizens in a cause that transcended sectarian boundaries; Chubb hoped this esprit de corps would carry over as an enduring spirit of religious
tolerance. Secondly, he wrote, the war strengthened the conviction that the common good -- rather than individual salvation -- ought to be the primary concern of religion. Finally, because teamwork and ethical principles literally had become matters of life and death, the war made religion a more integral part of American life. But Chubb's appreciation of the war's potential benefits did not alter his essential pacifism. As evidenced by the responsive reading he wrote for Armistice Day platform services, he wanted the war to be remembered as a shameful calamity:

LEADER: I sing the song of the great clean guns that belch forth death at will.
RESPONSE: Oh, but the wailing mothers, the lifeless forms and still!
LEADER: I sing the song of the billowing flags, the bugles that blare their tune.
RESPONSE: Oh, but the shattered cities where ruin came so soon!
LEADER: I sing the clash of bayonets and sabres that flash and cleave.
RESPONSE: But will you sing of the injured, too, who go with pinned-up sleeve?
LEADER: I sing of noted generals, their battle deeds intone.
RESPONSE: Oh, but the fields of crosses where lie the men unknown!
LEADER: I sing of hearts victorious, long ranks of marching men.
RESPONSE: But can you sing of the silent men who never can march again?
ALL: Were half the power that fills the world with terror,
Were half the wealth bestowed on camps and courts
Given to redeem the human mind from error,
There were no need of arsenal or forts.

Chubb stated his attitude in a more positive manner when he wrote that "if the glamor is to be taken out of war, it must be by making peace glamorous. The heart must be won for peace, and nothing less than World-peace." (Afterthoughts, pastoral letter published in pamphlet form, p. 5)
Chubb believed the war had shattered the credibility of creedal religions, both because they had failed to maintain peace and because their assurances amid worldwide suffering rang hollow. The world, he said, was "eager for a religion more adequate to its vital needs than those types of other-worldliness which failed it in the recent crisis, -- a religion attuned to the exigent realities, the new knowledge, and the broadened vision of the modern-minded man." (pastoral letter by Percival Chubb, September 1, 1918) He recounted stories from the trenches indicating that servicemen, who daily faced grave danger and stark inhumanity, had no use for sweet platitudes; they entered battle with stern devotion to their homeland, a stance that was "firm-set on the soil of human reality." (p. 15, "Religion of Young America") In the aftermath of the war, Chubb watched that devotion turn to cynicism. The disillusionment of the nation's youth, he believed, left them yearning for the sort of frontier religion he proffered:

[The youth of to-day are not in a natural and normal state of mind and emotion. They -- or at least those whom we style the "intellectuals" or the "intelligenzia" -- are in a state of revolt. This revolt of youth is a fruit of the war. The feeling which the war bred in youth was that they had been trapped and sacrificed in a cause represented as "holy." They found themselves betrayed. It had been trumpeted as the War to end War, and to save Democracy. The event led to no such results; they were forgotten. Instead, it led on to the fear of another war, to increased armaments in defiance of general bankruptcy, to Fascism and battling Communism. Youth drew its conclusion; there was something false and hypocritical in the morality that had sacrificed the youth of the world on its smoking altars of failure. They would cast these things from them. They would go their own better way, the way of freedom and friendliness. They would rally the youth of the world to the recognition of a common cause by war-resistance and pledges of cooperation. [T]hey ... gathered on the frontier.

(On the Religious Frontier, p. 48, 49)
Ethical Influenza

The religious reawakening Chubb prophesied did not occur. Instead, cynicism mounted:
Prohibition fostered contempt for the law, Teapot Dome and other political scandals undercut Americans' regard for officeholders, and the Great Depression revealed that even the nation's industrial economy was a crumbling fortress. The Depression, by Chubb's reckoning, was a manifestation of "spiritual bankruptcy." It resulted, not from flaws in the machinery of commerce and finance, but from "a lack of social vision, ethical vision, false first principles, a shallow reading of life." (On the Religious Frontier, p. 102) He hoped the misery of that era would at last spur the nation to re-examine its course, to remember "that the voice of an Emerson was once heard in the land." (Ibid., p. 89) He believed that the need for ethical religion was more apparent than ever:

Never in my memory has there been a time when the contribution which the Ethical Movement (which means our Society in particular) may make toward the common welfare and deliverance has been so convincingly called for. Of the ethical implications of the collapse of capitalist industry I will not speak. Not only Karl Marx, but the prophets and sages persuaded me long since that it carried within it the seeds of its own destruction. The Great War announced its doom. If this profiteers' game of greed and grab was to go on prospering, then the earth was pillared rottenness. The War and the Peace have together exposed the rottenness. Our resources of soundness are on trial.

The accompanying demoralization is too obvious; and the way of repentance, religiously speaking, seems equally obvious. The call upon religion is to divest itself of its accretions of irrelevancy and to address itself to the task of promoting plain righteousness, yes, just simple honesty and integrity. In these all spiritual values are rooted. The contemporary exhibitions of corruption in business and politics, the
brutalities of crime, the indecencies of self-indulgence, the vulgarities of popular
pleasuring, all announce the withering of fundamental *morale*. And the absence of any
widespread and agitating indignation and contrition is at once the handwriting on the
wall that threatens ruin and the summons to a new way of life.

(pastoral letter by Percival Chubb, June 10, 1932)

For Chubb, this lack of indignation -- which betrayed a general failure to critically assess
contemporary culture -- was as despicable as any willful moral transgression. American consciousness,
he said, was afflicted with ethical influenza and moral sleeping sickness." (New York Times, Dec. 2,
1929; dateline Philadelphia, Dec. 1) He, of course, had an opinion about virtually every social trend, and
he never hesitated to voice it. In 1913, he took William Marion Reedy to task for publishing a sexually
libertine essay in The Mirror. "I cannot understand why in your pages you should allow anyone to
wallow on all fours in this filth of depravity," he wrote. "The bestial thing is a slap in the face to all of us
who are working for clean manhood and womanhood." (April 18, 1913, "The Mirror") When Henry
Ford introduced the five-day work week, Chubb began railing against the unhealthy use of leisure time.
Though no temperance crusader, he was infuriated by the widespread disregard of Prohibition. "Manly
objection to the law, one understands, and organized effort to alter it," he said, "but to make a supposedly
unwise law an excuse and cover for bootlegging and indulgence, and for young people's imitation of their
intemperate elders, is humbug and hypocrisy and witlessness." (St. Louis Star, Nov. 1, 1926) In 1926,
while lambasting the Board of Education for demoting three administrators without explanation, he
referred to a recent city mayor as "a Mussolini." (unidentified clipping, around April 11) If he
sometimes overstated his case, he did so with calculation: He was more concerned with spirring thought
and debate than with winning agreement.

Chubb was no ivory-tower philosopher. He deemed responsible participation in civic affairs an
essential of the ethical life. "For the master mind of Aristotle, politics and religion are at heart one," he
said in a 1926 address. "Politics meant the attainment through the state of the supreme good, because the state is the highest form of human association and exists to make life not merely possible, but good."

("Religion Needed in Politics, Chubb says," Globe-Democrat, Nov. 1, 1926) He said the notion that the constitutional separation of church and state requires citizens to keep their religious convictions private was a "confusion of mind," for "if religion is a way of life, then it must inspire and help us to find and keep the right way in all our human relations and affairs." (Ibid.) Accordingly, he often addressed campaign issues and partisan policies from the platform. He also took part in a variety of civic enterprises. In 1915 and 1916, for instance, he directed a juried competition for a city flag design under the auspices of the St. Louis Pageant Drama Association. In 1913, he persuaded the Society's Men's Club to join the St. Louis Federation for Good Citizenship, a non-partisan group that disseminated information regarding candidates, officeholders, and pending legislation; Chubb himself served on the federation's executive committee. In addition, he chaired the League for Independent Political Action in the early 1930s. He freely distributed to Society members the political endorsements of these councils, and the board supported him in arranging political forums at Sheldon Memorial.
Chubb kicked up a public storm in 1916 when he attacked the caliber of St. Louis journalism. In an address delivered on January 16, he denounced local newspapers as superficial and sensational. He said they neglected sound reporting of deliberations at St. Louis City Hall and the Missouri General Assembly, and that they gave insufficient attention to the labor movement, literature, and cultural events. He decried the state of arts criticism as "pitiful." The worst grievances, by his estimate, were the lurid reporting of crime and the salacious packaging of "girl stuff" -- news about misbehaving debutantes, forbidden elopements and "marital misadventures." (The "girl's column" was a staple of many daily newspapers of the era. As an example of the custom, two days after Chubb's address the St. Louis Globe-Democrat ran -- at the top of its front page -- an illustrated story on a 16-year-old art student who had eloped to Clayton with her 19-year-old boyfriend; within an hour of the ceremony, the two had been detained by police and ordered separated by the girl's father, a prominent businessman.) ("Art Student, 16, Is Married, Arrested, Separated in Hour," St. Louis Globe-Democrat, January 18, 1916) He urged his listeners to pay attention to the profound influence wielded by newspapers. "The newspaper is so much with us and is so much taken for granted that we do not realize what an immensely potent force it is in coloring our minds and shaping our characters," he said. "Its scale of values tends to standardize ours." ("The Newspaper as One of the Social Forces that Fashion Character," St. Louis Labor, date unknown; Ethical Society archives) He complained that the city's "educated minority" had to turn to the New York Times and other Eastern newspapers for thorough coverage of national and world events, as well as for cultural and intellectual sustenance.

While all of the city's five daily newspapers carried reports of the address -- first-hand accounts, summaries of competitors' reportage, or interviews with Chubb -- only the weekly St. Louis Labor, which considered Chubb a valued ally, reprinted his address verbatim:

> [N]ewspaper owners and editors must face the fact that a great deal of distrust and discontent is prevalent among the better class of their readers. In this community in particular there is a large body of educated people who are deeply discontented with our great newspapers -- so much so that large numbers of them are subscribers to the great Eastern daily papers. I know of one institution in the city where, as I have been told, thirty copies of the New York Times are subscribed for.

> It is of the sins of omission rather than of commission that I shall speak for the most part on this occasion. Our newspapers defend themselves by the customary
argument that these so-called "high-brow" malcontents represent a negligible minority.
The great majority get what they want: a seemingly plausible defense, yet based on mere
guesswork and an assumption both unproved and unprovable. It was assumed in New
York that the people wanted rag-time music at the municipal concerts in the parks; it was
found when good music was offered they preferred it. Assume that a child is bad, and it
will act accordingly -- every teacher knows that. Assume that it is fine, and it will be
proud to justify your good opinion. You can treat the public in the same way.

The newspaper's public function is to get into line with all other similar
institutions -- the schools, libraries, art museums. It must educate, and not pander; it
must lead, and not slink in the rear of the crowd.

It is sometimes retorted that its function is the simple one of supplying
the news. But what news? The test of a newspaper that professes to be no more than a
purveyor of news is in the selection of its news and the relative emphasis put upon it.
How much does crime figure? Sordid gossip? Where does it figure? -- front page or last?
A newspaper must come to judgment on this issue.

How do we fare in this city on this score? Is this community as a whole, and in
all the varieties of its population and interests, fairly reflected in any of our newspapers?
Is justice done to the worthier elements in our life? Are its outreachings registered -- the
strivings of its best forward-moving citizens? The answer will be emphatically in the
negative. The record of the gossip and scandal of the town -- the frivolities and
foolishness of the town -- are out of all proportion to the record of the finer sides of life!
We resent this; we are ashamed of it. If we have been making a sojourn in the East, and
have been using the papers there, we return and take up our local papers with a sense of
mortification. We are not so bad as these papers make us out to be. They depress our
standards. They hold us back.

("The Newspaper as One of the Social Forces that Fashion Character," St. Louis Labor,
date unknown; clip in Ethical Society archives)

Chubb argued that the business offices of newspapers dictated editorial judgment, subjugating
journalists to advertisers bent on promoting their commercial interests. While acknowledging hope in
the increasing professionalism of journalists -- as evidenced by conventions addressing longstanding
ethical issues -- he called for some sort of public control of the press. Calling the newspaper "a public
institution akin in some ways to a public service corporation," he suggested that newspapers be endowed and run in the manner of a public library. "Think of a newspaper which represented on its board of management, in the interest of the largest public ends, men and women from every section and calling -- the business men, the professional classes, and above all the labor men; a board which represented not only the conservatism of a community, but its radicalism," he offered. "It would give the better element in the community more of a representation than they get to-day." (Ibid.)

Reaction from the press was swift and vehement. The Globe-Democrat's January 17 account of the address, which began in a single column at the top of the front page, openly mocked the speaker. "Wholesale denunciation of the St. Louis press, to the effect that the newspapers here are so poor that 'the educated minority' seek 'Eastern papers,' was uttered by Percival Chubb, at the Ethical Society, yesterday morning," the story began, "Presumably his own slender congregation, with so many vacant seats that the back pews were roped off to compel people to sit nearer to the speaker, was regarded by him as a part of this self-styled 'educated minority.'" ("St. Louis Press Denounced By Percival Chubb," St. Louis Globe-Democrat, Monday, January 17, 1916) The writer louted the speaker as a "modern Jeremiah" and took him to task for incorrectly dating a quote from a Globe-Democrat editor. In a subsequent interview published in the St. Louis Star, Chubb reviled the Globe-Democrat story as "mean, petty and inaccurate. The story was not handled in true sportsmanlike fashion. . . . The article . . . was jumbled in a maze of personal animus in an effort to criticise me. This is the sort of thing I complained against." ("Chubb Praises Star's Crusade Against Quacks," St. Louis Star, January 17, 1916) To Chubb's chagrin, portions of the Globe article, though biased and largely inaccurate, were reprinted by other papers in follow-up stories.

The Post-Dispatch, in an editorial published in its January 17 evening edition, dissected its entire Sunday edition, giving ample evidence that its coverage emphasized news of the war and other matters of public import, and that its cultural reporting was exemplary. The editorial asserted that the Post business office had no influence on the judgment of editors and reporters. It invited Chubb to investigate the newspaper and report his findings in its columns. "Meanwhile," the editorial concluded, "Mr. Chubb should read papers that are not filled with cheap sensationalism. Newspapers are not all alike." ("Mr. Chubb's Inaccuracies," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 17, 1916) In an interview with a Post reporter published the following day, Chubb acknowledged that he could find little to criticize in the newspaper; his critical remarks, he said, "were based on an average of the local papers and were not meant for the Post-Dispatch." However, he stood by his observation that even the Post gave insufficient attention to "civic and educational movements." ("Chubb Explains His Sunday Talk On Newspapers," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 18, 1916)
Newspapers would not let the controversy die quickly. Each of the city's daily papers carried several stories and editorial responses in the days and weeks after the address. While the Post declared its innocence of unsavory reporting, other papers defended their practices as responsive to the needs of diverse readers. This editorial, from the Globe, exemplifies the reaction of the press:

THE CHUBB IDEA

There is usually an infinite deal of nonsense in the criticisms of newspapers by transcendental idealists. There is more nonsense than usual in Mr. Percival Chubb's latest periodical arraignment of journalism, a profession which has never been conducted to his entire satisfaction, and, we fear, and hope, never will be. For a newspaper modeled on Chubb lines would appeal to an "educated minority" so small that it would be compelled to hold out its hat for the endowment or state control and support that Mr. Chubb advocates. There are a number of state-controlled journals in the world, but it would be a libel to call any one of them a newspaper, for they are so fettered by censorship that they do not dare to print anything but perfunctory statements of official acts.

The idealistic critic, of the Chubb order, always overlooks the fundamental purpose of a newspaper, which is the publication of news. And it cannot confine itself to news that will interest and meet with the approval of none but a highly educated and supercritical class, unless it expects to limit its circulation to that class. There are newspapers that do this, a few, and excellent papers they are, in certain qualities, but their field is narrow, their influence, however great within that field, does not extend beyond it, and with one or two exceptions, they are notoriously unprofitable. Nor are they newspapers in the full sense of that term. For the word "news" is not, and ought not to be, limited in its application to "the good, the pure and the beautiful." A knowledge of the existence, character and extent of evil, in all forms, is as necessary to the progress of mankind, as is an acquaintance with the ethical influences that promote advancement. A newspaper, a real newspaper, must tell its readers what is going on in the world, the bad as well as the good. . . . It is the newspaper that truly reflects life that is most successful and most influential, and it deserves to be, for it speaks to the whole people in a language they understand, and its influence is constant for good.
At the outset, the papers allied against Chubb. As the debate continued, however, each of several papers affirmed certain of Chubb's criticisms but fixed blame on its competitors. At least two bashed the *Post-Dispatch* for its assertion that its editorial department was wholly free from the influence of its business office; said one, "as to that sassy and independent newspaper which the P-D pretends to be -- there ain't no such journalistic animal." (unidentified press clipping, Ethical Society archives)

The newspapers took advantage of the debate as an opportunity to poke fun at Chubb and the Ethical Society for what some staff members deemed moralism and excessive intellectualism. One editorial, headlined "All Are Not Chubbs," chided the lecturer for attempting to foist his narrow tastes on the community; the editorial claimed to spell out "the logic of the situation ... in the same comprehensive, argumentative way that all ethical culturists admire." ("All Are Not Chubbs," unidentified newspaper clipping; Ethical Society archives) Another response was headlined, "A Publisher Chubblisher." Several papers produced remarkably creative lampoons. This from Bart Howard, a columnist for the *St. Louis Republic*:

**THE CHUBB PAPER**

Were Percy in the swivel,
The seat of high command,
He'd print no hint of scandal
Of social Goth or Vandal,
Nor dull commercial drivel
About what business planned,
Were Percy in the swivel,
The seat of high command.

If Percy, on the paper,
Held down the city desk,
Page one would never feature
That debutantie creature,
However gay her caper,
Or garb how picturesque!
If Percy, on the paper,
Held down the city desk.

If it were Percy's billet,
    A Sunday ed. to be,
He harbors the conviction
    He'd chuck the art and fiction.
The space -- just how he'd fill it
    I don't know, nor does he,
If it were Percy's billet,
    A Sunday ed. to be.

Were Percy the gazimbo
    That ran the sport etude,
The present style, rococo
    From "spokes" clean up to "boco,"
Were banished to the limbo
    Of well-known desuetude,
Were Percy the gazimbo
    That ran the sport etude.

As owner, Mister Percy
    Would have the sheet endowed,
Then, smashing the custom's fetters,
    He'd raise the torch of letters,
And, though they begged for mercy,
    He'd scorn the vulgar crowd.
You're right on one thing, Percy --
    Your sheet must be endowed.

("What Y'May Column," by Bart Howard, St. Louis Republic, date uncertain)

In its January 18 edition, the Globe carried a cluster of cartoons satirizing Chubb on the front of its second section. Beneath it was printed the work of an unnamed scribe:
The Ballad of the Cultured Minority
or
Page One or Bust

It was a Sunday afternoon,
And gathered there sedate,
The Cultured Minor Leaguers sat
To hear P. Chubb orate.
And most of them were women folk,
With here and there a hubby,
And some were lean and some were de
Riguer by being Chubby;
And as the faithful crowd drew close
In fond anticipation,
P. Chubb bucked up and let this fly --
(His bit to save the nation) --

We can live without girls, we can live without crooks,
But demand an occasional classic on books;
High art, not high heels, is the stuff we crave,
Not light stuff or bright stuff, but solemn and grave.

Then someone in a sheltered nook
Let out a stifled murmur;
But soon his better half prevailed,
And Chubb spoke all the firmer.
He dwelt on how he'd make page one
An object of delight
Until the lone reporter there
Collapsed, too proud to fight.
And as the Cultured Minors sat,
His fiery phrases eating,
P. Chubb talked on as if he knew
The subject he was treating:

We can do without stories of love and divorce,
And baseball and boxing and other things coarse,
We don't want descriptions of how a thief stole,
But demand an occasional theme on the soul.
(St. Louis Globe-Democrat, January 18, 1916)

Not to be outdone, Post-Dispatch columnist Clark McAdams produced several "issues" of an ersatz newspaper modeled on Chubb's ideals. Called "The Daily Chubb," it was printed in McAdams' corner of the editorial page. The masthead identified the publication as "A Newspaper for Highbrows"; its motto was, "If You Don't See It in The Chubb, It Isn't Worth Knowing." Naturally, The Chubb carried news of the arts and delicately avoided mentioning details of crime and war. Stories were written in a lofty tone and loaded with high-sounding words: "The educated minority," as defined by an editorial in The Chubb, "are free from that sort of ignoratio elenchi and amphiboly that has produced so many circulos in probando, to the despair of all true thinkers." (St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 25, 1916) The Chubb's fictional newsboys, forbidden to hawk the paper by "caterwauling," reportedly engaged in polite conversation with prospective buyers. Some nuggets from The Chubb:

THE PADEREWSKI DEBACLE

The cultured aristocracy of the city rises as one man in protest against a deplorable omission noted in Mr. Paderewski's program for next Wednesday night. By a singular oversight the pianist proffers not a single composition by Mendelssohn, to whose eminent virtues of breeding even so uncouth a person as Wagner felt constrained to pay tribute in the gratifying words: "Mendelssohn has nothing to say, but he says it like a gentleman."

Instead, the program is compiled from Liszt, who, it is lamentable to recall, never belonged to an Ethical Culture Society in his life; from Chopin, whose ethics were not all that they should have been; from Schubert and Schumann, who enjoy so detestable popularity among the vulgar; and from Couperin, who had the misfortune to die nearly two centuries before he could avail himself of the uplifting benefits of the modern ethical movement.
We once had high hopes of Mr. Paderewski, but we fear he is lost to the higher artistic consciousness.

(St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 20, 1916)

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There was a murder in the West End last night. Persons morbid enough to care about the details may get them from the Police Department.

(St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 20, 1916)

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The 18th prox. will be a bad day for local low-brows. Miss Harriet Monroe, editor of the Poetry Magazine, will be here that day.

(St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 20, 1916)

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There is great joy among the literary people over the enthusiasm of the crowd which heard Witter Bynner read his "Iphigenia in Tauris." That event sent more brows up than anything that has happened in St. Louis this winter.

(St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 20, 1916)

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It is not the intent of The Chubb to dignify the war with too much space, as the vulgar popular newspapers do. We will content ourselves with announcing who won, when somebody does win.

(St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 20, 1916)

Responding to Chubb's criticism that libraries and arts organizations could not get the newspapers to carry announcements of their programs, The Daily Chubb outlined its policy on calendar announcements in doggerel form:
YOU CAN GET IT IN THE CHUBB!
Would you like to reach the people
In some good and worthy cause
That the other local papers
Are not greeting with applause?
Be of cheer, ye noble-hearted,
Or ye literary club;
The way to do it opens --
You can get it in The Chubb!

Is there art, perhaps, despairing
Of its modicum of space?
Is there aught would meet the people
In the paper face to face?
Is there something out of Boston,
That great literary hub?
Be of comfort, ye that labor,
You can get it in The Chubb!

While the darkness broods about us
There shall be a light to burn.
Ever promising the weary
That the road's about to turn.
Though we dwell within the shadow,
One with old Beelzebub,
Be ye still of deathless courage --
You can get it in The Chubb!

(St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 25, 1916)

While some items in The Chubb were wholly fictitious, many actually reported -- albeit wryly -- on book releases, concerts, and other news of the arts. It even reproduced several newly published poems. The irony was not lost on The Mirror, a St. Louis-based literary weekly, which observed that The Chubb, "a debonairly humorous satire upon Mr. Chubb," was "doing actually the thing for which the
lecturer of the Ethical Society pleaded -- giving real news about things of interest to the educated minority. For all its blithe raillery, The Daily Chubb is a news sheet giving the news of poets and artists and their works. It applauds Mr. Chubb, and takes its cue from him, even while poking gentle fun at him." (Undated excerpt from The Mirror, quoted in "The Daily Chubb," Post-Dispatch, February 2, 1916)

The brouhaha became the source of such widespread humor that the papers took to making snide allusions to Chubb, even in unrelated stories. A story relaying criticism of the Post for not reporting an arrest noted that the chief of police felt "quite percivalchubbish" after a reporter pointed out that the story had indeed run. And when a Jesuit priest criticized the state of St. Louis journalism in a lecture at St. Louis University, one newspaper headlined its account of the lecture, "Press Is Chubbed By A Fresh Critic."

Chubb's lone ally among the city's newspapers, St. Louis Labor, called the lampoons published by the dailies "childish and clumsy." In an editorial accompanying its reprint of Chubb's text, Labor voiced agreement with Chubb's assertion that the profit motive distorts editorial judgment. "The daily newspaper," it said, "is commercialized, like an axle-grease factory, a rolling mill, a munitions plant. As Ferdinand Lassalle remarked: the modern newspaper has become a profit-making institution which differs from other profit-making concerns in this one particular point: it poisons the minds of the people whenever its business interests demand it." ("Percival Chubb and the Press, St. Louis Labor, undated press clipping; Ethical Society archives)

The glut of attention evidently boosted attendance at Sheldon Memorial. In a report of Chubb's January 23 address, one newspaper noted that "Chubb's audience had grown like the loaves and fishes. It seated itself in the whole house, and overflowed to the galleries. Compared with the remnant that heard the sad newspaper discourse a week before, there was but one conclusion: 'It pays to advertise.'" ("Percival Chubb Discovers 'It Pays to Advertise,'" unidentified press clipping, January 24, 1916) It is worth noting that Chubb's January 23 address on "The City," in which he called for public ownership of utilities and decried a proposed racial segregation measure, raised no stir whatever.

Though uncomfortable with his notoriety, Chubb did not fall silent. In an interview displayed prominently in a Sunday edition of the New York Tribune a few weeks after the address, Chubb again detailed his objections to contemporary newspapers. The reporter, Edward Alden Jewell, wrote that he had interviewed Chubb because he wanted to hear a wholehearted indictment of his profession; even Felix Adler, he wrote, could give him only "a mild and half-hearted flogging at best." ("Manifold Are The Sins Of Newspapers," New York Tribune, February 6, 1916) Again Chubb stated that newspapers failed to take their cue from "the minority which defends the culture and ethics of a community." (Ibid.)
He said he did not object to the reporting of news, as some St. Louis newspapers had charged, but argued that "the empire of news ought to be expanded so as to embrace, and raise also to a more vital dignity, reports of those finer and subtler activities which do not invite lurid verbal investiture." (Ibid.) He repeated his observation that the business interests of newspapers dictate editorial judgment; "Advertisers must be catered to," he said, "and thus the stamp of the dollar is placed upon opinion, making it dishonest or biased." (Ibid.) He also condemned the dressing up of scandal and crime, as well as the "absurd juxtaposition" of "girl stuff" with legitimate international and civic news. But going beyond his January 16 address, Chubb called for the abolishment of Sunday newspapers, which he called "a desecration of the Sabbath"; "The day of rest and meditation," he said, "is whipped into a day of feverish mental turmoil" by the surfeit of massive Sunday editions. He also launched into another peeve that he had wisely omitted from his St. Louis address for fear of distracting attention from his central thesis: The comic supplement, "an evil of long standing," should be eliminated, he said, "Or rather it ought to be replaced by a supplement presenting humor instead of inanity"; he charged that the "stupid gambols" depicted in the comics educated youth "to a chronic disrespect for age and distress and chivalry." (Ibid.) Finally, he called for an end to the use of newspapers in the classroom, since they cultivated devotion to base materialism and diminished students' appreciation of high culture. St. Louis newspapers carried synopses of the interview; one was headlined, "P. Chubb Tells His Troubles To N.Y. Editor."

But even that interview was not to be Chubb's last word on the subject. In meetings of the Public Question Club and the Open Forum held amidst the controversy, he reiterated his complaint that the newspapers were deficient in coverage of legislative debates and labor issues. He also took another swipe at local art critics. "There is really no technical critical knowledge of art in St. Louis, and it is disgusting to all artists," he reportedly said at the Public Question Club. ("Chubb Again Hits Press Because It 'Suppresses News,'" unidentified press clipping; Ethical Society archives) After a lively exchange with other participants in the club, he admitted that he was "blinded by the glare of publicity and craving for the gloom of the shade." (Ibid.) A few years later, however, he accepted an invitation to speak at a dinner meeting of the St. Louis Association of Journalists at the venerable Planters Hotel; in addition to repeating his usual criticisms of reporters, he castigated young professional men generally as "dependent, or kept classes" who allowed themselves to be "entirely muzzled by commercialism." One of the news stories on the meeting noted that "Mr. Chubb's views on journalism were sought by the association because several years ago his criticism of the local press led to an interesting controversy." (Undated, unidentified newspaper clipping; Ethical Society archives)
Though angered and amused by Chubb's criticism, writers by no means discounted the leader. Because his opinions were so strong and so eloquently expressed, reporters often asked Chubb to comment on public issues; he became an unofficial spokesman for "the cultured minority" as well as intellectual pacifists and socialists. An icon of high culture, he was widely admired and ridiculed in his day. *The Mirror*, which deflated pomposity even as it presented fine contemporary literature, was particularly fond of caricaturing him as a sanctimonious defender of classicism: Contributor Edgar Lee Masters, author of the *Spoon River Anthology*, wrote poetry and commentary for *The Mirror* under the fictitious name of "Elmer Chubb, L.L.D., Ph.D." Chubb canceled his subscription in anger, and several Society members wrote to Charles J. Finger, the assistant editor of the publication, urging him to stop the long-running satire. This poem, evidently published in *The Mirror* and attributed to Chubb, exemplifies the exquisite derision he came in for:

Strophes From Styxside

By Yorick

PERCIVAL CHUBB

AN ETHICAL CULTURIST

The ribald multitude moves on
And I lie here,
Under the chastely graven slab,
Which roofs my eternal resting-place.

The refining touch of Death
Passed over my mortal lineaments
And fixed them in a marble immobility
Austere and noble
As some old effigy of the Cinquecento.
Even my sparse and faun-like beard,
The only incongruity
In my otherwise blameless exterior,
With its mild suggestion
Of the great god Pan,
Or that drunken roisterer
Silenus,
Is shrunken and subdued
To a sort of sculptural and stony
Stiffness.

Pass on, oh vulgar throng!
And heed me not.
Used I am to neglect,
And to the jibes and jeers
With which the unthinking proletariat
Is wont to greet
The intrepid heralds of a higher culture.
Oh! I know even my knightly name
Aroused your unholy risibilities,
As though I had been consecrated at my christening,
To the mockery of your maudlin mirth.

But I take solace in this sweet thought,
That even while you scorned me,
And
Despite the debasing influences
Of that saffron-tinted press
Which reflected all too cunningly
The sensations, the shams and the frivolities
Of the scandalous age
In which I lived,
Despite the crass vulgarity
Of steaming, smoking, reeking,
Mighty America,
That little band of the faithful
Yclept so sneeringly, the Educated Minority
Increased in numbers and in force.

Even before my exit from the stage,
The Drama had advanced by Leagues.
Also the ancient art of Pageantry
Had been resuscitated.
The Spirit of Romance and Chivalry
Began to stir,
And Festivals and Feasts
Of olden time
Renewed our Springs of Beauty.

That I might not be considered
Too fond an Antiquarian,
I quoted Emerson
In the mazes of the Morris Dance,
And discoursed of Damaged Goods
Around the May-Pole.
But never could I be brought to admit
That the Rag-Time of to-day
Might become the Folk-Song of the Future.

You will not heed me.
So -- on with your Modern Dances,
Flippant Fools!
Eat, drink and be merry
For to-morrow you die.

To die; to sleep; perchance to dream,
Aye, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death, what dreams may come.

P.Chubb.  (unidentified clipping; Ethical Society archives)
Conviction in Action

Chubb was held dear by Society members. At the 1920 annual meeting, chairman Fred Herzog offered him "grateful acknowledgement and affectionate thanks for the devotion, self-sacrifice and unstinted labor which he has given us, and because of which the Society finds itself today staunch, vigorous and flourishing." (minutes of annual meeting, October 8, 1920) Beyond fulfilling the movement's professorial ideal of leadership, he developed the caring, nurturing attributes of the traditional pastor. A more sociable man than his predecessor, he heightened the geniality and intellectual intercourse of the community. He was responsive to his "constituency," even to the point of pleading for suggestions and criticisms. "In all decisions, including those as to what to speak about on Sundays, my endeavor is to feel after your needs and outreachings and to try to meet them out of what is most alive and abundant in myself," he wrote in a pastoral letter. (pastoral letter by Percival Chubb, Sept. 10, 1925)

Though membership dipped in the last years of Chubb's tenure, his public speeches and civic service brought the Society the favorable profile it had long coveted.

At times, Chubb's ardor precipitated painful frustration. He criticized members of the movement for being "too cautious and conservative . . . not having acted as people with the fire of a new faith burning in them." One of the movement's principal impediments, he believed, was Felix Adler's authoritarianism:

... The Chief . . . has kept the Movement isolated, detached, lacking in friendliness and appreciativeness. He has been so keen about being "unique" -- different -- superior . . . I really think he does not know the contemporary world. He is so intent on the eternal . . .

... We none of us want to hurt the Chief's feelings. There is no personal issue and yet it would be taken personally. The Chief is touchy, shies at dissent, and is very self-opinionated . . . the spirit of freedom is lacking . . . We are suffering from frozen assets . . .

(letter from Percival Chubb to John Lovejoy Elliott, dated Aug. 31, 1931; Ethical Culture archives)
He also was dismayed by signs of tepidity in the St. Louis community -- so much so that in 1923 he considered offers to serve the Brooklyn and Boston societies. He told an alarmed Martha Fischel that he was not anxious to leave St. Louis, but he owned that he was discouraged by the poor attendance at platform meetings and the "small response to his great efforts." (minutes of board of trustees, June 1923)

Furthermore, he complained, the demands of leadership had kept him from his writing. To make matters worse, Anna Sheldon Chubb, who served as his secretary without compensation, had fallen ill, and he told the board he was not prepared to take on another year's work without her support and assistance. He also acknowledged displeasure with his salary; the raise he had been promised at the time of his hire was not granted until 1921, and even then it amounted to only $750. In an effort to retain him, the board in late 1923 brought his salary up to $5,000, but he still refused to commit himself beyond the season.

Early in 1924, while on a speaking tour in the East, he formally submitted his resignation. Fischel traveled to Philadelphia to urge him to stay on, but he would consider no more than a part-time commitment. At his insistence, the board agreed to hire AEU executive secretary George O'Dell as associate leader; O'Dell was familiar with the community, having filled in when Chubb took a sabbatical in the 1917-18 season. Under the arrangement agreed upon by Chubb and the board, Chubb's salary was to be halved, and O'Dell and his wife would jointly be paid $4,000. Chubb was to lecture in St. Louis for periods of about six weeks in the fall and spring. During the rest of the season, Chubb would serve as associate lecturer -- with Henry Neumann -- of the Brooklyn Society, and O'Dell would occupy the St. Louis platform and arrange for guest speakers.

The arrangement did not come off as planned. O'Dell took ill over the summer and was advised not to work for at least six months. Chubb agreed to extend his lecture periods in St. Louis and to return for Christmas festivities, but he still had to uphold commitments to Brooklyn and other Eastern societies. A variety of academics and liberal clergymen filled out the platform schedule in O'Dell's absence. Chubb was pleased with the revised arrangement, and he persuaded the board to continue it into the 1925-26 season. However, illness forced him to remain in St. Louis throughout the second half of that season, and the time-sharing arrangement never was resumed. Chubb agreed to stay in St. Louis on full salary, provided he receive a midwinter vacation during which visitors would occupy the platform.

Chubb continued to plead for an assistant, even offering to forego $1,000 of his salary to make the addition possible. In 1928, his wish was granted in the person of W. Frank Swift, a leader-in-training who had been recommended by Chicago leader Horace J. Bridges. Because Swift's service would prepare him to serve the movement elsewhere, Adler underwrote $1,000 of his $2,400 salary for two years. Swift was one of the movement's most enthusiastic newcomers. Just before coming to St. Louis, he visited New York, meeting Adler and his associates and touring the settlement houses and the Ethical
Culture School. At the annual meeting in October 1928, he told the membership "he felt more and more convinced that this was a movement into which he could enter most heartily; there was no need to look farther or to seek a wider field." (minutes of board of trustees, October 1928) Notwithstanding the praises of St. Louis he had heard in New York, he expressed amazement at the scope of the Society's activities. Swift replaced Cecelia Boette as director of the Sunday School, helped organize youth activities, and occasionally spoke from the platform. He left St. Louis at the end of the 1929-30 season to work in the New York Society. The following year, he was named leader of the Boston Society, and in 1933 he began assisting S. Burns Weston in Philadelphia. In December of that year, he was killed in a car wreck on an icy road while returning from a leaders' meeting in New York.

Even with Swift's assistance, Chubb continued to feel restless in his post. In the 1929-30 season, he spent about fourteen weeks touring the Eastern societies; he covered the cost of the additional speakers needed in St. Louis out of his salary. When possible, visiting Ethical leaders spoke from the platform on two consecutive Sundays, providing additional leadership services in the intervening week. In late 1930, Chubb announced he would retire within a few years. He offered the board two alternatives -- either he would retire at the end of the 1931-32 season, or he would take a sabbatical in that season and return for one year in an advisory capacity. The latter alternative had the advantage of allowing the membership to review leadership candidates during Chubb's absence, then hire a replacement before he stepped out of the picture altogether. A Leadership Committee was formed to conduct the search. The first potential candidate invited to St. Louis was J. Hutton Hynd, another protege of London leader Stanton Coit. Hynd, a Scotsman who had studied philosophy at the University of Perth, first spoke in St. Louis in early 1931. The Ethical movement had no other leaders to offer. Apart from Hynd, the candidates for the post were a professor from the University of Wisconsin and the ministers of several Unitarian and Congregationalist churches.

Hynd, clearly the front-runner for the post, was under contract to the London Society for the 1931-32 season, so Chubb postponed his sabbatical until 1932-33. During that season, he was replaced jointly by Hynd and Nathaniel Schmidt, an auxiliary leader from New York; as during the Society's last period of leader limbo, a Platform Committee arranged for additional speakers. Within a month of Hynd's arrival, the board authorized president Alexander Langsdorf to offer him a permanent position. Hynd agreed to take the job in February 1933, and the membership ratified the hire that same month. He became permanent leader at the start of the 1933-34 season.

Chubb spent his sabbatical touring Europe and visiting friends in England. In September, he sent the Society his final autumn pastoral. In it, the lengthiest of his career, he thanked the members for the twenty-two years he had spent in their service and offered his most mature reflections on the nature of
personal growth and ethical communion. Self-realization, he said, can be achieved only in interaction with soul mates. Therefore, the Society, in order to fulfill its purpose, must be a "high-hearted and wholehearted fellowship." (Afterthoughts, pastoral letter in pamphlet form, p. 4) He envisioned the Society as a microcosm of the utopian harmony its members idealized:

Religion I have defined for myself as conviction in action, our highest wisdom incarnated in living or conduct. That view of it would commit us not merely to an intellectual acknowledgment of this basis of fellowship, but to the embodiment and exemplification of it. We are to be a fellowship, live in fellowship. We are not merely to seek the vision; nay, not merely to live accordingly in all our human relations; but -- and this is my emphasis -- to live it together in our little community; to exemplify it and typify it among ourselves in this community. Our life together is to be a collective confession of faith, so far as the restricted sphere of association and activity will permit of our making it so. The soul of meaning in such a fellowship is to focus and burn to a flame of light and warmth, creating the climate in which a small company pursue their quest of the Best Life. It is to commit us not only to seek the Way, but exemplify the Life in our collective endeavor.

(Afterthoughts, pastoral letter by Percival Chubb published in pamphlet form, p. 10)
Chapter ??

SECOND WIND

The stability provided by Sheldon Memorial greatly strengthened the institutional health of the Ethical Society. The board of trustees began to meet monthly instead of sporadically. Study and social clubs, having freer access to meeting quarters, grew steadier. The building's Assembly Room made possible frequent dinners and dances. The community now had a home, and its members came to feel more and more at home.

New Blood

The Society's authority structure grew more democratic after Sheldon and Robert Moore left the scene. Without these strong-willed leaders to attend to the details of running the Society, trustees and officers had to exercise more initiative than ever. Subcommittees proliferated and took on more authority. Drafting the budget and performing audits and inventories, keeping the building and grounds in shape, fielding requests for rentals, purchasing supplies, overseeing hospitality services, publicizing events, providing music for assemblies and platform services, stocking and cataloging the library, raising funds, coordinating group activities -- all these responsibilities were borne by standing committees. The board retained its right to check major decisions, but it generally respected the actions of committees.

Despite this delegation of authority, power was not always shared freely. To ensure both continuity and freshness, all board members served three-year terms, and one-third of the seats came up for election each year. However, the Nominating Committee was made up of board members, and it often nominated only incumbents. Furthermore, its slate usually included exactly as many nominees as available seats. Society members had the right to add nominations from the floor before voting on this slate at the annual meeting, but they rarely exercised that right. In consequence, most trustees retained their seats for as long as they wanted them. The process became fairer when, in 1917, the board prohibited more than one trustee from sitting on the Nominating Committee. In the 1920s, this committee began nominating about two candidates for each available seat. The board further broadened its base of representation when, in 1929, it began exercising its long-standing authority to appoint as many as three Society members to one-year terms on the board. These auxiliary trustees, though not elected by the Society membership, had full voting rights.
In 1914, at the direction of the board, the Nominating Committee first included women on the ballot. At that year's annual meeting, Martha Fischel became the first woman elected to the board; she later would become president. Women were not entirely at ease holding the sort of authority they were denied in the political arena. At the 1915 annual meeting, Edith Glatfelter, a schoolteacher and leader in the Y.P.A., moved to withdraw her name from nomination. Trustee Jesse Williams, "in a neat speech," and Anna Sheldon Chubb pursuaded her to reconsider, and she became the second woman on the board. And when the committee elected new officers in 1925, Fischel asked the committee to consider temporarily replacing her as president because "it would be more fitting to have a gentleman at the helm during the anniversary celebration." Despite her protest, she was unanimously re-elected. After Fischel and Glatfelter broke the ice, it became common for women to serve on the board.

The idea of holding board meetings each month -- regardless of the workload -- was proposed in 1915, but was not well-received. The following year, however, newly elected president Hugo Muench instituted monthly meetings. This regularity facilitated an administrative rhythm: Society members seeking approval for their proposals learned to lobby trustees in advance, allowing time for study before the issue went to a vote. To provide for decision-making between meetings, the board in 1924 established an advisory committee made up of the board president and two other trustees.

Moore retired from the board in 1916 for health reasons. Upon his retirement, the board named him chairman emeritus. He died in 1922. Hugo Muench, Lambert E. Walther, and Fred J. Herzog succeeded him in relatively brief terms. In 1923, Martha Fischel began a seven-year tenure. Fischel was deeply devoted to the Society. Though in her seventies when she took office, she spent countless hours organizing meetings and events and advising group leaders. At the 1925 annual meeting, trustee Charles Staudinger said Fischel served as "everything from janitor up. I have occasion to come here often and I always find her. I always look for her cot and trunk." After receiving a rising vote of thanks, Fischel vowed, "I shall work for the Society as long as I have breath; my life is consecrated to the Ethical Society." (minutes of annual meeting, October 11, 1925)

From the start of her tenure, Fischel solicited the ideas and criticisms of Society members, often urging them to attend board meetings. She also took a great interest in AEU affairs. In 1927, she visited each of the established societies to discuss national matters such as leadership training, finances, publications, education, and potential new subgroups. She retired from the presidency in 1930 at the age of 80. Like Moore, she was named president emeritus. She was succeeded by Alexander S. Langsdorf, who had served as vice president since 1927.
The Contemporary Literature Circle

The Greek Ethics Club, which had suspended its activities after Sheldon's death, was reconstituted by Society member L. Maude Eoff when the community moved into Sheldon Memorial. After studying historic works of philosophy and literature under Sheldon, members of the group sought to undertake a more direct examination of social and ethical issues. Chubb engineered this shift in the 1911-12 season by conducting a series of discussions on "Woman and Labor," a topical book that traced the history of women's economic roles. Each spring thereafter, a committee drew up a reading list comprising contemporary fiction, poetry, essays, biographies, and plays. Reflecting this shift, the group was renamed the Contemporary Literature Circle. Like its predecessor, the group met fortnightly on Tuesday afternoons. Before each meeting, Chubb and member assistants drew up synopses, reading suggestions, and lists of questions to facilitate discussion. Ethical leaders and St. Louis educators were asked to address the group on books with which they were especially familiar. Ethical leaders Henry Golding, Henry Neumann, and Nathaniel Schmidt were favorites. Men were welcome to join the club, but it remained essentially a women's group until 1931, when Society members asked its leaders to hold evening meetings to accommodate job schedules. Only about half the group's members belonged to the Ethical Society. In the teens and 1920s, the group had about a hundred dues-paying members. Leaders donated their services; dues were used to buy books that were then loaned to members for a nominal sum. The club also made an annual contribution to the Society. An ephemeral offshoot of the group, the Junior Reading Circle, built a similar program on young adult literature.

The Child Study Group

The Ladies' Home Club, one of the Society's earliest study groups, also was revived after the move to Sheldon Memorial. Society member Elsie Langsdorf organized the new club, the Child Study Group, in 1921. In their discussions of parenting and psychology books, group members shared their experiences and tested the theories of renowned experts. By its third year, the group boasted more than a hundred members. On average, thirty to fifty people attended the semi-weekly meetings. Like the Contemporary Literature Circle, the group was not confined to Ethical Society members; also like the reading circle, it was, in effect, a women's group. In addition to its regular meetings, the group held a yearly luncheon with a keynote speaker. In 1925, the group joined the National Federation for Child Study; half of each member's $2 annual dues was used for subscriptions to the parent organization's magazine. As the group's reputation grew, Langsdorf became a popular speaker on child-rearing; in the
1924-25 season, she delivered thirty talks to civic groups. Offshoots of the group sprang up in the city and county. Members of the original group gradually entered neighborhood satellites, and the Ethical Society group dissolved in 1929.

**The Women's Auxiliary**

The strongest and most influential women's group was the Women's Auxiliary. Formed before women were elected to the board of trustees, this group originally provided services then considered "women's work." After the move to Sheldon Memorial, it hosted monthly membership dinners, children's entertainments, and seasonal festivities. It oversaw the Society's fund-raising events, including bazaars, work auctions, Christmas sales, and bake sales; it also presented benefit plays and music recitals. Through its various enterprises, the Auxiliary raised as much as $1,000 a year for the Ethical Society's general fund. Members of its Visiting Committee looked in on Society members who were sick or isolated. For its own ranks, which ranged from about 50 to 80, it held teas, monthly board meetings, and an annual luncheon.

The Auxiliary maintained the charm and usefulness of Sheldon Memorial by furnishing the kitchen, decorating meeting rooms, keeping up the garden, and providing flowers for the platform. The Sheldon Memorial garden was its pride. An independent Grounds Committee oversaw the development of the yard, but Auxiliary members provided most of the needed funds and much of the labor. Full-scale gardening began with a tree planting in 1920. The trees, donated by the Auxiliary and four other Society subgroups, were dedicated at a spring festival. These were followed by flowering shrubs such as California privet and Japanese honeysuckle. The following year, a pergola was built with funds from the Auxiliary, a private donor, and the Society's current fund; at its base the women planted wisteria, clematis, and climbing roses. The club also procured a bird bath, benches, and a trellis. The garden was "a riot of color" planted with iris, tulips, snapdragon, chrysanthemums, zinnias, petunias, and asters. In the warm months, it served as the setting for festivals, plays, dance recitals, and wedding receptions. So beautiful was the garden that nearby apartment tenants vied for units that overlooked it. (Minutes of Annual Meeting, October 5, 1924)

The Women's Auxiliary was the Society's most charitable group. It hosted luncheons to benefit the Tuberculosis Society, the Visiting Nurses Association, and other public welfare organizations. During World War I, it sold hundreds of dollars worth of war bonds, entertained disabled soldiers, and assisted in campaigns for Liberty Loans, the United War Loan, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and European relief organizations. Its Philanthropic Sewing Group donated hundreds of garments to City
Hospital, the Children's Aid Society, and relief and detention centers; it also prepared surgical dressings for the Visiting Nurses Association. A separate sewing group made clothing for sale at bazaars. The Auxiliary also made isolated donations of money, food, clothing, and toys to needy families. On "Women's Day," a Sunday on which the platform service was devoted to women's issues, the Society donated part of its collection to the Auxiliary for its charitable work.

As a unit of the Board of Religious Organizations, an interdenominational civic and philanthropic society, the auxiliary formed subgroups that assisted the juvenile court system by helping place delinquent girls in foster homes and by making follow-up visits; provided cultural orientation for immigrants on the city's North Side; and distributed refreshments and donated clothing to patients at the city's infirmary and sanitarium. The Ethical Unit of the B.R.O. included a chairman, a secretary, and representatives to the board's Child Welfare, Family Welfare, Institutions, Publication, and Legislation committees. The unit also included a representative of the Young People's Association.

On the cerebral side, the auxiliary sponsored lecture courses by local professionals and prominent academics. Usually held on weekday mornings or in conjunction with luncheons, these lectures drew women of all religious affiliations. Health, child-rearing, and social issues were favorite topics. Because of its financial health and energetic membership, the group often was asked to arrange benefit lecture courses featuring such charismatic speakers as sociologist Charles Zeublin. Auxiliary members such as Edna Gellhorn were among the leaders of the St. Louis chapter of the League of Women Voters, and the groups sometimes collaborated in presenting lectures on politics and urban development. In the 1929-30 season, the Women's Auxiliary and its counterparts in other ethical societies joined a nationwide group for the study of the causes and cures of war; the national group was directed by Carrie Chapman Catt, who had led the National American Women's Suffrage Association to victory ten years before.

The Men's Club

The men of the Society never matched the organizational industry of the women. Sheldon repeatedly organized men's discussion clubs that focused on philosophy and politics, but participants were slow to take charge of their union. After arranging sporadic gatherings for years, Jesse Williams formally established a Men's Club about 1908. Its stated purpose was "to promote the welfare of the Ethical Society, to afford opportunities for the men of the Society to meet together in Social intercourse, to build up the Society, and to devise plans for strengthening it in membership and influence, to the end that the great work of advancing the moral life of St. Louis by a continued consideration of all great
questions from their ethical aspect, inaugurated by it, may endure." (Constitution and By-Laws of the Men's Club of the Ethical Society; archives) The club had an executive committee comprising a chairman, secretary, treasurer, and two other members, one of whom was the acting leader of the Ethical Society. At the time of its organization, the club had about 80 members. Club members entertained visiting lecturers and debated platform topics. The club also sponsored all-Society benefit dances. The club lapsed for lack of consistent interest, but was revived in the 1918-19 season by Dr. George Gellhorn. This time, the group attracted about 25 members. Once again, however, its meetings were poorly attended. Records of annual all-Society meetings indicate members of the Women's Auxiliary were fond of goading the men to copy their success and that of the New York men's club. Some of the men were defensive about their lack of enthusiasm. At the 1925 annual meeting, John Gundlach, though a dynamo in civic activities, offered to contribute $100 for special platform music if only the Men's Club would be permitted to die in peace. The chairman accepted the gift but not the provision. The club died anyway.

In 1928, board chairman Alexander S. Langsdorf again organized a men's club, this time on a basis that ensured high membership: All men belonging to the Ethical Society were registered as members of the club, regardless of whether they paid their $1 annual dues. Members of the Women's Auxiliary conspired to raise attendance at the club's meetings by providing dinner. Under the leadership of Dr. Frank Hinchey and Gaston DuBois, the club finally acquired some stability. Club members came to enjoy talks by visiting lecturers and discussions of current events and recent platform topics. R. Walston Chubb, son of Percival Chubb, brought to the club a talent for provocation. As evidenced by the notes of secretary J.C. Edwards, club members cultivated repartee:

Walston Chubb: Until all our doubts are resolved, I call my belief The Philosophy of the Meanwhile.

Dr. Frank Hinchey: Ford is paying his men too-high wages -- he raises their pay without their asking for it!

Hermann Schwarz: Five days shalt thou labor -- or at least see to it that thine employees do; on the sixth thou shalt avocationalize in the woods and cause much chatter among the birds by thine intrusiveness into their privacies; and on the seventh thou shalt repose in the Ethical Society and imbibe wisdom. This is the Grand Life!
Julian Glasgow: [Philosopher-biologist Ernst] Haeckel defines God as a gaseous vertebrate.

Professor Nathaniel Schmidt: It isn't ungentlemanly to kick around a dead person.

Percival Chubb: After being an optimist, I have to be a pessimist for an hour or two.

The Young People's Association

The Young People's Association, an outgrowth of the Young People's Union initiated by William Lighty at the turn of the century, also gained steam after the move to Sheldon. The Y.P.A. held two or three functions each week during the Society's regular season and occasional functions during the summer. Hiking was a favorite activity: Group members frequently gathered after platform meetings to explore nature reserves and river valleys; their walks often began at the endpoints of streetcar lines and wended toward such rural outposts as Black Jack and Valley Park. In warm weather, hikes culminated with picnics; in cool weather, Society members living in the far reaches of suburbia opened their homes to the hikers. The group also conducted skating parties, treasure hunts, hay rides, riverboat excursions, and athletic events. About once a year, the association sponsored trips to wilderness resorts featuring swimming, hiking, and horseback riding. For years, it held monthly dances. The association encouraged cultural enrichment by arranging outings to the art museum, symphony concerts, recitals at Washington University's Graham Chapel, and Muny Opera productions. Artistically inclined members formed an Aesthetic Dancing Group, a Folk Dancing Group, and a Dramatic Group. All these troupes performed at Y.P.A. and all-Society entertainments. The Drama Group, in addition to presenting shows, conducted a Dramatic Reading Circle, which informally performed contemporary plays. Many of the group's dramatic presentations were unadorned one-act plays, but some, especially those directed by Percival Chubb, were extravagant productions. The group's repertoire ranged from Greek tragedies to contemporary comedies by G.B. Shaw and A.A. Milne.

The Y.P.A. also conducted study and discussion groups. Over the years, these included a Nature Study Group, a Bible Study Group, a Travel Club, a Music History Group, and, in the wake of World War I, an International Peace Study Group. A pre-platform class on Sunday mornings was devoted to the study of ethics. The most enduring of the association's discussion groups was the International
Relations Group; founded by Paula Wilhelmi (later Moody) at the request of Percival Chubb, it sponsored dinner talks by platform speakers and other experts on foreign affairs. Of more local interest was the association's Civic Forum, which focused on topical issues such as pending legislation, taxation proposals, and women's political rights; Chubb expressed hope that this group would produce civic and political leaders.

The tenor of the Y.P.A. reflected the highbrow humor of the Men's Club and the Society at large. A notice of a Peripatetic Round-Table dinner promised "cerebral calisthenics for all," and the announcement of a 1926 treasure hunt admonished members not to act "unseemingly" but to conduct themselves with "studied audacity." An item in a newsletter noted that the young woman who helped Sunday School pupils build a doll house was "uncertain as to whether Ibsen's spirit will haunt the house when completed." (Y.P.A. program leaflet, February 1930; and December 1934 newsletter; Ethical Society archives)

The Y.P.A. played an integral role in the Ethical Society. For years, it was the Society's largest single source of Sunday School teachers. In addition to presenting its own plays and dances, the association helped organize parties for children and assisted the Women's Auxiliary in putting on bazaars, work auctions, and social suppers. Each year, it donated to the Society a few hundred dollars out of its profits from plays, recitals, and rummage sales. The Y.P.A. also performed a few community services, such as reading for the blind and assisting in projects of the Board of Religious Organizations, but its efforts never approached those of the Women's Auxiliary. Once a year on "Y.P.A. Sunday," the association took charge of arrangements for the Ethical Society platform service; traditionally, the group invited a speaker to address the needs and obligations of young people. Chubb looked to the Y.P.A. to help maintain the loyalty of Sunday School graduates. In response to that call, the Y.P.A. in the 1919-20 season formed a class called The Eso-Pograds (an anachronym for Esoteric Post Graduates), which, under the direction of Dr. Edith Weaver Johnson, delved more deeply than the Sunday School into matters of philosophy and religion. In the seasons Johnson led the group, 20 to 25 young people took part in the Sunday evening classes. In later seasons, Y.P.A. members took turns leading a Sunday morning Post Graduate Group in discussions of world problems and applied ethics.

The Young People's Association was central in the social lives of its members, many of whom met their spouses at Y.P.A. functions. The association's by-laws limited membership to Ethical Society members and their immediate relatives, but the restriction was not enforced. Initially, membership was dominated by college students and recent Sunday School graduates who ranged in age up to mid-30s. But because the group sponsored such appealing activities, few members elected to resign. In time, the
Y.P.A. took in Society members of all ages; like "Greek Ethics Club," Y.P.A. became a misnomer. In the teens and 1920s, Y.P.A. membership hovered around 150.

From time to time, the St. Louis Y.P.A. took part in nationwide organizational efforts. At the 1921 AEU convention in St. Louis, Y.P.A. members helped form a national federation of young people's groups. James Gutmann, a teacher in New York's Ethical Culture School and later an associate leader of the New York Society, was elected the first president of the federation. News notes from member groups were published in the AEU organ "The Standard." A few years after the St. Louis convention, thirteen members of the St. Louis group went to a Chicago convention at their own expense to attend a rally of the federation. With the assistance of the St. Louis delegation, young members of the Chicago Society established an association of their own.

The Drama Group

In the mid-20s, the Y.P.A. Drama Group swelled with young people who belonged to neither the Y.P.A. nor the Ethical Society. Rankled by the parent group's control of its treasury, the Drama Group agitated for independence. The board of trustees instructed the group to submit drafts of a constitution and by-laws in preparation for the secession; the group was slow to fulfill this requirement, and the board suspended its activities and barred it from the building until its leaders complied. When the paperwork finally was completed in December 1925, the board granted the group semi-autonomy. The chairman and vice chairman of the group had to be members of the Y.P.A. executive committee, but the group elected its officers and administered its own treasury. Membership no longer was limited to Y.P.A. members, but only Y.P.A. or Ethical Society members could vote and hold office in the group. Membership applicants were required to audition.

The board of trustees supported the group's ambitions by authorizing stage improvements, providing space for prop storage, and purchasing the lumber with which members built a loft over the Assembly Room kitchen. For several seasons, the revivified group annually presented two or three entertainments consisting of plays and dances. The group took on more ambitious productions, such as Chekhov plays and the Chinese opera "Little Almond-Eyes," and occasionally entered productions in tournaments of the St. Louis Art League. Unfortunately, casting was hampered by the group's disproportionately female membership. The level of attendance at the group's entertainments was discouraging, and it dissolved around 1930. In 1932, the board of trustees approved the formation of a new Drama Group, but it stipulated that the group be limited to members of the Society and its
subgroups. The cooperative group that evolved took in members of the Y.P.A., the Sunday School, the Women's Auxiliary, and the Junior Auxiliary. Rather than presenting its shows as independent events, this group performed at all-Society gatherings. During the Depression, it also performed gratis at neighborhood centers for the unemployed.

The Toy Shop

Members of the Women's Auxiliary, the Y.P.A., and other Society subgroups joined forces in maintaining the Toy Shop, one of the Ethical Society's most consistent community services. Begun in 1916 by Josie K. Wangelin, the Toy Shop produced and reconditioned thousands of toys for distribution to sick and needy children. A dozen or more regular volunteers fashioned dolls, doll houses, wagons, picture books, and games out of such simple materials as cigar boxes, spools, fabric scraps, and discarded magazines. Society members donated money, materials, and used toys. Each year, the shop presented an exhibit of its handiwork on the Sunday before Christmas. The shop annually distributed about a thousand toys to such institutions as City Hospital, St. Louis Colored Orphanage, Neighborhood House, the Salvation Army, and Good Will. A community center in Appalachia also was a regular recipient. In addition, the Women's Auxiliary gave toys to selected private families. Some of the toys were sold at bazaars to benefit the Society. Wangelin freely offered her expertise to other St. Louis associations initiating similar ventures. She also exported the project to other cities: After hearing her report at the New York Society's fiftieth anniversary celebration in 1926, the New York and Philadelphia societies organized toy shops of their own.

Scout Troops

For the children, the Society sponsored Boy Scout and Camp Fire Girl troops. The girls' troop was initiated the year the Society moved into Sheldon Memorial, but its progress was halting. Its strongest incarnation began in 1926 under the Indian-sounding name Petruchee -- an acronym for persistence, trustworthiness, and cheerfulness. Cecelia Boette, one of the first Camp Fire guardians in St. Louis, helped Emily Bausch form the group; three other Society members assisted with the program. The troop averaged 10 to 15 members. In addition to their weekly meetings at Sheldon Memorial, the girls went on hikes and camping trips; held parent-daughter dinners; and exhibited their handicrafts and outdoor skills at Society bazaars. As a member of the National Needlework Guild, the troop donated
handmade and refurbished clothing to the needy. Lacking consistent leadership, the group became an informal club, meeting in the homes of its members and having little to do with the Camp Fire organization.

Sons of Society members participated in a Scout troop that rented Sheldon Memorial for years before the Society started its own troop. Society member Curt Wilhelmi formed the first troop in the teens. In 1923, a reconstituted group under the direction of Erwin Schmidt was formally dedicated as Troop 21 of the St. Louis Council. A troop committee of five Society members assisted Schmidt with the group's finances, training courses, and excursions. The troop started with 12 members and grew to number about 35 by the end of the decade. At its weekly meetings, the troop followed the standard course of instruction in outdoor skills, but it had the extraordinary advantage of owning its own cabin in the woods. The boys built the cabin in 1925 on a farm near Manchester, Missouri. Society member George Koebel granted the troop use of the land. The cabin was located on high, densely wooded ground; a nearby spring provided drinking and cooking water. A professional carpenter volunteered his assistance in the project. The large, sturdy structure, dubbed "Wahoo Lodge," was dedicated at a parent-son cookout on February 6, 1926. The site was used for camping trips and merit-badge instruction. In addition to its hikes, urban diversions, and weekly meetings, Troop 21 took part in jamborees and St. Louis Council gatherings. For a time, uniformed scouts patrolled the intersection of Grand and Washington on Sunday mornings, escorting Sunday School students from streetcars to Sheldon Memorial. A subgroup of the troop, the Sea Scouts, was formed in 1932.

A Busy Intersection

As the Society's clubs grew bigger, livelier, and more numerous, tensions began to arise. By 1925, there were more than a dozen groups, each with its own officers, meetings, and dues; an average of forty-five meetings were held in Sheldon Memorial each month. Meeting and activity schedules conflicted, dividing the loyalties of members. Some groups complained that the board overlooked their needs. Martha Fischel, president of the board from 1923 to 1930, made group harmony a priority. She appointed an Organization Committee, composed of board members and group representatives, to mediate conflicts, coordinate schedules, and stimulate group activities. At least once a year, Fischel invited the leaders of groups to attend a board meeting devoted to integrating Society activities. The leaders reported on their groups, discussed ways in which they might assist each other, and aired
disagreements over Society policies. Fischel encouraged the groups to nominate representatives to board
seats. In addition, she asked ad hoc committees of group representatives to advise the board on
proposals that would affect them all. In the late twenties, when the board began appointing auxiliary
members, Fischel promised the groups preference would be given to the candidates they recommended.

Fischel also laid down stringent regulations. As of 1924, the groups were required to submit
membership and address lists as well as itemized records of their income and expenditures. All changes
in leadership were to be reported to the board. The groups also had to fill out questionnaires regarding
their purposes, activities, dues, and meeting schedules. Building use was tightly controlled. Except for
the Toy Shop, no group was permitted exclusive use of any meeting area. As rentals provided a
substantial source of revenue for the Society, groups had to defer to the needs of guests; when concerts
were held in the auditorium, meetings were prohibited in the Assembly Room. The board set the time of
building closure and established standards of acceptable behavior. For instance, dancing was prohibited
on Sundays because it was considered contrary to the religious nature of the day, and prizes could be
awarded at card parties only by special permission. Board approval also was required to promote an
event as an Ethical Society benefit. When an event was so billed, the board demanded a full disclosure
of the sponsoring organization's gate and expenditures. Some groups, particularly the Y.P.A., were less
than pleased with these demands, but Fischel's approach was effective. As group interdependence
increased, tensions eased. The groups exchanged membership lists to determine which members of the
Society were left out of group activities; an all-Society social calendar minimized scheduling conflicts;
and groups sponsored more activities jointly. Periodically, the Organization Committee held
informational meetings for the membership at large.

Fischel insisted that all subgroups share the aims of the Society as a whole; she would not permit
them to develop strictly social or recreational programs. "The Ethical Society exists for the promotion of
ethical worth, for a higher sense of duty and relations to each other, and not [as] a place of amusement,"
she said. "We cannot do the things the Society stands for if we have a lot of people, or groups, who are
not interested in the Society." (minutes of the board of trustees, March 10, 1925) Many groups included
people who were not members of the Society; some, such as the Child Study Group, were composed
predominantly of outsiders. The board accepted this openness in the belief that it would ultimately
increase Society membership, but it demanded that the groups be led only by Society members.
Chubb made the supremacy of community the hallmark of the platform service. An afficionado of the theater who served for a time as president of the Drama League of America, Chubb deeply appreciated the emotional impact of ritual -- the orchestration of symbols, space, and movement. He insisted that the community's meeting place and services be simple, befitting the austerity of ethical religion. He demanded promptness and decorum, frequently running rules of conduct in Society bulletins; he would not have members behave as if they were attending a secular event. Quiet, he taught, facilitated recollection and the overarching consciousness of communion:

The setting must not dwarf or stun the participants. It is their inward vision that must be helped: and for that, concentration is the essential. In this mood of focalized attention life in its unity and totality is to be a recovered reality. The scattered, fragmentary, and distracted self of daily routine and trivial diversion is to be reknit and made whole. The process of outward-going concern with a multitude of externalities is to be reversed; there is to be a return movement toward the center. The mind is its own place. Its splendor is its inward richness.

But this act of self-collection is to be performed with others. We are in the presence; the presence of companion personalities and fellow voyagers. And this communion is to awaken the consciousness of that larger social selfhood which is the real self. Fellowship means that; is the visible symbol of it. We live in and through our relations with others; and the sense of this relationship is to dominate us as we gather together. We really are members one of another in a corporate humanity; and we are to participate in a collective consciousness of the common life that breathes around us.

(On the Religious Frontier, p. 63-65)

Chubb left intact the basic elements of the platform service developed by Sheldon. Ordinarily, the address was the dominant element. As he had vowed, Chubb maintained a ceiling on the number of lectures he prepared each season. Most years, he made extensive tours of the Eastern societies, repeating for them the addresses he had introduced in St. Louis. During his absences, the St. Louis platform was occupied primarily by Ethical leaders -- Adler, Algernon Black, Horace Bridges, John Lovejoy Elliott, Henry Golding, Alfred Martin, David Muzzey, Henry Neumann, and Anna Garlin Spencer. Nathaniel Schmidt, an archeologist, linguist, and Cornell University professor affiliated with the New York
Society, was perhaps the Society's most beloved visitor; beginning in the 1897-98 season, he spoke in St.
Louis annually for more than thirty years. Occasionally, St. Louis helped finance American speaking
tours for Stanton Coit, leader of the London Society, and Lord Harry Snell, a Laborite member of the
British House of Lords who was active in that society. Most other visitors were academics and liberal
clergy, but a few Society members -- such as Washington University dean Alexander S. Langsdorf, civic
leader John H. Gundlach, and journalist William A. Kelsoe -- also graced the platform from time to time.
Chubb instituted regular observances focusing on the needs and contributions of women, youth, and
parents. Sheldon Sunday, or Founders Day, featured a talk on the Ethical Movement, and Recognition
Day honored Sunday School graduates. Chubb also devoted platform services to commemorations of
outstanding artists and writers such as Emerson, Shakespeare, and Goethe; complementary music and
readings augmented the address, which generally highlighted the subject's contribution to ethical
thought. In addition to the lecture, excerpts from great works of literature were read "to remind us of that
aristocracy of the spirit that must be preserved against the dead set and the downward pull of mass
conventionalism and averagism." (On the Religious Frontier, p. 67, 68)

Fine music remained a highly valued element of the platform service. At Memorial Hall, music
most often had been provided by the Lichtenstein and Waechtler string quartets; after the move to
Sheldon Memorial, the Anton Quartet performed regularly. At the start of the 1913-14 season, with the
new Kilgen organ in place at Sheldon Memorial, the Society hired a staff organist. After that time,
additional musicians and vocalists were hired only for special occasions, such as holiday festivals and
commemorations of Bach and Beethoven. (One Society member, a great lover of chamber music,
resigned in protest of the change.) As the Society's budget provided little funding for music beyond the
organist's salary, these presentations usually were underwritten by contributors; when the Society began
presenting public chamber music concerts in 1930, proceeds from the concerts went to the special music
fund. For nearly a decade, organists stayed with the Society for only a season or two; some were not
invited to return (an artist who auditioned for the Music Committee in 1916 "elicited the remark that our
organ had been heard for the first time," indicating that his predecessor was less than a virtuoso), and
others managed to improve on the $300 or so the Society paid per season. In the 1922-23 season,
Florence Jewett began a seventeen-year stint; by the mid-20s, her salary had leveled out at $400 a year.

Chubb frequently incorporated congregational singing in the service. He believed that most
Society members enjoyed singing, but he had difficulty shuffling the few songs the community knew to
avoid monotony. At his urging, a choral group was begun in 1925 to help expand the Society's
repertoire. The use of congregational singing, in addition to frequent responsive readings and the
passing of the collection plate, brought loud protests against the encroachment of "churchiness." As an
illustration of the fury these experiments aroused, a board member resigned from the Society over Chubb's introduction of a candle-lighting ceremony. Chubb noted that these protests came most often from older members who had rebelled against the church affiliations of their youth. He believed that the community's younger members, being less rebellious, could benefit from "some appeal to the imagination." (Minutes board of trustees meeting, October 8, 1915)

Chubb's philosophy of aesthetics was nowhere more evident than in the cyclic festivals he developed. Noting that religious celebrations meet the need to communally acknowledge perennial cycles of nature and human life, he founded rituals on the primal concerns that underlay sectarian rituals: Springtime was welcomed in a celebration of hope, the new year was approached in a reflective "Quiet Hour," and graduation from Sunday School was marked with the Festival of the Dedication of Youth. As an example of the universal values he extolled, the responsive readings he wrote for the Winter Festival called upon the season itself to warm hearts and spread good will:

Leader -- Welcome once more, season of returning light! 
Response -- Shine forth, new-risen sun; lead in a year of happier days!

L. Shine out upon the world, new sun; on old and young, on rich and poor, on say and gay; 
R. On home and hall, on hearth and feast, on brightening bough and glittering tree.

L. Melt every frost-bound heart till it glows with the warmth of generous desire. 
R. And let thy comforting light shine on the dark places of want and woe.

L. Welcome rich season of bounty and good cheer! 
R. Wreathe every life with garlands of innocent mirth.

L. Crown with green leaves of joy the brows of those we love; 
R. Weave in red berries of health, and the bright star of hope.
L. Welcome, blest season of peace, that bringest a truce to strife;
R. And may thy white wings of peace spread over the waiting earth.

L. Link all peoples and nations in the sure bonds of brotherhood;
R. Shed peace and good-will, good-will and peace, on all mankind.

The most profound reinterpretation Chubb rendered was that of Thanksgiving. As always, he focused on the feeling that inspired the traditional celebration -- in this case, the feeling of gratitude, "a high form of joy." (On the Religious Frontier, p. 106) His challenge, of course, was to develop a ritual that would express thanksgiving without reference to its usual object, God. Again, he summoned the mystical sense of union with the universe, a universe that, with or without intention, provides beauty and sustenance. But he owned that this vague appreciativeness is a dissatisfying variant of gratitude; a "law-pervaded cosmos," he wrote, may evoke awe, but it does not inspire love. His solution was to turn the attention of participants to an indisputably worthy object of their thanks: the human family. Chubb sought to revive the sanctity of Thanksgiving by transforming it into a celebration of the wondrous achievements of the race:

[The original cosmic providence, by which the cosmos is, has been supplemented by a more significant human providence; more significant, because it is more impressively the expression of man's creative mind and emotion and imagination. . . Thus there emerges that new conception of Thanksgiving for which I wish to plead; an outpouring of the heart toward this secondary but closer and more appealing providence of man. (Ibid., p. 113)

* * *

Strange that there should so seldom flow forth from our hearts a gratitude to that human power which we ought to thank in the first instance for all that is included under
the term civilization; those blessings of safety and peace, of justice and equity which we owe, not to any divine intervention and help, but to the steady, dogged persistence and valor and heroism of our race, our brother man! Strange that no such note should sound in our Thanksgiving proclamations! Do we forget that it is man who has conquered not alone the wild beast in the jungle but also the brute in himself, who has stayed the flood and the tornado, the plague and the pestilence, whose intervention and labor have achieved the wonders which make our modern life so much more livable and resourceful than was that of our ancestors?

(Ibid., p. 118)

Like his predecessor, Chubb was acutely conscious of the size of Sunday crowds. He told a trustee that he felt obliged to speak on moral values and politics even if the public was "too indifferent, disgusted, or bored" to attend, but he deliberately interspersed "sensational" topics -- such as the young science of psychoanalysis and the Scope's "Monkey Trial" in Dayton, Tennessee -- to attract newcomers. (letter from Percival Chubb to Elwood Street, dated November 8, 1926) He was perturbed by distasteful popular conceptions of the Society. For instance, the *St. Louis Republic* marked the dedication of Sheldon Memorial with an editorial describing Ethical Culture as "something akin to ancient stoicism" imbued with "the cold cheerlessness of the merely biologic outlook upon existence." (*St. Louis Republic*, October 13, 1912) Chubb responded with a forceful apologia printed on the editorial page, but he recognized that a good deal more ink would be needed to rectify the Society's image problem. Wryly noting that the 1928 fire at Sheldon Memorial had done more than years of quiet service to "heat people's curiosity" about the Society, he told the membership that increasing the Sunday turnout was "largely a matter of making the Society, its purposes and activities, more widely known." (pastoral letter by Percival Chubb, September 1, 1928) To that end, he enlisted the aid of board member Elwood Street in publicizing platform addresses. In the twenties, Street designed the Society's newspaper ads and acted as a go-between to get Chubb's addresses printed in Monday editions of local papers. Chubb would spend hours drafting readable transcriptions for this purpose, and he was infuriated by the severe trimming they often underwent. Street, however, reported that the city editor of the *St. Louis Star* regarded Chubb as "the George Bernard Shaw of St. Louis" and that his counterpart at the *Post-Dispatch* contended the Society received more publicity than any other religious institution in the city. (letter from Elwood Street to Percival Chubb, April 2, 1927) In the early thirties, the local newspapers ceased reprinting religious addresses as a matter of course; the *Globe-Democrat* offered to carry reprints for a fee, but the cost was prohibitive.
Besides buying display ads, the Society distributed cards announcing the speaker and topic of each lecture. In addition, announcements of the Society's platform services were regularly carried in the church notices of newspapers. Not surprisingly, the papers had difficulty finding an appropriate category for the Society. (The problem had been an irritant even to Sheldon. "I have been trying to get the daily papers to put our Ethical notice of the Sunday lectures along with the Non-Sectarian Church under a separate heading as 'Undenominational,'" he wrote to Robert Moore. "According to present methods, our Society is put in with Christian Science Associations, Spiritualists and every other queer thing.") (letter from Walter L. Sheldon to Robert Moore, November 6, 1899)

**Beating the Drum Softly**

The Society, as a whole, always has been reluctant to actively recruit members. Many members had a religious allegiance thrust upon them in childhood, and they do not wish to likewise ensnare their children and friends. Indeed, the intense devotion Sheldon and Moore professed to the institution never has been widespread; members are more apt to identify themselves with rationalism and humanistic ethics than with Ethical Culture. Furthermore, the movement does not lend itself to the neat, facile evangelism employed by some traditional religions. Most recruitment efforts have been indirect: The Society makes itself known by means of its lectures, concerts, and educational programs. At times, however, the community has ventured to blow its horn, for those who have found a home in the Society know that many of their contemporaries would likewise feel drawn to it if only they understood it better. Seekers who venture into the Society unawares often express surprise and gratification that such a place exists. That sense of discovery is keenly expressed in a membership application submitted in 1908:

I am only sorry I did not learn of your society sooner. [I] have lived here for eight years and have often wondered why a city of this size had no society of thinkers . . . In case I am accepted, I know I can bring several new members who are agnostics and also some of the Faith who are beginning to look for light (truth).

(letter from E.A. Macmahon, manager of Macmahon Roofing Co., to J.H. Arnstein, Men's Club Secretary, January 8, 1908; archives.)

Word of mouth and occasional newspaper ads accounted for the Society's early growth. In later years, the board of trustees invited members to turn in the names of associates who might be interested in
receiving pamphlets and platform notices. "Hospitality and Inquiry" meetings, in which longtime members explained the principles of the Society to visitors, were held on Sunday mornings. In 1905, the board of trustees sent each member a series of three letters -- written with graduating urgency -- asking him or her to introduce at least one person to the Society; the mailings included publicity brochures. At annual membership meetings, the leader and president customarily urged members to help swell the ranks, but no concerted recruitment was undertaken until the start of the 1911-12 season. At that time, the board of trustees formed a Membership Committee whose stated purpose was to conserve and increase membership in the Society. In the 1912-13 season, mindful of the need for members who could afford to offset the Society's debts, the committee specifically asked male members to recruit their business associates. In addition, newspaper accounts of the erection of Sheldon Memorial, plus the sight of the elegant structure going up in midtown, increased public awareness of the Society. In the year after Sheldon Memorial opened its doors, membership jumped by more than a hundred to a new high of 498. The following season, spurred by the mortgage perhaps more than by missionary zeal, the board launched another membership drive. By January 1915, membership reached 579. Deducting from that figure the handful of people who had allowed their memberships to lapse, the treasurer reported in October that membership had risen 86 percent -- from 301 to 561 -- since the slump following Sheldon's disappearance from the platform. Membership did not long remain at that high-water mark. Within two years, the figure had leveled off at about 500, and a slide in the late twenties and early thirties left the Society with about 400 members. The goal of 800 -- roughly the seating capacity of the auditorium -- never was reached.

Many membership applicants were drawn into the Society through its sub-organizations. Each year, ten to twenty recent Sunday School graduates became members. The Young People's Association, which sponsored dances, hikes, and study groups, also provided a strong draw. Of the 28 people who joined the Society in the 1919-20 season, 16 had first been members of the Y.P.A. and four others had learned of the Society through their children's involvement in the group. The Women's Auxiliary also took an active role in membership recruitment, and its open social events exposed hundreds of St. Louisans to the Society.

Membership in the Ethical Society always has been a sign of commitment, not a tool of exclusivity. Nevertheless, for many years the Society required each applicant to secure two member sponsors who could vouch for the applicant's character and sincerity. Often, the sponsors were the members who introduced the applicant to the Society. A newcomer who came on his or her own initiative easily secured the sponsorship of trustees or rank-and-file members.
The Membership Committee formalized the Society's procedures for acknowledging membership applications and resignations. Before its formation, applicants sometimes had to repeatedly contact board members to ascertain their acceptance. To help welcome and integrate newcomers into the Society, the Membership Committee in 1919 proposed that new members receive special attention at community dinners. The same year, the committee also began assigning each new member a mentor to introduce the newcomer to Society members and programs. Both customs have endured to the present. Also in 1919, the committee was expanded to include a representative from each of the Society's principal subgroups, enabling it to present newcomers with an even introduction to group activities. Although interviews with the leader were not yet part of the application procedure, Chubb made it a point to meet new members shortly after their induction.

The unlovely task of weeding the membership list also fell to the Membership Committee. In accordance with the Society's by-laws, a member who did not pay the minimum dues or otherwise express interest in the Society for more than two years was dropped from the membership roll. With the opening of Sheldon Memorial, it became especially important to regularly weed the list so that building privileges would be extended only to bona fide members. When a member failed to meet the criteria or formally submitted a resignation, the committee communicated with the member and made a recommendation to the board of trustees; because of the delicacy of approaching members for non-payment, the committee sometimes asked the delinquent member's sponsors to intervene. Dues delinquency became widespread during the Depression, but the board often agreed to carry without dues members who tendered their resignations solely for financial reasons. Those who neither paid dues nor pleaded their case to be carried without dues were unceremoniously dropped. Exception was made for servicemen on active duty, all of whom were kept on without dues.

The by-laws provided for an auxiliary class of membership: Associate members were regular contributors who made no explicit assent to the Society's principles and who did not wish to vote or hold office. Active members called to account for dues delinquency sometimes transferred to associate status, thus maintaining an affiliation while surrendering rights they did not exercise anyway. In 1927, after a yearly dues minimum of $10 had been instated, members approved the establishment of a Junior Membership with a yearly dues minimum of $5; this status, which did not bestow voting rights, was intended for college students and recent Sunday School graduates. Yet another status, that of honorary membership, was adopted in 1932. Honorary memberships, which carried no dues requirements, were conferred on the recommendation of three or more Society members in recognition of outstanding service to the community. This development spared devoted Society members the indignity of delinquency proceedings.
Given that most trustees were among the core of contributors whose pledges greatly exceeded the Society's per capita costs, their sympathy for parsimonious members sometimes was strained. In a letter to secretary Fred J. Herzog, treasurer Joseph S. Taussig said he had pruned the membership list because "there is no use spending the money for postage and pamphlets for people who do not take enough interest in our work to contribute the trifles that most of them promise." (letter from Joseph S. Taussig to Fred J. Herzog, dated October 15, 1908; Ethical Society archives) Trustee Charles W. Staudinger bluntly echoed that sentiment in a request for a complete list of delinquents: "I see no good reason why we should keep these names on our membership list if they do not come across with the dough." (letter from Charles W. Staudinger to Hattie Clark, executive secretary, dated July 28, 1927; Ethical Society archives)

The Wolf at the Door

The Society's financial status ranged from precarious to critical. In the teens, members were hard-pressed to meet both their annual pledges and their special pledges to the Building Fund. Annual operating deficits often ran from $1,000 to $2,000, and meeting interest payments and redeeming Sheldon Memorial bonds created an annual frenzy of creative financing: The board of trustees learned to juggle accounts, appease creditors, beg, borrow, and refinance. Dodging new debts became something of a sport; the Society secured tax-exempt status on Sheldon Memorial, and a congressman's intervention spared the Society a war tax imposed on door receipts, but there was no getting around the city controller's $1,550 pro-rated bill for the widening of Washington Avenue. Contending with an almost constant state of emergency, the committee often withdrew from the Emergency Fund $1,000 a year -- the maximum amount allowable under the terms on which it was instituted. As the fund approached depletion, frenzy turned to desperation. Well-heeled Society members, among them Anna Sheldon Chubb, frequently came to the rescue with hefty donations, bequests, and low-interest loans. In a singularly magnanimous gesture at the 1918 annual meeting, Percival Chubb offered to forego $1,000 of his $3,500 salary if the membership would pledge at least $4,000 on the spot; the membership complied. In a similar proposal in 1922, Anna Sheldon Chubb offered to contribute $500 if members would answer the challenge with twice that amount, but the board declined to present the offer to the membership. After his wife's death in 1924, Chubb frequently donated funds for speakers' fees, teachers' stipends, and other special needs.
Pledge drives took two forms – general appeals to the membership via mailings and platform announcements, and specific requests put before the Society's staunch benefactors. The dual demands of the building debt and the current fund often required several drives per year; trustees constantly weighed the need for funds against the danger of exhausting the good will of the membership. The tradition of appealing to members via their bellies began after the move to Sheldon Memorial, when the fund-drive kickoff dinner became a regular event. All-member canvasses first were conducted about 1915, but the canvass was not made an institution until decades later. For years, the task of canvassing members was carried out by a committee of the Women's Auxiliary. To the Society's credit, its dire financial straits did not spawn strong-arm tactics. Pledges were called in with tact, and members who paid at least a portion of their pledges often were forgiven the balance. The unsavory custom of publishing members' contributions in the annual address book was discontinued in 1912. As of 1915, long-term delinquents were given three notices of indebtedness before being dropped from the membership list.

Fund-raising events helped take up the slack in pledges. The not-quite-annual bazaar brought in from $2,000 to $4,000, making it an invaluable aid to the Society's debt retirement. Other periodic fund-raisers included rummage sales and work sales. Lecture series featuring notable academics also netted substantial sums. A subtle method of magnifying contributions was the institution in 1913 of formal collection-taking at platform meetings. Another modest source of funds was tapped in 1918 when members were given savings banks in which to deposit spare change.

Rental fees were a consistent source of ancillary revenue: The board of trustees contracted with booking agents to rent the auditorium and Assembly Room when they were not used for Society functions. The terms of Anna Sheldon Chubb's donation to the building fund limited rentals to concerts, lectures, and religious meetings, so requests for lucrative bookings such as secular conventions were denied. Further limits were imposed in 1928, when the Society learned that it jeopardized its tax-exempt status by renting the building to profit-making organizations. Pending clarification of the tax regulations by city officials, the board temporarily banned all rentals.

The Society had a rare taste of solvency in 1919, the first year in many that ended with a cash balance, but contributions immediately took another slide. In 1921, the Society's 35th anniversary, members contributed more than $7,000 to a "Birthday Fund," allowing the board of trustees to satisfy recent debts, spruce up Sheldon Memorial, and grant Chubb a long-awaited raise. Within a few years, however, fresh debts forced the committee to borrow several thousand dollars and dip once again into the Emergency Fund. When, in 1923, building and financing debt had been reduced to $13,000, the membership authorized the board to refinance the mortgage with a $15,000 loan. The new mortgage was to be repaid at the rate of $1,000 a year for four years, with the balance due at the end of five years; this
package gave the Society some respite from the annual rush to pay off maturing bonds, but it pointed up the need for long-term funding plans. No such plans were implemented: Within a year, the Society had to borrow another $2,000 -- including $1,000 from board president Martha Fischel -- to meet current expenses.

Record deficits forced the board to consider raising the minimum membership dues. Because dues requirements were set by the Society's by-laws, they could be changed only by a vote of the membership; the minimum annual pledge had been lowered from $5 to $1 in 1909, and a 1912 attempt by the board of trustees to bring back the higher figure was voted down by a large majority. The proposal never died, however. Trustees preferred to rely on members to contribute according to their consciences, but the results were consistently disappointing. In 1924, Finance Committee chairman Fred Herzog reported that more than half the Society's members contributed $10 or less per year. Of 420 members, he noted, thirty-seven made no pledge contributions that fiscal year; of the remaining 383, 112 -- nearly one-third of the membership -- gave $5 or less; one hundred members gave $6 to $10; and 72 members paid $10 to $25. Trustee Charles Staudinger noted that a trustee of a local synagogue recently had called the Society "crazy" for imposing only a $1 dues minimum; the synagogue, he said, required $35 of every member, and more from those of means. Staudinger conceded that the Society could not demand such high dues because it could not "guarantee that you will get to heaven," but he recommended a $10 minimum be instituted. (minutes, annual meeting, October 5, 1924) Fischel thereupon appointed a committee to draft a by-law amendment incorporating the increase. Under the proposed amendment, members who failed to pay the minimum amount would be barred from voting or holding office until the debt was met; delinquency for two years "without reasonable explanation" would result in loss of membership. A draft of the amendment was circulated in a letter announcing a special election on the issue. An acerbic response to that announcement revealed the sentiments brewing among some members:

Dear Ethical Society:

Your circular I received in reference to the proposed amendment. I favor it. It will increase the budget, and, at the same time, make the Society more exclusive; as only the rich and those in good circumstances can belong. It will eliminate the rifraff, and put the Society on a strictly commercial basis. After all, why should the poor be affiliated with any church or society?

As I shall be unable to pay the dues, will you kindly take my name from the book?

(letter from Mary Newnam, dated October 23, 1924)
At the election meeting, trustees and Society members engaged in one of the most heated debates in the Society's history. Opponents called the proposed increase degrading and a contradiction of the Society's ultimate regard for personal freedom; the imposition of any dues, they said, put the Society on a par with non-religious clubs. Proponents countered that members are ethically bound to help pay for the benefits they receive, and that the Society has a duty to maintain itself through businesslike means. All present agreed that putting the Society on a sound financial basis would be a boon to the entire membership, and opponents of the increase proposed no alternative means to that end. The measure was approved by a vote of 23-7. (minutes of special meeting, October 26, 1924) In interpreting the by-law, the board accepted the $10 minimum as sufficient for the joint membership of a husband and wife. (minutes of January 13, 1925) An unfortunate side effect of the regulation was that some membership applicants regarded the minimum amount -- which was far less than the Society's per capita operating cost -- as the standard contribution. Consequently, the board in 1930 elected to omit mention of the minimum on the application form; the following year, it reinstated the notice but subtly tacked on a mention of the Society's per capita costs.

When Anna Sheldon Chubb died in 1924, she left the Society $7,000 to be held in a building fund and $3,000 for a "Walter L. Sheldon Library Fund." Proceeds from the latter fund were to be used for the periodic reprinting of Sheldon's books and for the upkeep of the Sheldon Memorial Library, which comprised the books Sheldon had amassed as well as volumes contributed since his death. In addition, the residue of Anna Sheldon Chubb's estate after the disposition of legacies -- about $24,000 -- was left in a trust that would revert to the Society after Percival Chubb's death; Chubb, who received only the income from the trust, placed its administration in the hands of the board. Under the terms of the bequest, the board was permitted to spend the principal of both funds, but it immediately invested the lion's share of the money in bonds and real estate. Holdings bought with the larger bequest were held by the newly instituted Reserve Fund, which was to be used to pay off building debts. Because the board spent little money on the library, the smaller fund often was used to buy investment bonds from funds needing liquid cash.

Neither the bequest nor the $10 dues minimum stopped the Society's financial decline. In the mid-20s, annual deficits of about $4,000 were common. In 1926, Finance Committee Chairman Herbert Morisse headed up an ad hoc "Committee of Thirty" to induce members to raise their contributions. The committee's efforts brought in a few thousand dollars in increased pledges and contributions to offset the previous year's deficit, but the Finance Committee had to borrow heavily -- using the Society's bonds and real estate holdings as collateral -- to meet current expenses. The Society's debts reached crisis
proportions in 1928. The bulk of the mortgage taken out in 1923 -- $11,000 -- now came due. In addition, the Society had borrowed $8,000 to pay off yearly deficits and interest charges. Added to the $1,000 borrowed from Fischel, these liabilities totalled $20,000, half of which was due immediately. In addition, the Society faced a current operating deficit of nearly $6,000. Members were informed that they must sharply increase their contributions, solicit a substantial number of new members, or authorize another mortgage. Pledge increases offered in response to that call amounted to less than a thousand dollars. At a special meeting called in May 1928, the 55 members in attendance authorized the board to secure another mortgage of up to $75,000; the board had requested the high ceiling so it could secure additional loans without reconvening the membership. With a five-year, $35,000 loan, the board paid off the Society's most pressing debts, releasing its bonds and real estate holdings for liquidation. Part of the excess was invested, but most of it was devoured by ensuing debts. In a letter sent out in the fall of 1928, the board noted that the Society would need about $19,000 a year to meet its operating expenses and maintain a sinking fund to protect the mortgage notes and pay off interest. Divided among the Society's roughly 400 members, that tab came to about $47 per capita -- a figure more than 50 percent higher than the current average pledge.

In 1929, a standing Ways and Means Committee was established to develop more consistent fund-raising. Headed by Morisse, the committee circulated pleas for pledge increases and spurred special collections, carnivals, and other fund-raisers. The committee was made up of about 25 members, and these were wise enough to draw still more Society members into the canvassing process. A smaller committee, also led by Morisse, was formed to recommend cutbacks. The committee found little fat in the budget: In September 1929, it reported that "there are only a few items that we feel can be reduced without retarding the work of the Society." Salaries, the largest single budget item, had topped $11,000 with the addition of associate leader W. Frank Swift, but the committee maintained that these workers "are all necessary to carrying out our work properly, and their compensation is such that no changes are recommended." The work of these committees helped minimize the Society's operating deficits, but the impact of the Great Depression put solvency out of reach; periodic short-term loans were unavoidable, and paying off the mortgage was unthinkable. When the $35,000 loan came due in 1933, the Society was forced to renew it for three years at an interest rate a full percentage point higher.

Such a burden were mortgage payments and maintenance costs that the possibility of selling Sheldon Memorial emerged in the late 1920s. In 1927, a five-member Real Estate Committee was formed to keep tabs on the building's sale potential in light of the neighborhood's burgeoning land values. At the 1929 annual meeting, the chairman of this committee told the membership it would be impossible for the Society to remain in Sheldon Memorial without great increases in membership and contributions.
A motion to put the building up for sale was made and seconded, but was withdrawn after lengthy debate. In a standing vote taken to gauge the inclination of the membership, 27 members favored selling the building, 12 opposed the idea, and 16 were undecided. (Minutes of annual meeting, October 20, 1929) After the historic stock market collapse hit the nation a week later, however, it became evident the Society could not hope for a fair sale price. At a special meeting called in January 1930, an overwhelming majority of members opposed selling the building, and the matter was put to rest. (Minutes of special meeting, January 6, 1930)

The Society made no structural improvements at Sheldon Memorial during this era. For years, members dreamed of installing an elevator to make the balcony and Assembly Room more accessible, but the cost—estimated at $5,000 to $7,000—was prohibitive. After the board in 1928 refused to support the purchase, members raised a special fund; by 1931, pledges totalled $2,250. At a special meeting called in April 1932, members voted on whether to authorize payment of the balance out of the strapped Reserve Fund. Because of the Society's enormous building debt, and because an elevator would add little to the building's questionable sale value, the proposition finally was scotched. Apart from cultivation of the garden and periodic painting and redecorating, the only substantial improvements made at Sheldon Memorial were an amplification system that provided headphones for the hearing impaired and artificial lighting for memorial windows. A fire on June 29, 1928, caused about $6,000 in damages to the building and organ, but most of the repair costs were borne by insurance settlements.

As implied by the terms of her bequest, Anna Sheldon Chubb cherished the Sheldon Memorial Library and hoped it would continue to grow. The Library Committee initially recommended greatly expanding the facility, but later decided that the degree to which it was used did not justify the expense. Instead, it used the non-invested portion of the fund to bind pamphlets and addresses written by Sheldon; replenish Sheldon's books and keep his collection in good condition; collect the works of other Ethical leaders; bind back copies of The Standard; and buy books needed by the Sunday School and other Society subgroups, on the approval of the leader or Library Committee chairman. (March 1926 minutes) In 1930, the committee established a children's library in an alcove of the Assembly Room. (Minutes of March 11, 1930) And in 1932, former Sunday School director Cecilia Boette was hired on a part-time basis to rebind selected books and recatalog the collection. (Minutes of April 1932) These improvements, however, used little of the money tied up in the Walter L. Sheldon Library Fund, and a long succession of board members was exasperated by the nearness of so much unspendable cash.
A Ripe Field

Despite the Society's debts, a proposal to build an annex to Sheldon Memorial was given serious thought. The idea began in 1926, when Felix Adler offered to contribute to the Society $1,500 to $2,000 for some form of community service. In response, the board appointed a Committee for Community Extension to ascertain the needs of the neighborhood surrounding Sheldon Memorial. Committee member Elwood Street reported that "the Society, situated almost on the boundaries of two poorer districts, badly in need of help, had unlimited possibilities for assistance." He added that "there was a ripe field ready and waiting for workers." (minutes of annual meeting, October 31, 1926) Sheldon Memorial, said Street, could be used for a variety of educational, recreational, and arts programs. He was confident that the Society could obtain an adequate number of volunteers, and he suggested that programs begun by the Society could grow into independent organizations -- as had happened with the Self-Culture program. Street, the director of the Community Council of St. Louis, was asked in 1927 to oversee a study of neighborhood needs by various service agencies. Community leaders recommended that the Society proceed slowly, minimizing its costs -- and risks -- by coordinating its efforts with ongoing neighborhood programs. However, other members of the Extension Committee, after attending a meeting of the National Community Center Association, formulated plans for an annex in the rear of Sheldon Memorial that could be used as a community center.

At the same time, Chubb called for expansion of the Society's facilities to accommodate the growth of the Sunday School and increased group activities. In particular, Chubb noted that the production of children's plays had been suspended because rehearsals could not be held in the Assembly Room during platform services, and rental of the auditorium had forced the cancellation of many meetings, dances, and socials scheduled in the Assembly Room. In addition to easing those conflicts, he said, an annex would provide adequate space for the tots' groups and Sunday morning study groups. The second building also could provide the neighborhood with a reading room, a game room, a site for dances and athletic events, and perhaps a nursery school and playground. In a memorandum to an ad hoc Committee on Building Expansion, Chubb presented the proposal as a moral challenge: "Thus at the crossroads, the Society must make up its mind whether it shall dare to expand and go forward, or whether it shall restrict its activities within the limits of its present facilities. Can it and will it brace itself to new enterprises and become more missionary and militant?" (Memo by Percival Chubb; Ethical Society archives)

In its meetings during the summer of 1927, the Expansion Committee evaluated a variety of building proposals. It found that the cost of a brick structure was prohibitive, and the city would not
allow the erection of an all-wood building. Finally it settled on a temporary structure of galvanized iron. In October, the board agreed to ask the membership to authorize up to $3,000 to build and equip a temporary annex; it also would request up to $3,000 for the employment of a community service director. However, at the annual meeting in October, board vice president Alexander S. Langsdorf reported that the Expansion Committee's building plans did not meet building code requirements. (minutes of annual meeting, Oct. 23, 1927) He estimated that a 50-by-30-foot building that conformed to code would cost $3,500 to $4,000, not including heat and furnishings. After a "lively discussion," the membership unanimously authorized the board to spend up to $6,000 for the project; the proposal to hire a social worker was tabled. The New Building Committee commissioned several architects to draft practicable designs; under the plans submitted, the building, though temporary, would have cost about $9,000. The board decided to reject those plans and instead ask the membership to authorize the expenditure of $25,000 for a more durable structure. Given the Society's existing debts, that expenditure could feasibly be undertaken only if the membership pledged an additional $4,000 a year. The Society members present at a special meeting in November approved the plan contingent upon the Finance Committee's success in securing adequate pledge increases. (minutes of special meeting, November 27, 1927) Chubb and board members pledged a total of more than $2,000 to the cause, but the plan did not catch fire among the membership at large. By the end of the season, the project was abandoned.

The idea of providing recreational programs for the neighborhood was revived in 1933. Again, a committee was formed to supervise a survey of the area, but, again, the project failed to get off the ground. The Society did provide a few neighborhood services -- the Women's Auxiliary sometimes hosted entertainments for neighborhood children, and a few Sunday School teachers conducted summer classes in arts and crafts -- but a concerted, ongoing service program never materialized.

The Society did provide a substantial community service by granting use of the building free or at cost; requests were weighed on a case-by-case basis, and the board's decisions were unpredictable. Civic and minority groups were frequent beneficiaries, as were nascent church groups. When the neighboring Third Baptist Church was damaged by fire in 1928, the congregation immediately was invited to use the entire building throughout the summer; in gratitude, the congregation later made a contribution to the Society. Some avant-garde religious organizations -- such as the theosophical New Thought community -- were welcome at Sheldon Memorial, but a group sponsoring an institute by a yogi purported to possess miraculous powers was told it "did not come within the scope of our limited renting clientele." (Globe-Democrat, May 26, 1917; letter from executive secretary to Dr. D. Louis Allen, Plaza Hotel, Chicago, dated March 9, 1927; undated news clip) Organizations that included Ethical Society contingents -- such as the St. Louis Council of Organizations Promoting Peace and the League for
Independent Political Action -- were given free use of the building as a matter of policy. The peace council, in fact, was granted free office space in Sheldon Memorial for a disarmament campaign it conducted in the 1931-32 season.

One of the most visible -- or, more accurately, audible -- of the Society's community services was a chamber music series begun in 1930. The first series was proposed by Rudolph Schmitz, chairman of the Music Committee, which until that time had concerned itself solely with music for festivals and platform services; Chubb enthusiastically encouraged the undertaking as "a contribution to the musical culture of the city." (Undated handwritten notes, apparently in preparation for a promotional talk prior to the 1939-40 season; Ethical Society archives) The inaugural presentation was to be simple, consisting of three evenings of seldom-heard works by Bach and Beethoven. The board approved the plan provided that Schmitz raise a guarantee fund of $200 from subscribers outside the Society; the board would not support the program with Society funds, nor would it permit the committee to solicit guarantees from the membership. Schmitz raised the requisite cash, and the concerts were held in November 1930 and January and March of 1931. To avoid violating the Society's tax-exempt status, Schmitz billed the series as "educational concerts arranged for [Society] members and their friends." (minutes, June 10, 1930) More than half the tickets were bought by non-Society members. The few hundred dollars the series produced covered the cost of special platform music during the season. The second series was less lucrative. Receipts covered the cost of special music for one Sunday, but the committee later ran a slight deficit. Upon the conclusion of the second series, Schmitz immediately launched a pledge drive to amass a guarantee fund for a third. The newly formed Concert Committee barely broke even on the third series, and the board, though it favored the program, told Schmitz it would be abandoned if he failed to make it pay for itself. Although the annual series was to continue for 50 years, this touch-and-go pattern continued behind the scenes.
The Lyceum Dream

Percival Chubb believed that the Ethical Society, as the most liberal and untrammelled of religious fellowships, was ideally suited to host forums at which the public could hear -- and voice -- divergent opinions on social problems. He and others attempted to formalize these forums, to make them a St. Louis institution; but fluctuations in finances and enthusiasm kept them from becoming more than sporadic events.

The Society's thirtieth anniversary celebration in 1916 was more subdued than its 1896 colloquium. It included only one public forum, but that forum was close to the hearts of its organizers. Titled "Conference on Ethical Instruction and Moral Education," the May 6 forum examined the propriety of ethical instruction in schools and illustrated practicable courses of study. Teachers from private schools, public schools, and Sunday schools were urged to participate. Citing the charges of moral laxity that arose in the nation's debate over its preparedness for war, the May 1916 edition of the Society's Monthly Bulletin underlined the gravity of the problem and the Society's competence in addressing it:

Many educators are agreed that the great outstanding problem in American education today is that of moral discipline and ethical training. This has received new emphasis in the discussion of "Preparedness." It has been astonishing to find so many pacificallyminded people who have been won over to the cause of preparedness in its more militaristic form because they are convinced that our American youths are going "soft," becoming slack and fiberless, lacking in respect for authority and law and order; and that a soldierly severity alone can mend matters. "Nothing less than amilitaristic rigor will be effective," said the father of four sons who, with the ordinary school and college education, had come to show symptoms of the prevailing moral slackness. His was a cry of despair. The remedy is a desperate one. Are we so bankrupt of disciplinary power in home and school? If so, is it because the home and school are in their nature inadequate to the moral training of the young? Or is it because the school and the home are mismanaged and parents and teachers inadequately equipped for their task? Are our methods of living and our courses of study and school methods defective?

These are the grave questions which will be in our minds in discussing this all-important subject at the Conference on Ethical Instruction and Moral Education . . . . The discussion is not only nationally opportune in its bearing upon the "Preparedness" issue;
but it is locally opportune because the schoolmen and teachers of the city are now engaged upon a revision of the course of study for the public schools of Saint Louis, including the course in ethics. We have gathered from conversations with teachers that there is a wide difference of opinion as to the desirability of direct and systematic instruction in ethics. Probably the Ethical Societies -- and particularly the parent Ethical Culture Society, of New York -- have a wider basis of experience and experiment to draw upon than any other institution. For twenty years or more the work has been conducted in the Ethical Culture School in New York, one of the generally recognized experiment stations and pioneer schools of the country. Dr. Felix Adler's book on "The Moral Education of the Young" was the first book of any weight published on the question in this country, and has held its place as a standard. That is why we feel warranted in promoting the discussion of this matter.

(Ethical Society Monthly Bulletin, May 1916; Ethical Society archives)

The conference was held in two sessions. The topic of the morning session was "Direct and Systematic Ethical Instruction." Speakers included J.L. Meriam, professor of the School of Education at the University of Missouri; John Lovejoy Elliott, a leader of the New York Ethical Society and a teacher of ethics in the Ethical Culture School; Henry Neumann, leader of the Brooklyn Society; J.J. Maddox, principal of the Wyman School; and the Rev. George R. Dodson, pastor of the Unitarian Church of the Unity. The afternoon session, "The Responsibility and Cooperation of School, Home and Sunday School," included addresses by five local educators, including E. George Payne and Fanny L. Lachmund of the Teacher's College and Rev. Samuel Sale of Temple Shaare Emeth. Each session included discussion periods.

Enthusiasm for the education conference inspired a hankering for regularly scheduled public forums. An item in the same edition of the Society's bulletin -- probably written by leader Percival Chubb or executive committee Chairman Robert Moore -- challenged the Men's Club and the Young People's Association to arrange "a series of Sunday evening meetings to be in the nature of a People's Forum, at which leaders of thought on the great social, political and economic problems of the day will be asked to speak. We are ready for this step. Something of the sort is needed in the city. The downtown business men can hear such addresses at the City Club during the luncheon hour; but there is little opportunity for others to hear our national leaders of thought in these fields." Neither of the groups took up the challenge, but an independent civic organization did. At the repeated urging of Society member Mrs. Albert
Greensfelder, the Society's board of trustees agreed to permit the use of the Sheldon Memorial auditorium for the St. Louis Community Forum, which its promoters envisioned as a local version of a program conducted at Boston's Ford Hall. The Society's principal contribution to the program was its provision of the auditorium at cost.

The forum proposal came up again after the Society presented two public programs as part of its 35th anniversary celebration, which it marked by hosting the American Ethical Union's annual assembly in October 1921. The first of these programs was the Child-Life Exhibit. Arranged principally by Dr. George Gellhorn, Grace Anderson, and Louise Boette, the exhibit highlighted community programs devoted to the health and education of children; among the institutions profiled were Children's Hospital, the city library, and other public agencies, as well as the American ethical societies. The second public program was a round-table discussion of the role women should play in the nation's restoration after World War I. Edna Gellhorn, Society member and president of the St. Louis chapter of the League of Women Voters, presided over the meeting. Speakers included the president of the St. Louis Board of Religious Organizations and Judge Florence Allen of Cleveland. At the annual meeting held a few weeks later, board president Martha Fischel suggested the Society seize the public attention the programs engendered by launching a series of forums on social problems. Board member Fred Herzog suggested the Men's Club could oversee such a program, bringing in community leaders to spur debate. That plan did not materialize in the ensuing year, so Fischel helped revive the Community Forum, which again rented the auditorium for its Sunday evening programs.

The Society's fortieth anniversary celebration in 1926 included five public symposiums. The St. Louis chapter of the Child Study Association of America, which was headed by Society member Elsie Langsdorf, presented the first of these, "Symposium on Recreation for Children," on the afternoon of October 7. Henry Neumann, leader of the Brooklyn Ethical Society, delivered an address titled, "Recreation in the School and Home"; Society board member Elwood Street, director of the Community Council and the Community Fund of St. Louis, spoke on "Recreation and the Ethical Society"; and Bertha Howell, assistant director of the Community Council of St. Louis, addressed the topic, "Recreation and the Delinquent Child."

That evening, Charles Nagel, a prominent attorney and a charter member of the Society, presided over a public meeting highlighting the role of the Ethical Movement in society. The Rev. Dwight J. Bradley, pastor of the First Congregational Church of Webster Groves, spoke on "The Ethical Society as Viewed by a Non-Member"; and Henry J. Golding, a leader of the New York Society, spoke on "The Ethical Ideal as a World-Force." The Steindel Trio provided musical entertainment.
On the morning of October 8, Edna Gellhorn presided over a public conference on "Women's Participation in Civic and Social Welfare." Representatives of St. Louis civic organizations took part in a round-table discussion of the question, "Should the Volunteer Philanthropic Work of Religious Bodies be Done Independently or Under Other Organizations?" Speakers included Mrs. Gilbert Fox, of the Board of Religious Organizations, a women's philanthropic agency which included an Ethical Society unit; Mrs. George Hitchcock, Children's Aid Society; Mrs. M.M. Hart, Civic Union; Blanche Renard, Community Council; Mrs. George B. Mangold, League of Women Voters; and Mrs. J.B. Shapleigh, Neighborhood Association, the successor of the Self-Culture Hall Association. Anna Garlin Spencer, a Columbia University lecturer and associate leader in the New York Society, closed the colloquium with an address on "Woman's Place in the Life of the Present."

The highlight of the assembly was an ecumenical symposium held the evening of October 8. Alfred W. Martin, a leader of the New York Society, introduced the theme "The Search for Religious Unity" in an address. A number of St. Louis religious leaders took part in a discussion of the theme; among them were the Rev. Russell H. Stafford, pastor of Pilgrim Congregational Church; Dr. W.L. Sullivan, pastor of the Unitarian Church of the Messiah; Rev. M. Ashby Jones, pastor of Second Baptist Church; Rabbi Samuel Thurman of the United Hebrew Congregation; and Rev. Karl M. Block, rector of St. Michael's and All Angels Episcopal Church. A song recital rounded out the program.

The final public symposium of the assembly, "Ethical and Religious Training in the Home, the School, and the Sunday School," was held the morning of October 9. Anna Garlin Spencer spoke on "The Home"; Lewis M. Dougan, principal of the Eugene Field School, spoke on "The Public School"; Wilford M. Aiken, principal of the John Burroughs School, spoke on "The Private School"; John Lovejoy Elliott, an associate leader of the New York Society, spoke on the Ethical Culture School of New York; and Henry Neumann, also a New York Society leader, spoke on "Ethical Training in Schools Throughout the Country."

In 1931, the Society marked its forty-fifth anniversary with an assembly that included a public speech and discussion on "Disarmament, the Versailles Treaty and Security." The meeting, held the evening of October 9, was led by Henry Neumann, leader of the Brooklyn Ethical Society. Frederick J. Libby, executive secretary of the National Council for the Prevention of War, addressed the meeting. The assembly also featured a public display of exhibits by social agencies titled "Some Aspects of Human Relations." Exhibit themes included plans for the beautification of St. Louis; recreation and leisure; neighborhood life; health protection; education; social planning; family and child care; delinquency and readjustment; and international understanding. Displays also were presented by Ethical Society subgroups.
including the Women's Auxiliary, the Junior Auxiliary, the Sunday School, the Toy Shop, the Boy Scouts, and the Camp Fire Girls.

In addition to its forums, the Society continued to sponsor lectures and lecture series. These, too, were isolated events: After Sheldon's death, the Society never sponsored another comprehensive educational program for the public. In November 1917, temporary leader George O'Dell attempted a small-scale revival of the Self-Culture program when he initiated a Sunday afternoon lecture series for wage-earners at the St. Louis Public Library's Divoll Branch on North Grand. Despite a modest use of advertising, the lectures were poorly attended and the program lapsed after a few meetings. O'Dell attempted to restart the series the following spring, but the response was the same.

For several years in the teens, the Women's Auxiliary sponsored lecture courses on weekday mornings during the Lenten season; health and child-rearing were favorite topics. The Young People's Association also sponsored public lecture courses. These offerings were intended as fund-raisers, but the income was discouragingly slim. In February 1913, the Auxiliary sponsored a series of lectures by Richard T. Wyche, president of the Storytellers' League of America and author of a book on storytelling, and poet-dramatist Percy MacKaye, who, like Chubb, was an ardent believer in the efficacy of pageants and plays in building community spirit. To make the lectures accessible to educators as well as mothers, the Auxiliary held them in the afternoon and evening. The series succeeded in exposing a few hundred citizens to the Ethical Society, and the Auxiliary more than broke even on its costs, but the gate proved "that our community is not a very fruitful field so far as pay-lectures are concerned. There are too many free-meals perhaps. The Ethical Society has itself been a liberal provider of them. When distinguished visiting lecturers may be heard on our platform for nothing, or for the nickel or dime which scores of our casual patrons drop into our collection trays, why pay?" (April 1913 newsletter)

The popularity of another course offered at the Society that season -- a series of lectures on French philosopher Henri Bergson by the Rev. George R. Dodson -- indicated that in-house lectures by local authorities and visiting Ethical leaders were worthier efforts than grand public programs. Not until 1930 did the Society actively promote another lecture course. This series, held in February and March, focused on the arts: Victor S. Holm, a Washington University sculpture instructor, lectured on American sculpture; concert pianist Gottfried Galston spoke on "Characteristics of the Music of Various Nations"; and Meyric Rogers, director of the St. Louis Art Museum, lectured on "Development of American Decorative Art." The Society's $182 take confirmed that as fund-raisers go, lectures are excellent community services.
MORAL THOUGHTFULNESS
The Sunday School under Chubb

The Ethical Sunday School -- formally known as the Children's Sunday Assembly until 1929, when it was renamed the Junior Sunday Assembly -- thrived in its new home. In addition to classroom cubicles, Sheldon Memorial provided the children with facilities for playing and producing pageants. (As several graduates of the school have recalled, it also provided a fearsome but irresistible challenge -- walking the fourth-floor ledge around the building, risking injury and punishment.) William Brandenburger, a longtime executive committee member who had assisted Sheldon in the school, served as superintendent during the Society's leaderless years. Cecelia Boette, also a Sheldon protege, served as associate superintendent and superintendent from about 1907 until 1929, with a couple of leaves of absence. One of the Society's few paid employees, Boette received a salary of $500 to $600 a season. Boette was devoted to the school, and her familiarity with its history -- as well as her acquaintance with virtually every family in the program -- provided a continuity that bridged changes in setting and staffing.

The rise in adult membership after the move to Sheldon Memorial brought a corresponding jump in Sunday School attendance. In the 1910-11 season, 110 children were enrolled in the school; average attendance was 85. In the year after the move, those figures rose to 145 and 102, respectively. Enrollment peaked at 175 in the 1916-17 season, when attendance ranged from 110 to 130. Attendance then dropped steadily to about 70 in 1920. Given that only about 80 Society members had children of Sunday School age, the attendance rate was not especially poor, but Boette and executive committee liaison Philip Rau complained the committee did not give the school sufficient moral and financial support. In response, a three-member committee was appointed to determine means to increase attendance. Proposals included canvassing parents, attracting more -- and more enthusiastic -- teachers, and offering extracurricular activities as direct incentives to children. In an effort to bolster the morale of teachers, the executive committee authorized funds to entertain them at monthly dinners. Attendance continued to slide, but not altogether because of apathy. The problem was that most adults did not arrive at the building until the platform service began, more than an hour after the school started, and many of them no longer felt it was safe to send their children into the heavily trafficked neighborhood without adult companions.

Furthermore, the drift of the population beyond the range of streetcars made transportation problematic. Boette and a few allies on the executive committee fought for years to establish bus service for the students, but the plan never was adopted. Nonetheless, the slide in attendance stopped, with the average hovering around 80 in the 1920s.
The main lines of Sheldon's curriculum were maintained after his death, but Boette and the dozen or so teachers in her charge softened his stern Victorian pedagogy. Old Testament stories were balanced by the return of legends and fairy tales, and the focus on the life of Jesus opened out to encompass ethical heroes -- both men and women -- throughout history. "Duties in the Family" carried over into "Friends and Neighbors," and Sheldon's use of animal stories in the family class grew into a full-fledged "Ethics in Nature Study" class. Classes in "Art and Ethics" and "The Right Use of Leisure" also were introduced.

The emergence of these diverse courses reflected the change in leadership. In directing the Sunday School, Chubb replaced Sheldon's autocratic style with the art of encouragement. He asked Society members to share their unique gifts and interests with the students, if only for a semester or two; he referred to teaching in the Sunday School as "the best form of Adult Education we can offer our members." (pastoral letter by Percival Chubb, Sept. 1, 1928) He maintained the basic requirements of the program -- the consideration of virtue and vice, the introduction to world religions, and so on -- but he was happy to permit occasional detours into auxiliary studies. He considered Boette his associate, not his lieutenant, and she treated group leaders in like manner. In training programs and monthly dinner meetings, the teachers received information and support, not directives. The manual of course outlines they produced in the 1925-26 season comprised such an effective pedagogy that the Brooklyn Society used it in developing its own program.

Beyond Duty

Chubb and Boette approached curriculum planning with avant-garde sensitivity to developmental psychology. In a 1927 pamphlet, they laid out the principles on which the school was run:

We are trying to reach below doctrines, below the intellect, below knowledge, to the very roots of character; which means that, negatively, we are not trying to indoctrinate these young, helpless souls, or to herd them into our domicile so as to swell our numbers in the Census, but rather to serve them more disinterestedly.

What we are trying to do is to help these children to grow into freedom, self-mastery, and personal responsibility by giving a bent and quality and sort of savor to their natures and their behavior. We are trying to develop in them a moral "taste," a wholesome preference and liking for rightness and uprightness; for what is straight, square, and well-proportioned in conduct and character. This means going deeper than what is ordinarily called "belief"; it means reaching down to the sub-soil of impulses --
desire, ambition, hope and aspiration. These are the dynamics of character. Character is primarily a matter of likes and dislikes. Worthy character is rooted in a liking for high and honorable things and persons, and a consequent aversion to what is false and mean. Ideas and reasonings, knowledge and experience are, of course, involved; and so an attempt is made to implant true knowledge and sound ideas in the service of this end . . .

All the teaching aims at promoting moral reflection and considerateness. Moral thoughtfulness must be our chief objective. The Course of Study selects those matters about which it is important to foster such thoughtfulness. These are studies in human relations. We can help the children to know the facts about the typical ethical situations which they will have to meet. We can acquaint them with the strong and fine types of character, heroic and serviceable lives, and great instances and events. We can give them the stuff out of which ideals are fashioned. We can acquaint them with the great religious Scriptures and teachers, and the course of religious history in the world.

The school was divided into elementary, intermediate, and advanced sections. Curiously, school policy was to divide children "according to their 'moral' age, which does not always accord with their physical age or even their 'mental' age." (Ibid) The elementary section, which included children age 3-7, was begun in the mid-20s. Initially an informal child-care program, this section grew into three supervised classes. Using as starting points the ethical issues that naturally arise in group activities, teachers led the children in discussions of cooperation, sharing, acknowledging the rights of others, and making sacrifices for the welfare of the group. Activities included singing, games, storytelling, artwork, and parties. During the course of instruction, pupils graduated from fairy tales and folk legends to historical anecdotes. They learned selected mottoes and proverbs by heart. A couple of times a year, group leaders held mother-and-child receptions to demonstrate their methodology and coordinate efforts at ethical training. In the intermediate section, for children age 7-11, the emphasis on group loyalty expanded to community consciousness. In addition to their studies, the students were supervised in "lend-a-hand" service projects. Virtues introduced at the elementary level were taken up systematically in the three courses in this section. The first course, "Living Together," stressed the interdependence of all creatures and planted the desire to contribute one's share to the common welfare; the course was based on a Unitarian text of the same name. Old Testament stories formed the basis of a two-year course that introduced students to knotty ethical dilemmas and laid out the components of heroism. The third course, "Habits and Initiative," incorporated the Socratic questioning of Sheldon's "Lessons in the Study of Habits" to inculcate such virtues as courage, truthfulness, industry, and generosity.
In the advanced section, students age 11 to 17 were guided into a deepening consciousness of selfhood. Teachers were especially sensitive to the problems of adolescence -- the development of intimate relationships outside the family, peer pressure, emerging sexuality, and inevitable self-doubt. The first course in this section was based on Sheldon’s "Duties in the Home." The study of the life of Jesus, also a Sheldon-era staple, was followed by studies of all sorts of heroes -- thinkers, scientists, social reformers, artists, athletes, and explorers. Staff members distributed monthly calendars commemorating heroes and historic acts; students were encouraged to investigate and present the lives of their personal heroes. "Nature Study from an Ethical Standpoint" used biological information and concepts to foster an appreciation of one’s relationship to the world of plants, animals, and natural resources. Through hikes and field trips, this course sought to cultivate both wonder and a sense of stewardship. Member Philip Rau, a self-taught expert on the wasp, taught the nature course for years. The next course, "The Personal Life," was an updated version of Sheldon’s "Duties to Oneself." This course balanced the group loyalty stressed in earlier courses with a celebration of individuality. Ideals of health, self-control, and cultural enrichment were presented in a give-and-take format. Separate classes were held for boys and girls. The older students in this section applied the tools of the "higher criticism" to the study of the Bible. As always, ethical enlightenment was the primary goal of these courses, but they also promoted understanding of the cultural impact of the Judeo-Christian tradition and an appreciation of the Bible as literature. The crowning course was an explicit study of the history and principles of the Ethical movement. Students were taught to consider religious affiliations with a discerning eye, and purely ethical religion was held up as a universally satisfying and practicable way of life.

Kindling Ardor for All that is Admirable

Sheldon Memorial’s spacious Assembly Room facilitated the tradition of holding opening and closing assemblies. The General Assembly, as it was called, consisted of songs, responsive readings, and talks by the superintendent and guests such as civic leaders, artists, scientists, and visiting Ethical leaders. About once a month, the assembly was devoted to recitals by the Society organist and volunteer soloists. Most assemblies included the entire student body, but occasionally separate assemblies were held for the younger and older students to allow for "more intimate talks with the seniors." The ecclesiastical air cultivated by Sheldon gave way to a more down-to-earth tenor, but the stated purpose of the assemblies remained "to inform and deepen the emotions of the children, and kindle in them a generous ardor for all that is admirable." (Ibid.) Many of the assemblies were based on special all-school projects and topics of study: Recurring themes included Avocation Sunday, Home Sunday, Child Welfare Sunday, City Day (or
Civic Sunday), Bird Sunday, Parents' Day, Toy Sunday, Pioneer Sunday, Scout Sunday, Camp Fire Girls Sunday, and Patriots' Day. Rally Sunday, a yearly staple, kicked off the new season with songs and addresses; the ever-enthusiastic Mr. Chubb initiated the event as "an old-fashioned Revival to stir things up." (minutes of Annual Meeting, October 1919) This first get-together, often held a few weeks before the season's first platform service, included an exhibition of summer avocational work such as butterfly collections, pressed flowers, sketches, snapshots, craftwork, and poetry. On Flower Sunday, the children marked the coming of spring by decorating the Assembly Room with wildflowers and flowers picked from family gardens. On Sheldon Sunday (or Founders' Day), the students honored the men who started the Ethical movement; ceremonies included the laying of a wreath on a bust of Sheldon. On Easter Sunday and the Sundays before Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Day, and Easter, the general assembly was given over to festivals that gave a cross-cultural interpretation to the holidays. The Easter festival, for example, incorporated an overview of the diverse origins of Easter symbols and customs. It also included a custom peculiar to the school: The younger children brought flowers for the older children, and the seniors reciprocated with colored eggs.

Recognition Day was the annual graduation service; the "Festival of the Dedication of Youth," again orchestrated by Chubb, became the Ethical Society's counterpart to such rites of passage as confirmation and bar mitzvah. Traditionally, the graduates entered the hall in a procession through a Boy Scout honor guard. The Leader of the Society addressed the graduates on the responsibilities of adulthood, presented them with keepsakes, and led them in responsive sentences:

Leader: Fair day of larger light,
Life's own appointed hour,
Young souls, bud forth in white, --
The world's a flower:
Thrill, youthful hearts: soar upward, limpid voice;
Blossom time is come -- rejoice, rejoice, rejoice!

Response: Oh, that we as right and true might be
As a flower or a tree;
And that the sweetness of the Spring
Into our souls might pass,
And the clear courage of the grass:

Leader: All are needed by each one;
Nothing is fair or good alone:

Response: And know we not what argument
Our life to our neighbor's creed has lent.

Leader: There is a destiny that makes us brothers;
None goes his way alone:

Response: All that we send into the lives of others
Comes back into our own.

Leader: Keep thy heart with all diligence;
For out of it are the issues of life.

Response: He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty;
And he that ruleth his spirit
than he that taketh a city.

Leader: Stand fast together therefore,
having girded your loins with truth,
And having put on the breastplate of righteousness.

Response: To this end have we been born,
And for this cause come we into the world,
That we should bear witness unto the truth.

In a celebration of the continuity of ethical education, the "torch of loyalty" was passed from the Post Graduate Group to the graduating class and then to the incoming senior class. Representatives of the Post Graduate Group and the Y.P.A. then welcomed the graduates into their associations. Because it represented a communal validation, this event was held in the auditorium and served as the platform service for that Sunday -- often the closing Sunday of the season. The service was followed by a "coming out" reception for the graduates and their parents and friends.

Chubb carried his love of music and drama into the Sunday School. "We want to make Song, and music generally, a more dominating power, integrated with the rest of our teaching and emotional
nurture," he wrote. "To ... make song ... a cultural force at the very heart of our larger ethical purpose, must be our aim." (pastoral letter, Sept. 1 1928) The regular use of song began in the tots' groups and was later incorporated in the plans of higher grades. He also considered acting an effective tool of self-realization and ethical exploration. Holiday festivals usually incorporated plays, some written by Chubb. The school's Annual Entertainment included two or three one-act plays; parents, teachers, and other Society members assisted with costumes, set design, lighting, music, and choreography. In the late 1920s, the Society employed a drama director to produce the school's festivals, ceremonies, and poetry readings as well as its plays. Under her direction, the children entered one of their productions in a local drama tournament in the 1929-30 season. On occasion, the post-graduate groups produced full-length plays as independent troupes.

Chubb and Boette finally put fun on the Sunday School agenda. Parties frequently were held during the General Assembly, and occasionally in the evening. The school year was capped with a field day at a city park or country retreat; Chubb, an avid swimmer and hiker, encouraged vigorous recreation. Beginning in 1930, the annual outing usually took the form of a riverboat excursion.

Active Learning

Community service was an integral part of the Sunday School program. Each group initiated its own "lend-a-hand" project; the children contributed and raised the necessary money and directed its use. Over the years, these projects spanned a wide range of charitable and activist endeavors. Younger students made colorful scrapbooks for bedridden children at City Hospital, and a group of older students donated a wheelchair to the children's ward. Similarly, young students made toys and clothing for Appalachian children, while older students threw a fund-raising party to help an Appalachian community school keep its doors open. A group of girls made and repaired infant garments as a member unit of the National Needlework Guild. One group subscribed to the National Child Labor Committee and invited one of its lobbyists to address the school, while another group visited the Missouri School for the Blind and devoted its contributions to a vocational training program. Two groups joined the Humane Society and visited its animal shelter; as their enthusiasm for animal welfare spread, the school sponsored exhibits of birdhouses and taught the students to build and stock them. Another group supplied a baby with a month's supply of milk, and yet another gave its funds to the Provident Association of St. Louis for the care of a destitute family. As a body, the children also donated special collections and Christmas carolling receipts to charitable causes.
To give the children a role in directing school activities, a Student Council was formed in the teens. The council was composed of boys and girls over 14. Each group in the advanced section elected a representative to the council; the representatives, in turn, elected the officers who made up the Governing Committee. The full council met once a month. A single teachers' representative was present to relay the students' comments to group leaders. The students made suggestions regarding parties, plays, festivals, and outings; discipline problems; and incentives for attendance and promptness. The council's only direct authority was in producing a handful of general assemblies. Beyond that, its role was advisory, but its advice was taken seriously. For instance, when the annual drama-and-dance entertainment -- a load of work for parents and teachers -- was replaced with simple motion picture showings, an outcry from the council brought back the more elaborate format.

A Sunday School publication was begun several times, first in 1908 and again in the 1913-14 season. The magazine, which came to be known as "Twice-a-Year," included announcements of coming activities; messages from the school directors; essays by students; inspirational and nature poems; reports of extracurricular activities; and personal notes regarding members' education, employment, travel, and volunteer services. As an experiment, the publication was placed in the hands of a committee selected from the Student Council in the 1919-20 season. This committee also raised the funding for the publication by selling advertisements. The students' business and editorial skills proved wanting, and the publication languished until the newly formed PTA began underwriting it in 1925. Adult volunteers took over the editing duties. "Twice-a-Year" became a comical misnomer when it slipped to once-a-year publication; in 1929, it was renamed "The Torchlight," after the "torch of loyalty" used in the Festival of the Dedication of Youth.

The broadening scope of Sunday School activities required increased volunteer help. In the spring of 1923, a group of five parents circulated a petition calling for the establishment of a patrons' association. The following fall, a separate group of parents and teachers inaugurated a "Normal Course in Ethical Instruction," which consisted of about ten fortnightly lecture-discussion meetings. The two groups joined forces as the Parents' & Teachers' Association in January 1924. All parents of Sunday School students were members, regardless of whether they paid dues, and membership was open to all adult members of the Society. Each year, members elected four members of a governing committee; these four chose three additional committee members, and from among themselves these members elected a chairman, secretary, and treasurer and appointed the chairmen of standing committees -- Membership, Program, Drama, and Entertainment. The leader of the Society was an ex officio member of this executive committee.

The PTA brought parents into the educational process by organizing their support and integrating the ethical training provided in the home and school. It organized the spring outing, the Twelfth Night party held each holiday season, and the Annual Entertainment. Members volunteered child care, transportation,
and supervision for school activities. With funds raised through dues, donations, and proceeds from the Annual Entertainment, the PTA financed the school publication and provided the school with such amenities as a movie projector, an aquarium, educational toys, and Recognition Day mementos. The PTA also provided moral support: In its mailings, it encouraged children to attend classes regularly and promptly and invited parents to participate in the General Assembly; once a year, the group put on an appreciation dinner for the teachers. In their monthly meetings, PTA members were brought up to date on school topics; they also heard talks on child-rearing by Ethical leaders, educators, and mental health authorities. Some of these meetings were held jointly with the Child Study Group. A customary meeting held in the spring offered parents an overview of wholesome summertime diversions for children. About 1927, a related association called the Parents' Sunday Morning Group was formed. By gathering just after dropping off their children at the Sunday School, members were able to make use of the idle time before the platform service. The group was led by Society member Marguerite E. Grimmer, who served on the staff of the city's Psychiatric Clinic. In addition to addressing the group and guiding discussions on the ethical development of children, Grimmer shared her expertise in private consultations.
If the Ethical movement were to establish a seminary of its own, it might well seek the likes of J. Hutton Hynd to head up the Department of Homiletics. Hynd was an impeccable orator. He wrote out his addresses to the syllable, and he delivered them with studied elocution and gestures. To ensure crisp timing, he often practiced his orations on Saturday nights, orchestrating his greeting, address, and closing words with the interludes of longtime organist Carl Werner. For Hynd, the platform service was a holy event, a sacrament of sorts; he was known to acknowledge latecomers with a long, cool stare and a mortifying pause in an otherwise flowing address. He had not Walter Sheldon's consuming introspection or Percival Chubb's fiery indignation; he distinguished himself through his synthesis of the arts and sciences, and through the fastidiousness and consistency of his lectures. No blazer of intellectual trails, Hynd was devoted to inspiring listeners; with clarity, conciseness, and cleverly turned phrases, he provided Society members with a steady diet of thoughtful nutrition. Those who regularly attended Hynd's addresses received an ongoing education in history, literature, philosophy, and comparative religions. Recalled Mabel Jones:

I loved him. He was my mentor. If I ever had a mentor in life, it was he. Anything that he mentioned, I would go and either buy the book or get it from the library and read it on my own. He introduced me to ideas . . . . I didn't go college, so I was ripe for all this stuff. I was 34 years old when I joined the Society, so I drank it in -- I was ready for it. I really took it all very, very seriously. I didn't even form friendships until I'd been there about five years, because I sat in like I was going to college."

(Interview with Mabel Jones, August 11, 1986)

Hynd acquired his noted erudition through a varied course of training in his native Scotland. He earned a degree in philosophy from the University of Perth, and later studied engineering at the University of Glasgow. In World War I, he served as a mechanic in the Royal Air Force. After studying at Edinburgh's Congregational College and Germany's Merburg University, he was ordained a minister in the Congregational Church of Scotland. During his ten years of service to the church, he mastered the florid, inspirational style of oratory then prevalent among Celtic clerics. Before coming to the United States, he
spent four years assisting Stanton Coit in London's Ethical Church; like Chubb, Hynd was deeply influenced by Coit's reverential style and creative use of ceremony.

**Enthusiasm for a Fine Quality of Life**

The overriding theme of Hynd's oratory was that authentic religious values are those that are immediately apprehended -- not those that rest on belief in revelation or cultural mythology. He repeatedly defined religion as "an active enthusiasm for a fine quality of life." In so doing, he offered a straightforward, naturalistic answer to the ageless question of the "meaning of life." He belittled the popular assumption that human life has meaning only within the context of a fixed cosmology; it is not necessary, he said, to grasp some extra-rational explanation of human origin and destiny to appreciate life's self-evident goods. Further, by Hynd's reckoning, to hold fast to the belief that human fulfillment must be found in an afterlife is to preclude the fulfillment that may be found in the present. He likened the preoccupation with an afterlife to a dreary business trip: If the sole purpose of the trip is to reach a destination and carry out an assignment, then the traveler will disregard the scenery and pass up the human encounters one cherishes on a pleasure trip. Although he shied away from existentialist phraseology, Hynd recognized that one of the functions of belief in everlasting life is to provide relief from absurdity -- the enervating sense that life is rendered futile by the very fact that it ends. As an alternative to that belief, he proposed the calm acceptance of the life cycle as a microcosm of the universal cycles of change:

We are here as parts of the universe -- as parts of a dynamic process of change which proceeds within cycles of the seasons of the year, and of day and night. In such a system of cycles we are not going anywhere; we seem to be "going round and round" -- a fact which need not disturb us unduly! Life can be as meaningful in terms of a circle as in terms of a straight line! We are here -- and we are always in the present . . . If we as individuals are not always here -- Mankind is always here. Individuals come and go, but Mankind remains, always in the present. At this moment, you and I represent Mankind; soon others will be the representatives of Humanity -- which lives an eternal life that is charged with the dynamics of change . . .

The meaning of life is to be found in life itself -- in life as a process of dynamic change within the finite and infinite cycles of our universe. The meaning of life is to be found in a certain way of living your life . . .
We are offering the suggestion that the meaning of life, and therefore the purpose of life, are to be found in the emphasis upon the quality or kind of life we may know here and now. And this is a suggestion which gives denial to the implication that the meaning of life is to be found in the years of retirement and rest, or in the silent tomb, or in another world, or even in a far-off state of ethical perfection. We would give denial to the pernicious implication, this fallacy of futurity, that our life has no meaning apart from an existence other than the one we know here and now. If life is to be likened unto a journey, then the meaning and purpose of life are to be known along the way -- as in certain kinds of experiences which seem to have a special value, and which seem to have a special claim upon the attentions of intelligence and conscience and common sense; certain experiences which seem to give quality to life.


In address after address, Hynd extolled "the good things" of life -- the joys of beauty and adventure and companionship, the deep satisfaction that comes of contributing to human welfare, the serenity that attends emotional and intellectual maturation. According to Hynd, these goods are self-validating realities; the yearning for supernatural goods merely underscores the potency of the yearning for natural goods. Hynd outlined this philosophy most explicitly in a 1936 address titled, "What Are 'The Realities' of Religion?" In the address, Hynd asserted that the "realities" exalted by revelatory religions -- such as divinity, salvation, and immortality -- are imaginative embellishments of natural values, and that such embellishments tend to obscure and degrade nature. For example, on the most basic level of human experience, he noted that belief in a providential care for bodily needs simply expresses the drive to survive; as science strips away mythological explanations of the workings of nature, that drive is directed toward industry rather than supplication.

The same principle -- that supernatural beliefs express fundamental needs -- applies in what Hynd unabashedly termed "the spiritual life." [FOOTNOTE 1] The belief in a personal God, he said, simply expresses the need for sympathy, approval, and all other positive elements of human community; the frustration of that need spurs the lonely and rejected to seek satisfaction in a superhuman sphere:

[The need for human fellowship is the central reality. Men may seek the divine, but this seeking merely serves to throw into bolder relief the need of the human. The
longing for divine fellowship is verily the longing for a more perfect human fellowship. Let the human fellowship be more perfect, more congenial, more sympathetic, more just, more merciful, more patient, and the deepest spiritual need will be satisfied -- indeed, satisfied to such an extent that, in the circumstance of human fellowship, the most orthodox believer will exclaim that he is "in the presence of God." There is a line of thought in the New Testament which brings this humanistic matter home to us, as in the statement, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." The human fellowship itself, especially when it is of a high moral kind, is the reality of religion, since it is from this fellowship that all ethical and spiritual values come, and all emotional patterns radiate. The emotion of "enjoying the divine presence" radiates from the experience of human fellowship.

("What Are 'The Realities' of Religion?" first published in pamphlet form in 1936 by the AEU; pp. 6, 7)

Hynd traced the manifestation of this principle from its ultimate application through all subordinate values: The doctrine of divine forgiveness expresses the deep spiritual need for human forgiveness and restoration to community; prayers of supplication give voice to the yearning for understanding and guidance; consecration to God through celibacy echoes the desire for fidelity in love; and the belief in immortality underlines the extraordinary need for human consolation experienced by those in grief. In Hynd's vision, the perfect religious community -- as distinct from the "superstitious community" - fulfills needs and celebrates values directly, without reference to non-empirical "realities." Naturally, the community he envisioned is most nearly exemplified by an ethical society. [FOOTNOTE 2]

In accordance with this naturalism, Hynd applauded the roles of science and critical reasoning in purifying ethical values. In "The Fundamentalists Are Right," another signal address, he cleverly agreed with the rigid declamations of the orthodox: Judaism, he said, is the belief in such doctrines as the Mosaic law, the Chosen People, the Promised Land, and the Messiah; Christianity, likewise, must be defined as belief that humanity is innately corrupt and that salvation can be obtained only through faith in the divine incarnation and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. He dismissed as dishonest the attempts of liberal theologians to "stay within the fold" while minimizing such dogmas in light of scientific discoveries and intellectual trends. His intention, of course, was to separate the supernatural constructs of dogmatic religions from the "fundamental fact of religion" -- namely, what Chicago Ethical leader A. Eustace Haydon described as "the creative drive of human desire for the values of a satisfying life." ("The
Fundamentalists Are Right,” p. 14) Accentuating that “fact,” Hynd urged his listeners to engage wholeheartedly in the humanistic cultivation of "the good life":

This interest in the good (as in what life should be, extending beyond what life is) is a dynamic interest which leads to definite activity, and to the building up of certain institutions, which become the custodian of the traditions and techniques by which a good life is to be achieved. "Science" is the name we give to man’s dynamic interest in finding the facts and knowing the truth; "Art" is the name we give to man’s dynamic and creative interest in proportion and beauty; "Religion" is the name we give to the dynamic and creative interest in the good. Science, Art, Religion -- each with its own institutions -- these three; and perhaps the greatest of these is Religion. [FOOTNOTE 3] since it is the religious impulse which should direct and consecrate the activities of mankind to the service of the good life. . . . I do not speak here of any particular religion -- I speak of religion as such, as having its own fundamental fact and feature, by which mankind may yet be united in its creative drive for the values of a satisfying life for all, in terms of worth, achievement, and fulfillment. Through the generations, man, seeking the good life, has tried to be creative in his magic, in his supernaturalism, in his superstition; now let him try to be creative in terms of his scientific knowledge, his technical skill, his political knowledge, and his ideals of the good; thus giving expression to the religious interest and activity, as a vital part of a people's culture.

"The Fundamentalists Are Right," published in pamphlet form in 1950 by the AEU; p. 14)

Dogging the Dogmatists

Though commonly perceived as anticlerical, Hynd was genuinely committed to purifying and fortifying religion, not abolishing it. He candidly acknowledged that he did not believe the metaphysical tenets of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and he was less than scrupulous to avoid offending believers, but he was not out to negate theism per se. Rather, his criticisms were aimed at self-serving institutionalism and cowardly other-worldliness -- tendencies which obstruct "the creative drive of human desire for the values of a satisfying life." In his most stinging indictment of ecclesiasticism, he contended the Christian establishment stultifies the liberating spirit of Jesus when it forbids progressive thought:
[I]nasmuch as the organized traditionalism of Christianity, which hitherto has controlled the moral experience of the people, is forcing upon us to-day the view of a fixed and final tradition, it is actually hindering the moral development of the race. Christian ethics has become a matter of sacred manuscripts and superstitious sanctions. The sanctimonious quotation of a text is the only solution offered for the most pressing problems as of slavery, war, divorce and birth-control. Bibliolatry is a blight upon the spiritual nature of man. Mere biblical commentary enslaves the mind. The free intelligence is not allowed to play upon the elements of the ethical life. The Church has so committed herself to her supernatural traditionalism that she has lost the perception of the true nature of her witness, and has become insensible to the responsibility she carries as the professed custodian of moral traditions. She has relentlessly condemned every spontaneous expression of moral experience outside the circle of her orthodoxy. Her severest anathemas and excommunications have fallen upon the doubters and disputers who have dared to question the absolute finality of her doctrines and interpretations.

In all this she has been disloyal to her great traditions. There is a sense in which orthodoxy is disloyalty. Christian orthodoxy, in accepting the Bible as a finality, tried to destroy the scientific tradition; to-day, she tries to thwart the enrichment of the moral inheritance. She misunderstands her stewardship. She buries her talent. She is an unfaithful servant.

("The Great Tradition of the Ethical Movement," a reprint in pamphlet form of an article published in the Standard, p.4)

Hynd frequently accused institutionalized Christianity of divisive chauvinism. In a 1946 radio address titled "Ideas of Brotherhood," he denounced the Christian proclivity to "divide Mankind into two classes or groups -- the saved and the unsaved, or the children of God and the children of the Devil." (script of radio address; Feb. 24, 1946, KMOX "Church of the Air"; Ethical Society archives) The only way to cultivate a universal sense of community, he countered, is to recognize a "mystical bond" that transcends alliances of blood and belief. The narrowest of Christian dogmatists infuriated Hynd by expressing contempt for political approaches to world harmony. In "That We May Have Peace," he argued for a realistic commitment to the establishment of universal law as against the rigidly sectarian assumption that the "unsaved" are incapable of upholding any sort of moral law. (May 1, 1949, script read over radio
station KWK; Ethical Society archives) And in responding to the orthodox equation of "godlessness" with amorality, Hynd noted that atheism is a relative term: Early Christians were deemed atheists by the Roman religionists whose idols they denigrated, and contemporary Christians are called infidels within the Islamic world; likewise, rational humanists can be termed atheists only insofar as they question the validity of the prevailing Western God-concept. With due respect for devout theists, Hynd acknowledged that "beliefs regarding the Universe and its mysteries are important," but he stressed that such beliefs ought to be "freely and openly discussed in the spirit of toleration, open-mindedness, and humility." ("When Christians Were Called 'Atheists," KMOX "Church of the Air" broadcast, May 27, 1945) He called for an end to schoolyard name-calling, contrapositing the attitude that morality, not belief, ought be the touchstone of human goodness. Just as Jesus taught that the compassionate Samaritan -- an "atheist" vis-a-vis the Jewish culture of that time and place -- was the paradigm of neighborliness, so Hynd pleaded with adversarial Christians to judge "heathen" humanists by their deeds. As always, he elevated the natural goods upon which all can agree:

Let it be observed that we are more likely to be united in our ideas of Good because such ideas lie more intimately within the range of our knowledge and experience. The ideas of Good may be proved. "Prove all things," says the Bible, "hold fast that which is good." Goodness seems to lie within our human comprehension and implementation. For example, we know in a general way when our health is good -- and when Life is good. We seem to be able to prove it! And it is in relation to the Good Life that men and women know their most certain responsibilities and duties -- because the Good Life is a matter of everyday practice and experiment. Yes -- it may be true that we can never be united in our conceptions of God, but let it be known that we may be united to a remarkable and practical degree in our conceptions of Good: for here are ideas to be discussed -- with a sense of certainty, with a sense of responsibility, and with a sense of unity. . . . Religious unity is not to be achieved in common conceptions of God but in common conceptions of Good.

(Ibid.)

Hynd did not confine his critiques to the power structure of orthodoxy. Challenging complacent believers, he mocked the psychological gymnastics by which theism might be used to dodge humanitarian obligations:
Mention should be made . . . of a favorite trick which human nature plays upon itself with remarkable success; it has played this trick upon itself for ages now, and still seems to enjoy being fooled by it. Human nature does not mind being fooled, so long as it may escape from a task it does not wish to perform!

Here is the trick. Man has an emotion which he does not wish to follow -- since obedience to it may be difficult or costly. The reaction is natural enough. In order to escape from the ordeal, he proceeds to project his emotion outward as an abstraction of himself. He projects it upon vacancy -- and he may give it a name. A favorite name has been the word “God.” The projection of himself stands out there as an idol, or as an idea; and then he proceeds to call upon his projection to do what he finds so difficult to do. He knows that he should practice the law of kindness in his dealings with his fellows -- but it is difficult, it is irksome, it is embarrassing; accordingly, he proceeds (feeling very virtuous the while) to call upon his projection to be kind. "O God, be kind to the poor and the needy, to the sick and the aged. O God, be kind to the people who are compelled to live in the slums, and to those who are in prison. O God, be kind to the people of Africa, and the peoples of China. O God, be kind and gracious and merciful." And Man, having played this neat little trick upon himself, is inclined to leave it just at that! He has escaped from his duty -- from his responsibility -- as in the practice of kindness! That same emotion which might have impelled him to do great things for his fellowmen is projected upon vacancy; and he proceeds to make his fervent appeal to his own emotion. A neat trick; and popular! It seems to be easier for men to ask God to be kind than it is for them to be kind! It seems to be easier for a man to ask God's forgiveness than it is for him to apologize and make amends to the person whom he has wronged!

("The Quality of Kindness," transcription of platform address delivered Dec. 19, 1948; p. 4)

Again, while it may appear that Hynd disputed the very idea of divine intervention, his intention was to rouse humanitarian ardor. [FOOTNOTE 4] In “The Quality of Kindness," the address quoted above, Hynd (echoing a contention of Percival Chubb's) pointed out that the centrality of religious leaders -- notably, Christ, Krishna, and Buddha -- indicates that human beings can only comprehend goodness insofar as it is embodied in exemplary human beings. The purpose of religious legends, he said, is "to
bring the projected emotions back to earth again." (Ibid.) For Hynd, the validity of these legends lay, not in historical accuracy, but in their expression of ethical truisms: "the kindness and compassion represented in the Christ of the Hebrew-Christian literature must be born in US -- must be made manifest in US -- and must work through us, to become an effectual grace among men, seeking to save mankind from its sickness and sorrows, without respect of persons. This is the suggestion that is offered to mankind in the literature and legendry of East and West." (Ibid.)

Beyond criticizing the errors of traditional religious institutions, Hynd called upon Ethical Culturists to help incorporate the values of the Ethical movement in American secular institutions:

As members of Ethical Societies, we have respect for certain contributions which have been made to the religious culture of the nation by Christian, Hebrew, and other organized religions; but we see the religious life of this nation emerging and moving as something that is different from the fragmentary state religions of other times, other places, other peoples; and we hold that this religious life should find definition and direction in new forms of organization, as in new institutions, new statements of belief, new codes of behavior, new services and ceremonies of orientation and consecration, and in new methods of education and administration -- none of these being final, but all of these being of such a kind that the scientific knowledge, the technical skill, and business and professional ability, and all the natural and human resources of this great nation, may be rightly directed, YEA RIGHTLY DEDICATED, as to the common good, or greatest good of the greatest number . . . .

[O]whatever may have been the part played by others by others in centuries to come, whatever may be the part to be played by others in this present century, we say -- because we can do no other -- that the more democratic, naturalistic, rationalistic, moralistic, humanistic aspects of the religious life must be formalized and organized, within the political and cultural setting of which they are such a vital part, in order that the potentialities and possibilities of each succeeding generation may be brought to finest and fullest expression; and therefore we say, without uncertainty, without hesitancy, without apology, that this is our part in this country, OUR PART IN THIS CENTURY.

("Our Part in this Century," closing address of the annual AEU assembly, Brooklyn, May 22, 1949)
Ethics in the Caldron of War

Hynd hoped that the tragedy of World War II would advance the purification of ethical values. Religious leaders of all stripes addressed the terror, cynicism, and jingoism of the war era; characteristically, Hynd's response to the tenor of the times was a renewed call to human responsibility. Taking as his foil the popular wartime saying that "there are no atheists in foxholes," Hynd asserted that the essence of religion is not the fearful cry for supernatural aid but the courageous devotion to a noble way of life. The genuinely religious soldier, he said, is not the one who prays for deliverance from harm but the one who consecrates himself to the values he defends:

This man has made the issues clear to himself. He sees his country: he sees the folks at home, his family, you and me; he sees the institutions that are cherished by free men and women. He sees his native land and all its precious values under threat of violence, invasion, and spoliation by a ruthless and arrogant enemy. He sees it clearly, vividly. He sees a certain kind of life. It is a kind of life to be preserved: It is the kind of life he wants to live for -- and it is the kind of life he is willing to die for. This man has a concern for certain values -- and he makes the great commitment of himself, of his life, to the defense of these values. With this vision of human life before him he prepares himself to engage the enemy with resolution and with courage. It is the religious vision of a normal man who wants to live the best kind of life -- and who is willing, if need be, to make the supreme sacrifice for its preservation. The vision commands his supreme reverence, his supreme devotion, his supreme sacrifice.

And now, following this silent and sincere commitment to a certain quality of life, he finds himself, shall we say, in a fox-hole, under the fire and fury of his foes. Some men may offer prayer, some may curse and swear -- but this soldier stands in grim determination -- afraid, yet mastering his fear by the convictions of his faith. There are men such as this. And I would say, in all fairness to them, that such men are truly and deeply religious.

("How Fares Religion in the Fox-Holes?" broadcast May 23, 1943, on radio station KMOX's "Church of the Air" program.)
While he exalted the "religious" devotion of fighters [FOOTNOTE 5] and civilian supporters of the war effort, Hynd placed an even higher premium on the responsibility to wage peace. Just as Chubb, during World War I, taught that "the fires in which the world is being tried must be for us cleansing fires, burning up the dross of our smaller selves," so Hynd contended that the indiscriminate brutality of the second war undercut supernaturalism, challenging humanity to champion a more self-accountable realism. (pastoral letter, Sept. 27, 1915; Ethical Society archives) In a 1944 radio address, Hynd underscored human responsibility by flatly contradicting the earnest belief that prayer saves lives:

[T]here are those who say, in the name of religion, that our sons can be saved from cruel wounding and untimely death by prayer and miracle. . . . And since religion is concerned with the saving of life and the fulfillment of life, they speak of prayer for the saving of life as the supreme religious obligation. . . . But is it not so that this war has brought a very severe test to the saying that it is by prayer that our sons are to be saved? . . . In this war, men are praying for themselves as never before; and they are being prayed for as never before. . . . The voice of prayer is never silent -- but the slaughter of men does not cease! The men who pray, and the men for whom prayer is made, are numbered among the dead and the dying . . . .

As I look at the facts in the face I learn the lesson that our sons are not saved by prayer and miracle. It may comfort me to imagine that they are saved by prayer and miracle -- but why should I deceive myself or others by vain imaginings and false consolations?

Now, someone will say at this point -- This is a cruel and a hard saying; it is cruel to say to the persons who pray for their sons that their prayers are of no avail. Well -- the facts are cruel enough; more cruel indeed than any words of mine can ever be! And I would suggest that it adds considerably to the cruelty of the facts when we lead the praying mother to believe that her son will be saved -- it is cruel, I say, to treat her so in face of the fact that she may rise from her knees to receive the telegram which tells her that her son has been killed in action . . . .

And let me add here that the cruelty of this situation is extended and deepened when the mother who has lost her son begins to accuse herself and to think that perhaps her prayers were not answered because she was not good enough, or did not have "faith" enough, when she prayed . . . . The telegram comes to "the just and the unjust." This is the
fact to be faced; and it is a fact from which we may learn the bitter truth that modern warfare, *when we allow it to come*, involves the wholesale slaughter of millions of men -- our sons, our brothers, our husbands, our friends. In the threatenings and thunderings of modern warfare, in the din and dust of bombs and bullets, rockets and shells, grenades and mines, and many other hellish devices which we fashion with our hands -- which under certain circumstances we MUST fashion with our hands -- the voice of prayer is of no avail. The sooner we learn this lesson concerning life and religion the better it will be for all concerned. Learning this bitter lesson, we may come to see that we have been too prone to place the responsibility for our sons' salvation on the shoulders of the gods rather than upon the shoulders of men. The responsibility is OURS.

("The Only Way to Save Our Sons," broadcast Oct. 29, 1944, on radio station KMOX's "Church of the Air" program.)

Despite his qualified support of the war effort, Hynd abhorred the ugly necessity of it. Member Ted Anderson recalled that Hynd once pounded on the lectern and shouted, "I hate war!" (That, said Anderson, was the only emotional outburst he could recall Hynd allowing himself on the platform.) (Interview with Ted and Ruth Anderson, Sept. 15, 1986) Hynd declared that "war in all its forms, legal or illegal, should be thought of as a monstrous crime . . . a crime which we charge to mankind as a whole." ("The Light of Hope in the Darkness of War," KMOX "Church of the Air" script, Nov. 17, 1940.) Worldwide guilt for the war, he said, lay in humanity's failure to establish "the conditions, under which, by law and its enforcement, war might be averted." (Ibid.) He admonished his listeners to atone for this crime by working toward an enduring peace. "Our supreme religious duty," he said, is to engage in concrete efforts to build up international harmony; he urged support for the work of governments, the United Nations, and the business community to establish a global system of justice and social interdependence. ("The Only Way to Save Our Sons") "It is only as we rise from our knees to fulfill the higher religious duty of world-citizenship," he said, "that we can hope to save our sons, and our sons' sons, from the massacres of modern warfare." (Ibid.) On a deeper level, Hynd pointed up the need for postwar spiritual reconstruction:

This war should give us a sense of history -- it should give us an awareness of what is going on within the Soul of Humanity . . . . Old nationalisms and militarisms are struggling in desperate defiance of new internationalisms and humanitarianisms. We feel
the tensions of this struggle in our own souls. And even when the war is over, and the victory is won by the new against the old, we shall feel the tensions of conflict within ourselves. These tensions are not our private and personal tensions merely; they are the tensions of the universal human spirit; they are the tensions within the historical process; they are the travblings of a new world waiting to be born within us... [L]et us have a sense of history -- an awareness of what is going on within the Soul of the human race; and let us try to resolve the tension as a spiritual problem universal in its scope, international in its implications. Let us remember that, in history, things do not merely happen TO us, they happen THROUGH us. THROUGH us, let the new international spirit be born; THROUGH us, let the new humanitarianism come; THROUGH us, let history fulfill itself in terms of the Universal Man who shall live his life according to the spirit of freedom, justice, and peace.

("On Having a Sense of History," transcription of platform address given Oct. 3, 1943)

[FOOTNOTE 1: Hynd, whose bent was toward pure reason, employed the term "spiritual" in a loose, poetic manner. He explained his use of quasi-mystical terminology in a 1942 radio address titled "Living in a Fool's Paradise": "When we speak here of 'spiritual resources,' we refer to the resources of thought and feeling. We do not wish to imply that the spiritual life is something apart from the physical, as though the 'soul' were a ghostly presence having an existence apart from the 'body.' The term 'soul,' or 'spirit,' is used conveniently to signify thought and emotion -- the general quality and disposition of a person." (Address broadcast Feb. 15, 1942, on KMOX's "Church of the Air" program)]

[FOOTNOTE 2: Hynd's heady naturalism, as expressed in "Realities," might be more compelling were he willing to acknowledge its limitations. For one thing, he discounts a characteristic function of symbol and myth -- namely, providing a focal point toward which one's longings and gratitude may be directed. When he urges the penitent to seek ZhumanŽ forgiveness, his argument rings clear, but the principle of demythologization does not apply so clearly to the bestowal of homage; the Taoist may be accustomed to an Ultimate Reality too vast to be objectified, but the typical Westerner attempts to locate a central source of creativity. Instead of encouraging the Western mind to broaden its breadth of awareness, Hynd attempts to redirect its habitual focus, as when he suggests that "a Boulder Dam, or a Tennessee
Valley project, imperfect as it may be, may stir the emotions of the intelligent person more deeply than all the prayers for rain that were ever said." ("Realities," pp. 4, 5) Another of Hynd's weaknesses is his squeamish reluctance to acknowledge angst: It is the terror of mortality -- not solely the pain of bereavement -- that the belief in immortality soothes; similarly, he declines to mention that even those fortunate enough to experience intimate love and "high moral fellowship" can hardly hope for a humanistic nirvana free of existential loneliness. Overstatements are common in Hynd's addresses, indicating his overriding concern for hortatory inspiration, even to the neglect of philosophical integrity.

[FOOTNOTE 3: Note: This passage illustrates two of Hynd's favorite homiletic devises -- the effective use of repetition through the echoing of successive phrases, and the fresh recasting of traditional religious sayings (in this case, Science, Art, and Religion parallel the "faith, hope, and love" of I Corinthians 13:13).]

[FOOTNOTE 4: Hynd's reference to "vacancy" seems to reveal an atheistic assumption, but the context of the quoted passage makes it clear that his concern is psychological, not metaphysical; he is judging the manner in which the God-concept is spawned and used, not whether a reality corresponding to that concept exists.]

[FOOTNOTE 5: In 1942, Hynd, though a resident alien and in middle age, registered with the Selective Service Board.]
The "J" in J. Hutton Hynd stood for John, but no one ever called him that. For that matter, no one was ever heard to call him Hutton. Even his wife, when in public, addressed him as Mr. Hynd. At leadership meetings, colleagues who refused to indulge his formality settled on addressing him simply as "Hynd." Asked to describe the man, nearly every interviewee used the adjectives aloof and austere. ("Formidable" ran a close third in the adjectival survey. And for all Hynd's advocacy of religion as "an active enthusiasm for life," the word "enthusiastic" never came up.) All agreed he was a man of dignity -- "impenetrable dignity," in the words of one Society member. He was a regal, rather humorless man who allowed himself to be seen -- and photographed -- only in a stiff collar. Charles "Bud" Blake recalled Hynd as "unapproachable. You did not ever feel that this was a buddy of any kind. He was always a person on high -- sort of a priestlike character . . . . I could not possibly imagine the man in shorts or doing something like sweeping the walk or using a vacuum cleaner." (Interview with Charles and Garnet Blake, July 1986)

The fastidiousness that characterized Hynd's addresses carried over into his other pastoral duties: He insisted on a formal rehearsal even for so simple a ceremony as the Ethical naming service for newborns. (Ruth Anderson, whose daughter Linda was named in an Ethical ceremony, recalled that Hynd "did a very good job, although he looked terribly awkward holding her; I had to laugh. He didn't have any children, and he held babies like they going to crack in two.") (Interview with Ted and Ruth Anderson, Sept. 15, 1986) Member Mildred Smith recalled that full-scale festivals called for correspondingly finer daintiness:

Hynd] was a detailist. He must have thought every spare moment about order, and organization, and the details of the Society. When we had a festival -- on Thanksgiving and Christmas -- you had a sprig of holly. Every child held it by the right hand at a certain height, and you were all lined up down the front steps [of Sheldon Memorial]. When the organ played a certain note, with the right foot you entered and went down the steps [of the auditorium], and you all sang at a certain given note. He was a stickler for detail.

(Interview with Mildred Smith, August 11, 1986)

Likewise, Mabel Jones recalled how Hynd demanded that Sunday School students participating in candle-lighting ceremonies stand erect in marked locations, holding their candles perfectly upright; on Hynd's cue, the children meticulously intoned inspirational verses. "That pleased me mightily," said Jones.
"I knew a lot of people criticized all that, but to me that was just wonderful order, and I dovetailed into that." (Interview with Mabel Jones, August 11, 1986)

Other Society members, while impressed with Hynd's conscientiousness and enchanted with his rich accent, found his Britannic primness out of place in this unpretentious Midwestern community. Society member Jane Hanke recalled discovering that broad red bows she had put up as part of a yuletide display had been inexplicably removed; upon inquiring about their fate, she was told that Hynd had ordered the ribbons taken down and ironed. One anecdote, recounted often and with varied embellishments, illustrates Hynd's need to project a professorial bearing. As the story goes, Dee Simpson, a gregarious and rather eccentric Society member (she was given to addressing all acquaintances as "honey"), bluntly asked Hynd who cut his hair; Simpson was married to a barber, and she evidently deemed the cut of Hynd's sparse locks below par. As Bud Blake recounted the incident, Hynd "looked like he'd been slapped in the face. He drew back to his 6 feet 3 inches and peered down on her and, in this voice from above, said, "Whom I have cut my hair is my own business!" Blake surmised that Hynd, with typical Scottish frugality, had his wife cut his hair but was chagrined by the fact. He added that Hynd undoubtedly found the question altogether too personal. "You couldn't have offended the man more if you had reached up and kissed him," Blake said. "I've never seen a guy quite so embarrassed as he was, and so affronted." (Interview with Charles and Garnet Blake, July 1986) Even Mabel Jones, who admired Hynd's precision in ceremonial matters, owned that his fussiness clashed with American ways. "He would come to a picnic with his straw hat and his coat and jacket and everything -- very formal," said Jones. "He didn't come to a picnic like he was picnicking." (Interview with Mabel Jones, August 11, 1986)

For all his "impenetrable dignity," Hynd was not incapable of a certain restrained playfulness. Once, at a Sunday School assembly, he donned a kilt and did a few steps of a Scottish jig to the accompaniment of a bagpipe. And former members of the Young People's Association recalled with amusement that he joined in exactly one of their many soccer games. (The youngsters played on a stubble field, and thought nothing of fielding twenty or thirty players at a time. Hynd played about ten minutes before giving up in exasperation; an experienced player by English rules, he expressed disgust with the association's lackadaisical approach to the game.)

Hynd's compulsion to maintain privacy, control, and a dignified stature contributed to his overall poor rating as a pastoral servant. He and his wife lived at the former Coronado Hotel in midtown, a stone's throw from Sheldon Memorial, but Society members felt they were unwelcome at the couple's home. While living in the United States, the couple never owned a car, making it difficult -- some said conveniently difficult -- for Hynd to call on congregants. He was seldom seen "offstage," leading many members to
assume he was uninterested in their welfare. The deeper truth is that Hynd was most at ease performing predictable, well-rehearsed tasks: At committee meetings, he was left nonplused by unexpected outbursts; in the presence of troubled and bereaved congregants, and even at the heartiest of dinner parties, he was apt to find himself at a loss for words. In a man who sustains studied dignity, this lack of competence in the arts of listening and making small talk bears a striking resemblance to disdain. It is not surprising, then, that Hynd often was perceived as uncaring. One member recalled stopping him in a stairwell to introduce him to her children; his flustered response, she said, left her feeling that she had acted impudently. Another member said she would never forget being summarily dismissed from his office when she asked him to help obtain a box of holiday candy for a young guest of hers. "I had this feeling that he was not a very compassionate sort of person," she said.

Ironically, Hynd cherished the community feeling he found in the St. Louis Society. Upon returning from a trip to Britain in 1948, he bemoaned the highbrow air of the movement abroad:

I would say that the Societies in England lack "the personal touch." I mean that the tendency is towards the intellectual and academic expression of morals and religion. This aspect, of course, is extremely important . . . but the "family feeling," the feeling of "religious community," such as we have here in high degree in St. Louis, is lacking . . . .

Because of this situation in London, there is a feeling that the day of ethical societies, as religious or "church" communities, is over, and that concentration should be made on conferences and publications. In other words -- it should be a matter of streams without any fountain or source! It would seem to me that some sort of emotional and spiritual fountainhead is necessary.

(Leader's report to the Board of Trustees, Feb. 9, 1948)

Beyond appreciating the extraordinary warmth of the St. Louis Society, Hynd hoped to contribute to it. He once vowed in a platform address that he would resign and return to Scotland if he felt members could not turn to him with their problems. "He was sincere when he said that," one member woefully recalled, "and yet he did everything to turn you off. It's really kind of tragic."

Hynd's esteem for human community was genuine, but he did not equate community with undiscriminating personal interaction. Indeed, he explicitly stated that fellow-feeling does not preclude discrimination and a careful regard for privacy:
Concern and compassion will leave wide room for the due recognition of differences between persons... Brotherhood does not make us merely sentimental or mawkish in our relationships -- as when we may try to be fulsome or foolish in our friendliness toward all men. Brotherhood will have respect for likes and dislikes -- since these point to legitimate evaluations and discriminations. We may choose our friends -- being more intimate with one group of persons than with another (as may even happen in a family when a brother will seem to have a closer kinship with one than another). And brotherhood will have a certain respect for privacies -- especially the privacies of personality; it is a respect which will prompt us to keep our distance -- as a protection for ourselves and for others against aggressive and thoughtless persons.

("Ideas of Brotherhood," script broadcast Feb. 24, 1946, on KMOX's "Church of the Air" program)

Although he did not project a welcoming air, Hynd did respond to congregants who made their needs known to him. Members who dropped by his office unannounced may have met with a chilly response, but those who scheduled appointments found him at least dutifully responsive. He was a willing - - if unsophisticated -- counselor, and he was capable of rising to heartfelt pastoral care. Recalled Hilda Dreifke:

I liked [Hynd] very much. So many people thought [the Hynds] were rather unfriendly, but I never found them so. My husband was not a member of the Ethical, but my husband died of lung cancer, and several weeks before he did die, Mr. Hynd came out to the house -- he was home at that time. Mr. Hynd came out to see him this one afternoon and spent at least an hour or an hour and a half with us. He was very friendly. My husband had built our house -- he was not a builder, but it was really a very pretty house -- and Mr. Hynd said the house was a "monument to a man." It was a beautiful little old English house with a great big fireplace and beamed ceilings; I did the designing of the house, and Mr. Hynd immediately fell for the house because it reminded him of home.

(Interview with Hilda Dreifke, Oct. 28, 1986)

Hynd's wife, Anne, helped compensate for his reserve. An active member of the Women's Auxiliary, she was tireless in her tending of the Sheldon Memorial garden. When the Society sponsored a
Girl Scout troop in the thirties and forties, Anne Hynd taught the girls sewing, table-setting, and other domestic skills. Though often remembered as mousy, she touched many members of the Society. "Mrs. Hynd was very friendly with me," recalled Hilda Dreifke. "I remember . . . she brought a very beautiful handmade dress for my first grandchild; that was a nice thing for her to do." (Interview with Hilda Dreifke, Oct. 28, 1986) Member Robin Jones also was struck by Anne Hynd's thoughtfulness:

She came [to the hospital] when our first child was born, and I was quite ill. But I was glad to see her. She had on a beautiful hat -- of course, that was when women wore hats. But she always wore fancy hats with some kind of big ribbon on it or something. I was feeling very ill, and I said, "I'll close my eyes, but talk to me." So she stayed and she talked. I thought afterwards: "Anytime I go see someone in the hospital, I'm going to wear something bright and pretty." I've remembered that the rest of my life.

(Interview with Robin Jones, Sept. 24, 1986)

If the Hynds were less than affable by the standards of the American Midwest, it was not because of any innate coolness. Emsy Rubin was impressed by the couple's depth of affection:

He was rather austere, you know, and she was a very sweet person, and I would catch the loving looks they would give each other . . . . I'd catch some little glance that she'd give him or some little glance that he'd give her, and I knew they were a couple deeply in love with each other.

(Interview with Emsy Rubin, Sept. 30, 1986)

For their part, the Hynds perceived the Society as anything but unfriendly. After returning to Scotland in 1950, they corresponded with -- and welcomed visits from -- Society members until their deaths. In a letter to Clarence and Audrey Anderson written shortly after his wife's death, Hynd expressed both his love for Anne and his fond memories of the couple's years in St. Louis:

It was kind and thoughtful of you to write your nice letter to me, and so to send your gracious word of sympathy and concern; also to express your warm and affectionate regard for my dear Anne. Her sudden, unexpected, and untimely death, just a few years
from the beginning of our retirement, leaves me very sad and lonely and desolate. Her life had meant so much to me that now her death must mean that any adjustment is very difficult. Nothing, just nothing, can take the place of the living presence of the beloved. There is no final consolation for a deeply personal bereavement of this kind; and even though memories are very precious, they do not assuage one's grief. But I am truly grateful for the wonderful years we had together; and among the happiest are the years in St. Louis, when we were so greatly privileged to make so many friends -- your good selves among them -- friends who have written to us to express their condolences; such letters bring their own kind of sustaining grace, and I do appreciate every one of them. Thanks ever so much for your letter; and I want to thank you and the members of your family circle for all the kindness and friendship which you extended to Anne during her time in St. Louis; especially your sisterly friendship, Mrs. Anderson, in the fine fellowship of the Women's Auxiliary. Anne cherished your friendship greatly. [FOOTNOTE 1]

(Letter dated March 25, 1968)

Hynd deemed oratory his consuming obligation; managing volunteers was not his long suit. He took a profound interest in the administration of the Sunday School, and he consistently offered direction to lay organizers. When he ventured into committee work, however, he tended to exhibit an authoritarian concern for detail, and the Society's "movers and shakers" sometimes discouraged his involvement. His shortcomings as an organizer may be laid in part to a self-conscious wariness of spontaneity, but he came to view that role as a minor aspect of his vocation:

The Leader's relation to the groups is purely advisory . . . . When the need for a group seems to arise, the Leader may make suggestions and advise; he may not 'impose' a group upon the members. We have the Business and Professional Women's Group as an example; the need arose, and a spontaneous organization of the group was made. When some of our men-folk feel deeply enough that there should be a Men's Club in the Society, there will be a Men's Club in due time. It is not the Leader's place to organize a Men's Club. Towards the groups already well organized, the Leader enjoys a relationship of friendly interest. When his interest seems to move out of bounds it is interpreted as "interference." He keeps at a respectful distance from the "inner sanctum" of each group. Who would dare to try to run the Women's Auxiliaries, for instance?! This is as it should
be: and it is our hope that the group life of the Society will continue to have a spontaneous and healthy and fruitful growth.

As a matter of fact, the Leader has quite enough on his hands in the maintenance of the Sunday morning services -- and the many less conspicuous "pastoral duties" that are his to perform. Hints are heard betimes that Sunday, and Sunday morning services, and Sunday morning sermons, like history, are "a thing of the past"; but it seems to remain as a central feature of the St. Louis Ethical Society that the Sunday morning service hold a place of importance in the lives of our members and in the life of the community at large. The average standard of the Sunday morning service is very high -- in music, in readings, and in the addresses offered by a variety of speakers....

Returning this week from the East by train I read Sullivan's "Beethoven: His Spiritual Development." I read the following as having reference to a certain period in Beethoven's career: "Beethoven at this time greatly desired fame; His genius was to be exploited for his personal glory. He had not yet reached the position of seeing himself rather as a priest than as a king." The Leader of an Ethical Society must reach the position of "seeing himself rather as a priest than as a king," even as a musician must. The musician is a priest inasmuch as he mediates certain great experiences of the spirit -- the human spirit -- to mankind; he is the mediator; the priest, who stands between the great musical and spiritual experiences of the race and individual men and women and children.

The priest in religion professes to be the mediator between the gods and men -- bringing the blessing or the curse of the gods to men and women and children. The Leader of an Ethical Society is not a king -- lording it over men, seeking his own glory, imposing his will upon others -- he is more akin to the priest, since he stands before the people as their mediator -- the mediator between the great spiritual traditions of the human race, past and present, and the individuals who seek his services in the Sunday morning meetings, in other meetings, in the ceremonies of an ethical religion (as in the Marriage Service, the Naming Service, the Funeral and Memorial service, and so on), and in private consultation. The Leader speaks and serves in the name of something far greater than himself, more eternal than himself, -- the great tradition of ethics and religion; and if, as a kind of priest, he achieves greatness, he achieves it because it is written, "He who would be greatest among you let him be among you as one who serves."

(Report to Annual Meeting, May 22, 1946)
Hynd neatly fulfilled Adler's model of the Ethical leader as scholar-in-residence. His study on the second floor of Sheldon Memorial was Spartan; in winter, he kept the heat down low, and visitors found him wrapped in a woolen shawl as he perused his books. Like Sheldon and Chubb, he used his summers as academic sabbaticals; he passed the off-season in cooler climes -- often British Columbia -- catching up on his reading and preparing lectures for the coming season. Hynd limited his scholarly undertakings to public speaking; he edited some of his platform addresses for publication in pamphlet form, but he wrote only a few articles for direct publication in Ethical Culture journals. His interest in community affairs also was limited; he served for a time on the board of the Urban League, but he exhibited no fervor for social action.

Beyond his platform duties, he frequently spoke to outside organizations. His book reviews at public libraries were well-attended, and he often was called upon to lecture to educators and deliver commencement addresses at high schools and colleges. In addition to traveling the Ethical platform circuit, he spoke at Unitarian and free churches. For several years in the forties, he presented a ten-week series of lectures on world religions at the University College of Washington University; in the 1946-47 season, Society trustees personally underwrote tuition fees to permit Sunday School teachers to participate in the course. He also gave 15-minute radio talks on stations that provided free air time to religious organizations.

Hynd resigned in 1950 to return to his homeland. In addition to nostalgia, he was lured home by British social security benefits -- benefits he could not draw in the United States. After submitting his resignation, he acknowledged that he also had been dissatisfied with his compensation in St. Louis; he was paid less than $5,000 a year, plus a tax-exempt parsonage allowance and a skimpy retirement fund. The executive committee offered to negotiate a better package, but Hynd declined, saying he had resolved to live out his years in the British Isles. He was given a cordial send-off -- the community honored him at a dinner and made a gift of the few thousand dollars that had accrued in his endowment policy -- but few eyes were damp. In his 17 years as leader in St. Louis, Hynd had garnered much respect but little affection.

[FOOTNOTE 1: In a postscript to this letter, Hynd noted that prominent among Anne's belongings was a 1950 certificate proclaiming her a lifelong member of the Women's Auxiliary. "She prized the card very much indeed," he wrote. "Auxiliary members may wish to know this."]
Under Sheldon, the Ethical Society was more of a lecture club than a wholehearted religious community; its hallmarks were stimulating addresses, both public and private; study groups divided according to age, gender, and topic; and collective sponsorship of community service. Social gatherings were rare and somewhat forced. Chubb, with his extravagant festivals and his glorification of unity, deepened members’ sense of belonging. But while the Society’s social life blossomed after the move to Sheldon Memorial, it was as fragmentary as the intellectual pursuits of the earlier era. It was during Hynd’s tenure that Society members began to forge a community worthy of the name. Committees and lay leaders complemented Hynd’s scholarly preoccupation by attending more thoughtfully to the needs of members. Furthermore, the community, like a family that had been splintering into self-absorbed individuals, recognized the need to gather together — even if the effort seemed at first artificial and self-conscious — to facilitate undiscriminating bonding. The time had come to realize the unity Chubb had prophesied.

**Handshakes and Head Counts**

Membership in the Society took a dive in the 1930s. When J. Hutton Hynd took the leadership post in 1933, the Society had 411 members; by the end of the decade, that figure had dropped to 342. Ten to twenty people joined the Society each year, but new arrivals consistently were outnumbered by deaths, resignations, and drops. Of course, the Depression forced many Americans to cut back on charitable contributions and resign from organizations requiring dues, but the Society also suffered from its leader’s lukewarm commitment to expansion. Hynd did little to attract new membership. Though he treated visitors cordially, those who requested an on-the-spot synopsis of the Society’s philosophy were apt to be instructed to make an appointment through his secretary; he did not readily approach strangers, nor did he call on prospective members. Furthermore, Hynd lacked Chubb’s knack of inspiring loyalty to the community. And despite the pattern set by his predecessors, many Society members were dissatisfied with Hynd’s long sabbaticals (one of which he unexpectedly stretched to six months), during which he was unavailable for weddings, funerals, and consultation.
Lay members of the Society took it upon themselves to arrest the slide in membership by conscientiously reaching out to visitors and confreres alike. Ushers became deputies of the Membership Committee, answering queries and passing out Ethical Culture pamphlets and cards indicating interest in literature and membership information. In an effort to make young people feel more at home, the committee in the late thirties began asking members of the post-graduate groups and other young Society members to serve as ushers. It asked board members to be especially hospitable, but it sent letters to all members urging them to act as "publicity agents" for the Society. Mindful of the financial straits that prevailed during the Depression, the Membership Committee in 1933 instituted a kind of deferred-billing plan: Visitors who expressed an interest in the Society but were not in a position to make a pledge were granted membership privileges gratis "for a reasonable length of time" -- in practice, one or two years. To heighten the community's sense of welcome, dinners honoring new members were made biannual beginning in the 1937-38 season. The Membership Committee also enhanced solidarity by calling on seldom-seen members, keeping tabs on the special needs of members, and announcing births, weddings, and deaths.

The membership slide stopped about 1940, and by the middle of the decade, the head count had risen back to 400. The Membership Committee then undertook a series of aggressive promotional efforts aimed at adding one hundred members to the tally. The committee's first big push was a membership drive conducted in the 1940-41 season. Members were asked to bring prospective members to a kickoff dinner in January 1941; guests attending the event later were invited to attend intimate get-acquainted gatherings at members' homes. During the drive, representatives of the Membership Committee maintained an informational post in the vestibule of Sheldon Memorial.

In the ensuing years, the Membership Committee built up a list of prospects whose names had been turned in by members. In the 1941-42 season, the Publicity Committee began sending notices of platform meetings and other Society events to people on the list, then followed up by asking members who had submitted names whether the prospects actually had attended meetings. Mailings were stepped up in 1943, when hundreds of people on the list were asked to consider applying for membership; leader-in-training William Hammond conferred with those who expressed interest.

In 1947, the Membership Committee led a campaign to induce hangers-on to become members. Sunday School graduates and non-member parents of the school's students were tapped first. Invitations to membership again were sent to about 300 non-members on the mailing list, and a statement of the benefits of active membership was sent to all non-members who participated in Society subgroups. Neighborhood captains made phone calls and personal visits to those who did not reply to the mailings. The Platform Committee assisted in the drive by including a brief talk on membership in each platform service; the
positive image of the Society by emphasizing ethical values without offending listeners' religious sensibilities. The radio show spurred frequent inquiries and requests for transcripts, but it had no appreciable affect on platform attendance or Society membership. Judging by the station's mail, the show's most loyal listeners were Society members, indicating that it did little more than "preach to the saved." The show's limited effectiveness was by no means peculiar: The "religious ghetto" of Sunday morning radio never has been known for winning converts.
An Incisive Observer

In addition to raising the head count, the Society leadership sought to become more responsive to the needs and interests of Society members. In the 1935-36 season, an ad hoc Survey Committee distributed questionnaires seeking suggestions for improving the Society. A moderate number of questionnaires were returned, but with few suggestions. In the hope that a person-to-person appeal would be more fruitful, the Society in 1938 engaged Grace Gosselin, an auxiliary staffer of the New York Society, to canvass the membership and scrutinize the Society's administrative structure. Besides providing insight into members' hopes and disappointments, the survey was expected to help the board clarify the functions of the Society's committees, administrators, and paid employees. Society members donated the funds for the survey. Gosselin spent weeks in St. Louis studying reports; attending Society meetings; and interviewing members, trustees, committee chairmen, leaders of subgroups, and Sunday School administrators, as well as Hynd and Percival Chubb.

Gosselin, acting as a detached efficiency expert, presented the board with a challenging overview of the Society in February 1939. All her recommendations spurred thought and discussion; some spurred decisive changes. She made a number of suggestions for increasing membership, some of which were adopted in the drives outlined above. In addition, she recommended that detailed membership files be maintained, and that committees and subgroups make extensive use of this information to draw members into more active participation in the Society's administration and social life. As for managerial structure, Gosselin delineated the duties of the leader, the executive secretary, the Sunday School director, and even the janitor. Committees, she said, should be streamlined to minimize conflicts and duplication of effort; she recommended the unification of the Finance Committee with the Ways and Means Committee, and the merger of the Building, House, and Grounds committees. In addition, she counseled the board to give committees more pointed instructions; for instance, she suggested that the Publicity Committee be asked to compile a directory outlining the Society's purposes, structure, and activities. She strongly urged the creation of a central committee that would serve as a think tank for improving the Society's program and facilitating group interaction; such a committee, she said, might be a refinement of the dormant Organization Committee provided for in the Society's by-laws. She also advised the board to more effectively tap the potential of the subgroups for the overall welfare of the community. Noting that members of the Young People's Association had expressed willingness to organize a subsidiary group for teen-agers, she urged the board to encourage the plan. She also recommended that Y.P.A. members, who...
represented the core of the Society's future lay leaders, be consistently invited to serve on the board and Society committees.

In April 1939, the board held a dinner meeting at the Congress Hotel to take action on the report. The meeting resulted in a flurry of initiatives, including upgrading the maintenance of membership files and producing a Society directory. The board referred numerous recommendations to the appropriate committees and subgroups with its blessings, and it ordered each committee to contribute to a manual outlining the duties of committee chairs and members.

The most signal undertaking resulting from the survey was the inauguration of an all-Society steering committee called the Advisory and Planning Council. The council, which included the chairmen of the Society's subgroups and standing committees and up to four members of the Society at large, was charged with recommending changes in Society policies and activities. At least once a year, the council would present to the board a plan for coordinating groups and events to maximize their contribution to the Society. In the coming years, this idea factory was to spawn some of the Society's most beneficial programs; among the initiatives undertaken at the council's suggestion were the establishment of a Membership Participation Committee, which gathered information on members' interests and talents and distributed the information to committees and subgroups; the development of all-Society and small-group dinner programs; and the launching of a weekly reception for members and visitors.
Breaking Bread

In the thirties and forties, the Society experimented with a variety of social activities and succeeded in establishing customs that would foster fellow-feeling for years to come. In an effort to "revitalize" the Society, an ad hoc committee in the 1934-35 season developed a plan for weekly or bi-weekly Society dinners featuring talks, entertainment, and group discussions. Such meetings, the committee said in its proposal, would be "conducive to fellowship and the constructive pursuit of what we stand for as an Ethical Culture Society." After the membership approved the plan at the 1935 annual meeting, the board established a Program Committee to organize the meetings. These dinners, which sometimes included large-scale discussions of public affairs topics proposed by the AEU, were held irregularly in the thirties.

Under the sponsorship of the Women's Auxiliary and Junior Auxiliary, all-Society dinners were held monthly beginning in 1941. They grew into elegant affairs, each requiring days of work. Volunteers hauled food and utensils up the four flights of Sheldon Memorial to the Assembly Room, then hauled the refuse back down. Tables were covered with lace tablecloths, and food was served on fine china. Initially, the gatherings were called "Hostess Dinners": Auxiliary members divvied up the membership list and extended personal invitations, then served the diners at the tables to which they were assigned. After lapsing in the mid-forties, the dinners were revived under the more egalitarian -- but only modestly accurate -- title of "Host and Hostess Dinners." Eventually, they came to be known simply as "Fellowship Dinners."

A Fellowship Dinner Program Committee formed in the 1947-48 season made talks and group discussions a regular feature of the gatherings. As an illustration of the variety of topics covered in the dinner programs, the first dinner in the 1948-49 season featured three talks on United World Federalists, a movement formed in the wake of World War II aimed at establishing a global justice system; the event included discussion of pending AEU resolutions on the United Nations. The February 1949 dinner included a panel discussion on river conservation; participants included a naturalist, a proponent of a Missouri River Valley Authority, and a public utility representative. The March dinner included a talk by a mental health expert and discussion of a proposal that the Society institute a counseling service for its members. And the April dinner featured talks by Hynd and David S. Muzzey on the history and philosophy of the Ethical movement. In addition to talks on social issues, the dinners sometimes included music, slide shows, and film documentaries. These gatherings served as occasions to welcome leaders-in-training and leaders returning from sabbaticals; to honor servicemen who had fought overseas; to express gratitude to board members and committee chairs; to reunite Sunday School graduates; and to introduce new members. Most were arranged by the women's clubs, but the Men's Club -- in its brief incarnations -- clumsily conducted a few dinners.
Fellowship dinners continued to be held monthly -- except in months that featured more elaborate all-Society events, such as the bazaar and the Good Cheer celebration -- into the fifties and sixties.

As an experiment, the Society in 1947 also conducted neighborhood dinner parties in members' homes. Irene Chubb, first wife of R. Walston Chubb, initiated the program in the hope of facilitating more intimate interaction among members. Mrs. Chubb helped form the Fellowship Committee, members of which arranged social gatherings in their respective geographic districts. Chance compatibility made some of the dinners convivial affairs, but other groups found they had little more in common than a zip code. The program soon petered out, but was to be revived in later decades in more agreeable formations. In the meantime, affluent couples such as the Putzels, the Fischels, and the Lennertsons could be counted on to throw dinner parties in honor of visiting Ethical leaders; invitations to these exclusive affairs were prized.

In the 1930s, the Society's bazaar was complemented by a spring carnival called the County Fair, an event that recreated the milieu of its old-fashioned rural namesake. Society subgroups, under the direction of the Organization Committee, ran concessions and provided entertainment. The first County Fair was held in 1934. The event brought in only about $150, but its inestimable social value inspired the Society to organize similar events biennially until 1940. The later fairs, which were held on two or three consecutive days, raised several times as much money as the first. The fall bazaar, meanwhile, was expanded in 1941 as a means of increasing the Society's income: Sunday School alcoves served as booths for the sale of crafts, preserves, baked goods, and white elephants; on the Assembly Room stage, young people sold works of art; and the women's groups hosted sit-down meals.

The Sunday School's annual outing evolved into an all-Society affair in the thirties. From 1930-35, the outing consisted of a day on a Mississippi River excursion boat such as The City of St. Louis and the steamer St. Paul. In later years, the excursions were replaced with picnics held at public parks. Typical of church and school picnics, these gatherings consisted of basket lunches, sack races, softball games, and the like. For years, the picnics were sponsored by the PTA, members of which had garnered organizational experience through their assistance to the Sunday School. However, as more and more members without schoolchildren began to attend, the PTA asked that its responsibilities be shared more equitably. Consequently, an independent Picnic Committee was formed in 1949 to arrange the outings.

The Society also conducted square dances, card parties, and receptions to introduce exhibitions of members' photographs and artwork. The community sometimes sponsored outings to stage productions at the Opera Guild, the Little Theatre, and the Town Square Theatre; as the Society received a percentage of the theaters' gate for selling blocks of tickets, these events brought in modest funds. In more deliberate attempts to raise funds, the Society experimented with public entertainments. An Entertainment Committee formed in 1934 on a recommendation of the Ways and Means Committee organized public performances by
musicians, puppeteers, and storytellers. The events were sparse and, though sometimes well-attended, rarely netted proceeds commensurate with the work and overhead expenses invested in them.

Amid all the brainstorming and hand-wringing over the promotion of community, perhaps the most effective contribution to the cause was the establishment of a simple "coffee hour" after the platform service. While some members had been in the habit of remaining in the lobby to chat in small clusters, they rarely stayed long, and visitors were apt to be ignored in the rush toward the parking lot. The Advisory and Planning Council suggested in 1949 that serving coffee in the library would encourage members to mix and interact at some depth, and would give members and visitors alike a regular opportunity to make new acquaintances. The women's clubs, with the board's financial backing, hired a maid to prepare and serve coffee on the first few Sundays of the 1949-50 season. Members of the clubs and the Membership Committee made a point of greeting visitors and making introductions. With attendance ranging from fifty to seventy, the trial was deemed successful and the custom was crystallized. In no time, the simple reception became integral to the Ethical experience. It became a time to digest and debate the platform address in thoughtful company, a time for the young to mingle with the old, a time for visitors to catch the spirit of the community. Society members would even attend platform addresses they fully expected to be humdrum so as not to miss this opportunity to visit with their friends.

The Annual Meeting was the community's most focused occasion for taking stock of itself and airing disputes. Beginning in the 1933-34 season, the Society held its annual meeting in May; it was in that season that the Society began starting its fiscal year in May instead of October. The meeting traditionally was preceded by a supper in honor of new members. Especially active members religiously attended the meeting, but others were put off by the prospect of listening to tedious reports in an uncooled hall. To make the gathering more appealing, the board sometimes included motion picture showings and Sunday School plays in the program. Attendance in the Hynd era ranged from 91 to 185. The agenda included reports on the budget for the ending year and budget projections for the coming season; a report on membership growth or decline; reports on group activities; and talks by the board president and the leaders. Also, the membership elected trustees and voted on proposed by-law amendments and ethical resolutions. The meeting served as a time to take stock of progress toward stated goals and to introduce new long-range goals. Virtually each year, the board instructed group representatives to keep their reports brief. It was not above using gimmicks to make the reports palatable. At the 1945 meeting, group representatives held placards listing their accomplishments for the year; when all the reports were completed, the cards were reversed, revealing letters that spelled out "Ethical Society." In 1946 and 1948, group and committee reports were presented in abbreviated verse form; the full reports were simply filed for those who wished to peruse them. Beginning in the late forties, the marvel of mimeograph reproduction permitted the board to distribute copies of written reports, sparing everyone from having to listen to them in toto.
Hybrid Vigor

Paradoxically, the Society's many subgroups provided "hybrid vigor" that contributed mightily to the goal of unifying the community. As these social and study groups formed, expanded, split, and merged, Society members encountered each other in new and stimulating configurations. Accordingly, the board, in a 1940 policy statement, agreed that, while acknowledging the platform service as the Society's central activity, it would give all possible encouragement to the activities of the subgroups. For candor's sake, the statement should have included the caveat "within budgetary constraints."

The Organization Committee, which had galvanized group activities and coordinated meeting schedules, fell dormant in the late thirties; some of its duties were assumed by the Advisory and Planning Council -- an all-Society oversight committee -- and the Membership Participation Committee. Even still, group and committee leaders felt the need for an all-purpose organizer to whom they could turn for consultation and administrative assistance. Because Hynd had little time -- or talent -- to take on that role, the Advisory and Planning Council in 1945 recommended the Society hire a part-time director of group activities. The board president appointed a committee to investigate the proposal, but no director was hired. In 1948, the council again recommended that funds be budgeted for an organizational assistant; this time, it urged the hiring of a full-time aide to coordinate social and educational activities, develop a youth program, and provide various membership services. The board tabled action on the recommendation, but the council renewed the proposal in 1950; at that time, the suggestion was one of a number of proposals for use of the 75th Anniversary Fund to be raised in 1951. Again, the board declined to act. In this administrative vacuum, the position of program director unofficially was filled by the Society's executive secretary, Meredith McCargo; though a notoriously poor typist, this dedicated -- and pitifully paid -- worker was cherished by generations of Society members for coordinating the social calendar and cheerfully attending to a myriad of administrative details.

In limited ways, the board kept its promise to promote group life. It mailed a statement of the groups' purposes and activities to all new members of the Society with a note of encouragement to take part. The annual meeting often was dominated by group reports; at several of these meetings, charts clarifying the activities and interrelation of the Society's groups were presented to the membership. The board also offered the groups funds, space, and direction on a case-by-case basis. But because it never provided a central program director, the viability or collapse of the Society's groups depended almost entirely on the initiative of group members.
The Women’s Auxiliary underwent a schism in the early thirties. While the original group continued to meet regularly in one of the back rooms of Sheldon Memorial, Irene Kundermann and Edith Enzinger fused a bevy of younger women into a parallel group that met in the Assembly Room. The Junior Auxiliary, beyond chatting about matters more pertinent to its generation, provided distinct services to the Society; notably, it sponsored the spring card party, a popular and modestly profitable annual event. The sororities periodically came together for luncheons, poetry readings, and music recitals. While both groups made baked, sewn and handcrafted goods for fund-raising sales and distribution to the poor, the Junior Auxiliary specialized in group quilting. Both clubs donated funds and supplies to the Society, and they always joined forces to put on bazaars and community dinners. Over time, both groups shrank: Members of the parent group grew feeble and began dying off, and members of the offshoot slipped away as they took on more familial and career obligations. Consequently, the groups remerged -- again under the name Women’s Auxiliary -- in 1949. Yet another sorority formed in 1943: The Business Women’s Group, which was composed primarily of secretaries and teachers, held evening get-togethers at members’ homes well into the fifties.

The Men’s Club organized in the late twenties held together into the mid-thirties. Its monthly dinner meetings featured talks by club members, Society leaders Hynd and Percival Chubb, and guest speakers. Through the depths of the Depression, these lecture-discussions focused on politics and social problems. At a 1935 meeting, for instance, J.A. Wolf, executive director of the Neighborhood Association, gave an address "concerning the lives, habits, poverty & misfortunes, of the many poor people living in the so-called Slum Districts of our City . . . . Mr. Wolf went to some length in describing the destitution & misery of a large number of these people -- emphasizing the fact that many negroes are in an unbelievably sad, sad state of want, half-starvation & misery." (Minutes of Men’s Club meeting held Nov. 14, 1935)

Unlike the women’s groups, this club never performed social services. Several members tried to mobilize support for civic development, but despite the persistent encouragement of Percival Chubb, all such efforts came to naught. At a meeting in 1934, for example, Hermann Schwarz pleaded with the men to help him lobby the Board of Aldermen for the erection of a planetarium and museum of natural history. Initially, the club elected to form a lobbying committee to take up the cause. However, R. Walston Chubb, who had a formidable talent for swaying opinion, reversed the vote by arguing that "in these days of broad social interests, most worthwhile people had some special interest in cultural or social development work, and that the club as a whole should not be bound to any one special project." (Minutes of Men’s Club meeting, April 10, 1934)

The chairmanship of the club changed hands almost yearly, and none of the leaders attempted to formalize the organization -- which was just fine with the members.
Several years after this manifestation of the Men's Club went the way of its predecessors, a group of Society men began gathering for occasional luncheons. Beginning in the forties, this group of about thirty men assembled five or six times a year at the call of its long-standing chairman, R. Walston Chubb. Because the largest plurality of its members worked downtown, the fraternity met at restaurants in downtown hotels. When visiting Ethical leaders and other affable out-of-town platform speakers accepted the group's invitation, it met on the Monday after the address to accommodate the guest's itinerary. The men gathered simply to socialize; they followed no fixed agenda and broached no service or fund-raising projects. The "Downtown Club," as it came to be known, perdured into the mid-sixties, by which time the dispersion of business sites throughout the metropolitan area made weekday luncheons unfeasible.

The Young People's Association underwent growing pains in the thirties. The Society's most active social group, the Y.P.A. conducted countless dances, wilderness excursions, and sporting events. Occasionally, it presented plays at Society functions and public fund-raisers. The group also sponsored study groups on philosophy, comparative religion, and current issues; Society members opened their homes to the association for dinners and wide-ranging discussions with visiting Ethical leaders. The group's warmth and vivacity ensnared many young people who visited the Society experimentally. "I just felt at home there right away," recalled Robin Jones, who went on to become a member -- and later president -- of the Society. (Interview with Robin Jones, Sept. 24, 1986) Ruth Anderson described the group as a dynamic amalgam of personalities:

We had a terrific Y.P.A. -- really active and strong and creative. That's where I met [my husband,] Ted. We went out almost every Sunday after [platform services] and played soccer. We had a Halloween party to end all Halloween parties, and a winter dance with cotton "snow" hanging from the ceiling, and a "Gay Nineties" party. We weren't always too popular with the Ethical. The old custodian, I think, hated us; he thought we were ruining the building, which we probably were.

It's hard to look at us now and think we were a wild bunch. We were iconoclasts; we were individualists; we were people who had broken away from something; we all had minds of our own. We were very creative. So you put that bunch together, and you've got fireworks.

(Interview with Ted and Ruth Anderson, Sept. 15, 1986)
Ironically, the association's strong appeal became its undoing. Although originally composed of Society members in their teens and twenties, the congenial group had no fixed ceiling. Longtime members were disinclined to step aside. "People just kind of hung on," recalled Harold Hanke. "It got to be unwieldy." (Interview with Harold and Jane Hanke, Sept. 22, 1986) Furthermore, the Y.P.A. was the only group in the Society that consistently sponsored outings, and older Society members could not resist taking part. By the late thirties, "Young People's Association" had become a misnomer; Ted Anderson half-facetiously estimated members ranged in age "from 8 to 80 -- something like that." (Interview with Ted and Ruth Anderson, Sept. 15, 1986) As the club's age span stretched into early dotage, differences in interests - - and efforts to accommodate all of them -- diluted the association's vitality. In 1940, Hanke, the Y.P.A. liaison, informed the board that the association had disbanded. At the board's request, Hanke revived the group, but it failed to regain its former health. After it dissolved yet again in 1942, the board, on the advice of the Advisory and Planning Council, offered to pay a recreational aide a per diem wage to develop appealing activities. The group reorganized under the direction of Hanke and Ted Anderson, but it declined the board's offer.

In the mid-forties, the Y.P.A. acted on the lessons of its past. To avoid intergenerational conflicts, it split into two groups. The Junior Division, which included teen-agers and single Society members in their twenties, reinstated strenuous activities and youth-oriented outings. It acquired sole use of a room at Sheldon Memorial -- a privilege hitherto reserved for the Toy Shop -- which it furnished and decorated to provide a homely atmosphere for get-togethers. Taking on the character of a typical youth group, it conducted carnivals and other fund-raisers to finance excursions and participation in young people's conferences. The Junior Y.P.A., under various names, was to repeatedly lapse -- usually because of weak leadership and its members' departures for college -- only to be revived with fresh batches of youngsters. Meanwhile, the open-ended Senior Division, whose members described themselves as "the older young," organized more sedate gatherings than its counterpart. As more and more of the group's members married and began raising families, the "Senior Y.P.A.," as such, dissolved, but its members maintained close bonds. Beginning in 1948, married Society members and friends began banding together in "couples clubs" which met at members' homes for dinners, games, and lecture-discussions.

After the dissolution of the Child Study Group in the late twenties, L.D. "Mac" McIntyre started the Parents' Child-Guidance Group. By meeting in the library on Sunday mornings -- after the start of the Sunday School and before the platform service -- this group, unlike its predecessor, drew an equal number of men and women. Over time, the group broadened its scope of topics; while child-rearing remained a staple in its agenda, the group now tackled everything from utility rates to political scandals and women's
rights. Reflecting this change, Ted Anderson renamed the club the Adult Discussion Group when he assumed leadership in the forties. As in the International Relations Group, debates were fueled by visiting speakers. During the Society's summer recess, the group conducted Sunday meetings in public parks. Because its sessions were consistently rousing, the group drew -- and held -- a number of new Society members. More ephemeral discussion groups, with different meeting times and more narrowly defined agendas, sprung up from time to time; one such group met bi-weekly in the thirties to hear and discuss classical music.

The Society's reading circles suffered sad fates. The Contemporary Literature Circle, which had thrived in the teens and twenties, waned in the thirties. In its later incarnations, the group lacked an erudite, determined leader who could guide both reading and discussions. Hynd frequently reviewed books from the platform, but he did not assume Chubb's role in assisting the reading group. As visits from provocative Ethical leaders grew less frequent, the group gathered only sporadically; it finally dissolved in the early forties. Beginning in the 1947-48 season, the Society made several attempts to sustain a Great Books discussion group. These groups, and philosophy groups conducted on the same pattern, similarly dissipated for lack of direction and discipline. Too often, participants failed to keep up with assigned readings, and discussions tended to deteriorate into irrelevant polemics.

The International Relations Group was revivified by a few astute changes. In the thirties, the group continued to meet periodically to hear timely talks and take part in discussions under the direction of founder Paula Wilhelmi Moody. Members stayed abreast of political and economic developments through news reports, and Ethical leaders, foreign-born professionals, and political observers presented their perspectives on the pressing issues of the day. As the members -- many of whom had joined via the Y.P.A. of the twenties -- aged, they elected to move their meeting time from Sunday evenings to weekday mornings. The time change had the unfortunate effect of limiting male participation to retirees, but it dovetailed with the schedules of the Society's women members: At the urging of Elsie Langsdorf, the group met monthly simultaneously with gatherings of the Women's Auxiliary and the Junior Auxiliary, effectively inducting all the members of those groups into its ranks. Langsdorf eventually took over the group, and in the aftermath of World War II she focused its attention on the United Nations -- "the chief force that is holding the world together." (minutes of U.N. Discussion Group, October 1948)

The U.N. Discussion Group, now a subsidiary of the Women's Auxiliary, studied the composition, deliberations, and interventions of the United Nations. U.N. proposals and declarations spurred spirited debates on the ethics of war, revolution, trade barriers, population growth, and nuclear armament. In addition, members presented reviews of books on world affairs. Support for the establishment of a world
government ran high in the group, but the women were optimistic about the circumscribed efficacy of the United Nations. The auxiliary was part of the National Women's Conference of the AEU, an accredited advisory agency of the United Nations Organization. Because the AEU association sent representatives to special meetings of the U.N. Assembly, the St. Louis group maintained two-way communication with the United Nations: UNO publications were augmented by insider reports, and the women often drafted resolutions on United Nations issues for presentation to the membership and AEU assemblies. Group membership ranged from 30 to 60.

The Toy Shop met with a most ignominious demise. As volunteers grew scarce, the Misses Wangelin -- Josie, Hattie, and Emma -- dutifully carried on their work almost solely by themselves. With so few hands at work, production had declined from roughly a thousand toys a year in the teens to a few boxloads in the forties. Because the Society's unhallowed groups had to endure cramped conditions and scheduling conflicts, sentiment arose that the Toy Shop room ought no longer be consecrated to the quaint hobby of a few kindly old women. In particular, the Sunday School was in dire need of space for a nursery, and its administrators pressed for that room. The problem was, the sisters had exclusively occupied the room for as long as anyone could remember, and no one was eager to ask these pious volunteers to gather up their glue pots and make way for the diaper brigade -- a directive comparable to telling nuns that their chapel henceforth would be used as a water closet. To the knowledge of posterity, no one claimed credit -- or blame -- for the exploit, but the deed was indeed done: The room would principally house the Toy Shop until 1960, but on Sundays it was the province of the babies.

Boy Scout Troop 21, led by scoutmasters Herbert Morisse Sr. and Joe J. Grant, held strong into the mid-thirties. In 1930, in addition to hiking and camping, the troop of about 30 boys manned a float ("International Scout Brotherhood") in the city's Armistice Day parade and presented an exhibit at the AEU assembly. The boys, many of whom attended the Junior Sunday Assembly, enjoyed showing off their outdoor skills in Sunday School assemblies. Attendance at meetings and outings fell off after the middle of the decade, and the troop disbanded about 1938.

The troop's distaff counterpart was launched about the time the boys hit their skid; in fact, the funds remaining in the Boy Scout troop's account were turned over to the nascent Girl Scout troop. Society members Hilda Dreifke and Lola Niederhoff started the girls' troop in 1934. Unlike the Camp Fire Girls troop of the twenties, the Girl Scout troop was composed primarily of neighborhood residents; only a handful of the roughly twenty-five girls in the group were children of Society members. Many of these girls were too poor to afford uniforms; with Dreifke's intercession, Society members helped cover those costs. Members helped in other ways, as well: Anne Hynd taught the girls home economics, and Hermann
Schwarz shared with them his knowledge of nature. And, because the girls could not afford to attend the official scout camp, Society members who owned wilderness retreats allowed the troop to use them for weekend trips. "That was a big help for those youngsters -- to get away," Dreifke said. "Some of them had never seen a live chicken or cow before." (Interview with Hilda Dreifke, Oct. 28, 1986) The original troop met at Sheldon Memorial on weekday afternoons. In the 1938-39 season, Society member Virginia Schrader added a Brownie Troop, which met on Sunday mornings during platform meetings. Because most of the girls walked home from the meetings, Dreifke decided to disband the troop in the early forties, by which time the immediate neighborhood had turned menacing.
BAPTIZED IN THE GOOD LIFE
The Sunday School under Hynd

Hynd's tireless advocacy of pure religious values carried over from the platform to the Junior Sunday Assembly. Next to oratory, Hynd gave the greatest share of his attention to the JSA: Bearing the title of school president, he took part in curriculum planning, student evaluations, the hiring of directors, the selection of teachers, and the fixing of salaries and honoraria. By tradition, his primary role was to set the intellectual and spiritual tone of the school; he persistently infused his exaltation of "the Good Life" into the pedagogy:

In religious education of the more liberal sort, the child is introduced to the more universal tradition of religion. We may tell what was believed, what is believed, by this and that religion; but the main objective lies in the effort to expose the child to the spirit of religion common to all religions -- the spirit of questing for the Good, the spirit of reverence for the Good, the spirit of devotion to the Good.

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And it may be that our children, as they are baptized in the spirit of man's search for the Good Life, will be inspired to unite with all men and women of good will in the right use of science and of art, and of all knowledge, to the greater glory of mankind. This should be the great objective in religious education.

(J. Hutton Hynd, "Objectives in Religious Education: A Panel Discussion," Religious Education, March-April, 1945; Volume XL, Number 2; p. 99)

The JSA, Hynd said, taught "the three R's in religious education, Reason, Reverence, and Responsibility." ("The Ethical Society of St. Louis," undated radio address broadcast over station WIL.) Among the Society's adults, however, Responsibility for the Sunday School was a hot potato. Throughout much of Hynd's tenure, continuity in administration of the JSA was provided by longtime board member Jennie Wahlert. Cecelia Boette, who directed the school in the teens and twenties, had stepped down before...
Hynd's arrival. During the succession of directors in the following decades, Wahlert maintained the school's harmony and educational caliber.

Wahlert, a progressive teacher and school administrator, earned a national reputation for her work in early childhood education. A descendant of five generations of educators, she began her career teaching at the elementary level in the St. Louis Public Schools. In 1934, she began serving as principal of Jackson Elementary School on the city's North Side, and in 1948 became professor of education at Harris Teachers' College. After her "retirement" in 1953, she directed Washington University's nursery school and taught early childhood education at the institution's University College. She was an enthusiastic delegate -- by gubernatorial appointment -- to the 1951 Mid-Century White House Conference on Children and Youth, a weeklong colloquium of educators and youth leaders held in Washington, D.C., on Truman's initiative. A stalwart in the racial integration of the public school system, Wahlert was honored in 1965 by the St. Louis Association of Colored Women's Clubs for "excellent work in the field of human relations." She founded the Missouri chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma, an educational sorority, and was the founding president of the Association for Childhood Education International. "You were amazed at how many things she could have her fingers in and still do a good job," Emsy Rubin said of Wahlert. "Anything she undertook, she did well -- woman of all seasons, woman of all times." (Interview with Emsy Rubin, Sept. 30, 1986) Wahlert was warmly regarded for her patience and kindness in assisting troubled children (acquaintances frequently recalled the solicitous interest she expressed in a young would-be purse snatcher she once warded off). An earthy, vivacious woman, she counterbalanced Hynd's rather stilted style. She humored his fussiness in organizing festivals and pushing for formal teacher training; her forte was attending directly to the changing needs of directors, teachers, and students. Ordinarily, Wahlert worked behind the scenes, chairing numerous incarnations of the JSA Committee, advising and encouraging directors, building up a stable management structure, and representing the board's concerns at staff meetings; except when she briefly filled in as director, she was not involved in the Sunday morning nitty-gritty.

Boette's immediate successor in the directorship was Hermann Schwarz, a stern Prussian man who had taught in the school for years. [FOOTNOTE 1] In contrast to the deferential Miss Boette, Schwarz was a stickler for order and proper deportment; exactly at starting time, he shut the door to the Assembly Room, requiring latecomers to enter in shame. He eschewed the revered Sheldon textbooks, but he revived the Victorian righteousness that characterized them. Using the press he employed in his printing firm, he churned out cards carrying philosophical quotes and edifying moral dictums to be memorized by the pupils -- for example, "Know the Right, Love the Right, Do the Right." Schwarz resigned as director in 1934. Reflecting the board's predilection for professional educators, the position was assumed, in quick
succession, by Richard Jente, an instructor at Washington University; Julian C. Aldrich, an administrator in the University City schools; and Alfred Daniel "Buck" Buchmueller, a graduate of Eden Seminary employed in social work and educational research. During breaks in the directorship, Hynd -- with coaching from Wahlert -- took on the role.

Ideas in Search of Doers

Ideas for improving the school abounded, but the frequent turnover of directors impeded the board's efforts to implement them. In an effort to secure a long-term director, an ad hoc committee formed in 1938 urged the board to establish an honorarium. The board had balked at the recommendation since Boette's retirement, mainly because of budgetary constraints, [FOOTNOTE 2] but partly because it was feared that a director attracted by payment would be less dedicated than a volunteer. However, given that the few hundred dollars suggested by the committee was even less than the Society had paid Boette, the board agreed to set aside the funds.

In her 1939 report on a survey of the Society's needs, New York adviser Grace Gosselin also suggested a handful of administrative and programmatic changes in the school. She recommended that Hynd relinquish the presidency of the school and turn over principal authority to the school director. The director, she wrote, should have "complete liberty to plan the work," hiring and supervising both paid and volunteer staff members. As the PTA provided support but not direction, Gosselin recommended the establishment of a standing JSA Committee that would guide teachers and administrators in program development. "It would be logical," she wrote, to choose the president of the JSA from such a committee rather than placing the Society leader in that role. Gosselin believed that the school director should rely primarily on a JSA Committee, deferring to the Society leader only in matters of general philosophy; such a system, she said, would make the school more responsive to the parents of pupils. The board acknowledged the wisdom of her suggestion, but continued to rely on Hynd because he was eminently reliable, while few trustees and Society members were eager to maintain a committee that would take on his duties. Gosselin also recommended developing more engaging extracurricular activities; improving the quality of the school's song collection and music program; building up the school library; and giving the children more responsibility for planning activities and decorating meeting areas. (Survey report delivered to board Feb. 10, 1939, by Grace H. Gosselin) These suggestions were passed along to the school staff, which gradually executed them. Julian C. Aldrich, during his brief tenure, spawned still more plans for school
improvements. He wanted to add to the staff a teachers’ assistant; a music director who could bring originality and verve to the school’s increasingly drab assemblies; and an activities director who could organize outings, recreation, and crafts instruction during the second half of the morning program, thus giving purpose to a period that amounted to little more than baby sitting. At Wahlert’s urging, the board agreed to support these staff enhancements. The school secretary was immediately dubbed teachers’ aide (a semantic promotion, at best), but the additional personnel were slow in coming.

In 1940, the Advisory and Planning Council recommended the formation of a “Senior Sunday Assembly” -- a division that would add three years to the Sunday School program. Under the proposal, students still would graduate from the Junior Sunday Assembly, but they then would advance to the senior group. Graduation from the junior group would be subdued, and held in the Assembly Room; graduation from the senior group would be a more elaborate affair in the auditorium. The council recommended that the two divisions be led by the same director but be conducted in separate parts of the building. The board favored the plan and asked Hynd to oversee development of an expanded staff and curriculum. In April 1940, the board held a special meeting at the Congress Hotel to discuss the expansion plans. Walston Chubb insisted that advanced classes could be conducted only if the school could acquire college-educated teachers with special training in ethics. Accordingly, the board appointed Hynd, Henry Putzel, and pre-school director Mildred Smith to institute an exacting training program for teachers and group leaders. At the same time, Hynd, Smith, and Buchmueller set about drafting the advanced curriculum. In September 1940, Hynd reported that he had outlined a course for the Senior Sunday Assembly, and had consulted Willis H. Reals, dean of Washington University’s continuing education program, on the formation of a training course for teachers. In the ensuing seasons, Hynd did organize advanced classes for JSA graduates, but the dream of a “Senior Sunday Assembly” never was fully realized; the volunteers who conducted the extension simply failed to hold the attention of jaded older teen-agers.

In the tradition of the Eso-Pograds, JSA graduates did continue to form post-graduate study and discussion groups. These groups endured for varying lengths of time, lasting only until the adolescent desire to break free overrode the desire to continue associating with classmates; their success depended largely on the charisma of volunteer leaders. In the thirties, some of these groups progressed so steadily that their philosophical investigations took them beyond the ken of fresh graduates; at Hynd’s urging, a Society volunteer in 1935 organized a club for the younger graduates which met monthly on Sunday evenings. Another post-graduate group, complete with president and secretary, was organized in the 1939-40 season by Carl Morisse. In the early forties, two "junior discussion groups" -- divided by age -- met weekly under the overall direction of Arthur Schwarz, a leader of the Young People’s Association; Society members
representing a variety of professions, avocations, and social causes spoke to the groups and led informal discussions on Sunday mornings. Though often stimulating, none of these formations attained the continuity of the post-graduate group run entirely by Walston Chubb in the twenties and early thirties. The Y.P.A., with its consistent blend of social events and intellectual undertakings, commanded far more loyalty, but its youngest members generally were several years out of high school.

In an effort to encourage participation in post-graduate groups, Hynd moved Recognition Day to midseason starting in the 1935-36 season. He reasoned that graduates would be more inclined to maintain an affiliation with the program if there were no summer break between JSA graduation and entrance into a post-graduate group. The change in graduation timing required other classes to advance in January, forcing new students to enter courses in midstream. Consequently, Recognition Day was moved back to the end of the season in the 1942-43 season.

Seeking "the Good" in the Arts

The tradition of holding thematic assemblies continued into the Hynd era, with a distinct leaning toward the arts. In addition to building on such themes as Scouts Sunday, Peace Sunday, and "Kindness to Animals" Sunday, the JSA held assemblies honoring outstanding poets, composers, and painters. All-school assemblies often were marked by special music, sprightly folk dances, and lighthearted plays. The breadth of the children's dramatic undertakings varied with the talents and ambitiousness of volunteers. In the thirties, Society members Emsy Rubin and Emily Marner staged and choreographed elaborate operettas based on such tales as "Jack and the Beanstalk" and "The Pied Piper of Hamelin." [FOOTNOTE 3] In the forties, plays and oral presentations of all sorts became an integral part of the school program.

The JSA piped up in the 1940-41 season with the enlistment of music director Carl Werner, who was hired as platform organist midway through the season. Society organists had customarily performed at student assemblies, but Werner was especially committed to the school, and he inspired a burst of musical enthusiasm. In addition to performing on piano and organ, Werner, using song books published by the AEU and Unitarian liturgical committees, led the children in what Smith termed "lusty singing." In addition, he arranged for fine recitals at school assemblies. Keeping within a tight budget, he often brought in students from the Community Music School, a forerunner of the St. Louis Conservatory and Schools for the Arts (CASA). When talent allowed, he also directed a small instrumental group composed of JSA students. Teaching that "music begins where speech leaves off," Werner broadened the students' aesthetic exposure and considerably raised the tenor of school assemblies.
In the mid-forties, Werner brought the school another boon -- his bride, Lorna, who served as drama director. Carl, a director of high school orchestras, and Lorna, a speech pathologist, met while working for the Webster Groves school district. When the couple were dating, Lorna regularly accompanied Carl on his Saturday evening rehearsals with Hynd at Sheldon Memorial; only after Hynd was satisfied with the preparations could the couple go dancing or take in a movie. Upon joining the Sunday School staff, Lorna Werner set about organizing taut assemblies which would "encourage promptness, add dignity and discipline to the assembling each Sunday morning, and provide inspiration for the class period which follows." ("A Challenge for Religious Education," address broadcast Sept. 9, 1951, over radio station KWK.) A dynamic, animated woman, she boldly conscripted parents and teachers to assist in producing cyclic pageants -- such as the Thanksgiving, Winter, and Spring festivals. She also directed a variety of plays and oral presentations, coaching the children in voice projection, diction, acting, and theatrical production. During her term of service, it became customary for classes to regularly present artistic interpretations of their studies. Like Percival Chubb, Werner believed that dramatics deepened the impact of classroom studies:

[T]he festival is seen as an opportunity to highlight a portion of the year's work by reviewing and placing in a form for oral presentation a play, a story to be read or told aloud, a choral speaking arrangement, etc. By this means a lively summation of the work will be accomplished, other classes will have an opportunity to share what has been gained by one group or groups, the children's creative abilities will be stimulated, and important personal growth will have taken place. Evidences of this personal growth will be observed as the child begins to overcome his inhibiting audience fears, he gains a more natural stage presence, [and] he improves in voice and diction as a result of efforts to communicate before a larger audience than his usual conversational group or class. Also, such important ethical by-products as the cooperation necessary for working together toward a common goal, development of leadership and self-discipline will be observed during the process of preparation for the festival. Strangely enough, as our own Percival Chubb said in his book, "Festivals and Plays," written long before progressive education came into practice, "the ultimate finished presentation constitutes the smallest part of the value derived from festival work." (Ibid.)
Though endeared for what she gave the school, Werner received in kind. "My growth as an aesthetic person was immense through my work with the Sunday School," she recalled. "I've done some writing since, but that was my first taste of creative writing, in working with the festivals at the Sunday School." (Remarks from platform, May 25, 1980) The Werners served the JSA until 1955, when they moved to Florida to take jobs in the Sarasota school system.

"Living Together": A Unified Curriculum

Florence Grant Armstrong, who succeeded Buchmueller as director in 1941, carried out some of the other plans that had been wafting about. Armstrong was a strong-minded woman who acquired her leadership acumen while directing the women's athletic department at Washington University. Her son William recalled that she "went about her chores with the spirit of the song we sang in Sunday School, 'If you have a task to do, do it, do it with a will.' (Letter from William Grant Armstrong to James F. Hornback, dated Jan. 12, 1978) The founder and longtime president of Poetry Center, a writers' circle that presented interpretive "poetry concerts" to the public, she shared the Werners' zeal for creative expression. Armstrong's first stint as director was brief; in 1943, she took a hiatus to travel. She was replaced by leader-in-training William Hammond for two seasons, and Wahlert and teacher Dewey Schill each filled in for a season. At the start of the 1947-48 season, Armstrong agreed to take on a four-year term as director, provided she be given a "free hand."

Armstrong delegated administration of the pre-school group -- formally called the Primary Department -- entirely to Mildred Smith, a vital, nurturing women who engaged the children with stories, songs, art projects, and play activities. The group occupied rooms at the rear of Sheldon Memorial, spilling into the garden in the warmer months; the children had access to equipment for indoor and outdoor play. Smith called the group a "social laboratory" in which toys were used for experimentation and self-discovery. It taught fundamental ethical values such as courtesy and group decision-making. The older children in the department -- 4- and 5-year-olds -- were taught stories about everyday childhood experiences, such as making new friends or feeling afraid of the dark. The children's own accounts of personal conflicts furnished material for the teachers' explication of ethical concepts.

For the older children, Armstrong helped develop a curriculum that would remain in use for more than a decade. The curriculum she inherited -- a piecemeal refinement of that designed by Boette and Percival Chubb -- had been developed for an undivided ten-year program for 6- to 16-year-olds. The first grade studied fundamental moral attitudes as depicted in fables and legends; the second grade undertook
contemporary children's literature termed "Here and Now Stories"; the third and fourth grades delved into Old Testament and New Testament stories, respectively; the fifth grade examined the lives of exemplary men and women; the sixth grade studied civics, with an emphasis on the local community; the seventh grade learned to appreciate the natural world and humanity's obligation to protect it; the eighth grade explored foreign cultures; the ninth grade discussed "Ethics in Everyday Life"; and the graduating class examined world religions in a course that culminated with a study of the Ethical movement. In her second stint as director, Armstrong, working closely with Smith, updated the curriculum under the unifying theme of "Living Together." The 6-year-olds now focused on living together in the home. They studied family responsibilities, ways of making the home a pleasant environment, the meaning of family ties, and other values arising in the home. Included in this course was an introduction to the art of conversation:

Each Sunday they serve "tea" (actually chocolate drink) and make small talk. That is, the child must learn to converse. No one child may dominate the conversation, but must listen in turn to his neighbor -- [a lesson] which many grown-ups have never learned. You recognize the beginning of the psycho-social growth, this trying to reach out into the larger world, gradually leaving behind the ego-centered baby, in the new-found enjoyment of the fine game of mind meeting mind.


The class for 7-year-olds broadened out to living together in the community. These students studied public protection and health; the provision of food, shelter, and clothing; and each citizen's role in serving the community. Moving on to the concept of living together in the world, 8-year-olds studied cultural variety, examining the ways in which the customs of foreign cultures evolve to meet the same needs addressed by Western customs. The 9-year-old class studied the lives of influential historical figures in a course titled "Patterns for Living Together." Under Armstrong, these first four grades beyond the Primary level were loosely segregated as the Intermediate Department. On the first Sunday of each month, this department gathered for an exclusive assembly in which the children were told an "Ever-Ever Story" -- a story that illustrated a perennially applicable ethical principle; among the staples were "The Blind Men and the Elephant" and "The Man, the Boy, and The Donkey." Group discussions were held on the contemporary significance of the stories. At the department's next exclusive assembly, one of the classes in the division would present a creative dramatization of the story.
The Senior Department, which included children 10 through 14, undertook the "History of Living Together." The 10-year-olds studied social customs of peoples ranging from primitive nomadic tribes through the Egyptian, Greek, and Roman civilizations. As a prelude to Bible studies, 11-year-olds examined the Palestinians and Semites of the Biblical era from a practical perspective, focusing on agriculture, slavery, wars, and laws governing safety and labor. The 12-year-olds approached the Bible as an ancient library, studying how and when the books were written and evaluating the ethical content of each. The 13-year-olds took up the study of the Bible as literature; they learned to appreciate its beauty and cadence, with an emphasis on the role of song and verse in uniting a people. Numerous auxiliary books were used in these courses; the Bible was made central because its ethical precepts are integral to the value system of the contemporary Western world. The final group in the Senior Department studied world religious thought from primitive superstitions on up to contemporary religious beliefs and practices. This course included visits from sectarian religious leaders and field trips to churches and synagogues. Gene Speckert, who studied this course under Hynd just before graduating in 1938, recalled with gratitude how it helped her grasp the universal principles of religion. "I was more knowledgeable in comparative religions than my contemporaries at that time," she said. "I can remember going to college with ministers' children, and I... found what I had learned in Sunday School was a help to me. In some ways, I'd learned things that these folks didn't learn." (Interview with Gene Speckert, Sept. 29, 1986) At the Senior Department's monthly assembly, teachers presented a signal Bible story; classes later presented these stories in the form of playlets.

Another of Armstrong's lasting contributions was the methodical development of extracurricular activities. The Sunday School proper -- including assemblies and classes -- was conducted from 9:30 to 10:50 a.m. For years, a play group for children who did not attend platform services had been held from 10:50 to 12:30, but bored, restive older children had become a bane to school directors, not to mention platform attendants disturbed by the noise that bled through the Assembly Room floor. Armstrong solved the problem by soliciting additional volunteers -- and, when necessary, hiring outside help -- to lead the children in artistic pastimes such as dramatics, painting, crafts, puppetry, and photography; such groups as the Punch 'n' Judy Puppet Club and the Printing Shop Club met regularly during this time slot. The Society, the JSA, and the Parents Discussion Group split the costs of paid helpers, thus rounding out the staff enhancements envisaged for years. Student fees for the diversions were minimal.
High Standards, Low Budget

Though neatly unified on paper, the JSA's course of studies began to lose its cohesiveness in the forties. A professional journalist, Armstrong -- by her own admission -- lacked the educational expertise to fully implement her ideas. She gave her teachers general thematic direction but left it to them to design lesson plans. The teachers, all of whom were strictly volunteer, varied widely in competence. Some, such as Gina Hasse, a former stage actress with a flair for dramatic storytelling, and self-taught naturalists Philip Rau [FOOTNOTE 4] and Waldemar Palm, intrigued students year after year; others had more good will than talent. Such limitations would have been offset by the retention of a trained educator at the helm, but the board was unwilling to provide even a part-time salary for the directorship. When, in 1949, the board formed a committee to assess the staffing of the JSA, the committee essentially said the Society was getting what it paid for. The committee -- which was chaired by Alexander S. Langsdorf and included Hynd, Armstrong, Smith, Wahlert, Buchmueller, and longtime JSA secretary Mabel Wheeler [FOOTNOTE 5] -- urged the board to increase the school's budgetary allotment. "It is very evident that the JSA has been left to limp along as best it may, with reliance upon the voluntary efforts of those members who have some free time they are willing to devote to the arduous work," the committee reported, adding that "the word 'voluntary' is used advisedly, for the few honorariums provided for in the budget are so small as even to stretch the meaning of honorarium to its ultimate limit." (Report to board dated April 11, 1949) The committee determined that no untrained volunteer could be expected to thoroughly design and implement a curriculum "that will be consistent with the aims of the Society." (Ibid.) It recommended the board find the means to finance a professional teacher-director; as an alternative, it requested more time to examine the school's administrative structure and to collectively refine instructions for teachers. Not surprisingly, the board chose the latter option. In the ensuing year, the committee ploddingly filled out the curriculum, drawing inspiration from a Unitarian model and assistance from AEU religious education director Florence Klaber. In 1950, the committee passed its work along to a newly formed JSA Committee which included representatives of teachers and parents; this formation was crystallized when the committee's duties were spelled out in a by-law amendment adopted the same year.

The high academic standards held by Hynd and a handful of trustees created a persistent element of tension between the board and the JSA staff. In particular, Walston Chubb, a Harvard-educated attorney, and Alexander S. Langsdorf, with his background in university administration, continually pushed for extensive teacher training and a rigorous, systematic pedagogy. In a portion of the 1949 committee report in which he spoke solely for himself, Langsdorf had some harsh words for the JSA program:
A genuinely constructive Sunday School remains a problem to be worked out on experimental lines. The usual church Sunday school is a device for equipping children with permanent blinders to make them see and think through life only what their elders want them to see and think. In our own curriculum, I see almost nothing that will make our children understand, and be tolerant of, the religious beliefs of people with whom they will have to live their lives. I see nothing that will acquaint them with what science has to say about the nature of the physical world in which they live, and how they may learn reverence for the wonders all about them, as for instance, by some study of the stars.

(Report to board dated April 11, 1949)

Wahlert, Armstrong, and Smith, with their more down-to-earth expectations of teachers, made no attempt to institute the sort of formal training program that Hynd and his backers envisioned; the Society lacked the funds for such an undertaking, and the teachers lacked the time. Instead, the women conducted periodic seminars on classroom techniques, brought in authorities to speak on religious studies, and discussed educational philosophy at teachers meetings. The monthly meetings, which included dinners served by grateful members of the Women's Auxiliary and the PTA, were well-attended and often fruitful. In addition, teachers were encouraged to attend outside seminars on religious education. In the mid-forties, board members personally underwrote the fees of teachers who chose to attend Hynd's comparative religion courses at University College. The AEU also provided valued assistance: Religious Education Director Florence Klaber regularly consulted on the trainers of teachers, and, with financial support from trustee Henry Putzel, as many as five or six JSA administrators and teachers attended the annual AEU religious education conferences at Hudson Guild.

If the JSA was not always up to Langsdorf's stringent standards, parents and students were less captious. Year after year, enrollment topped one hundred, and parental participation was high. Lifelong Society member Jane Arrigo, who graduated from the school in this era, recalled the program as a crucial element of her upbringing:

We were always learning something; we always had fun. And the teachers were great . . . . It was so fascinating, and so much went on, that you didn't want to miss . . . . It was the most interesting Sunday School anybody could go to. You wouldn't want to miss,
because you might miss something. When they were studying nature, we went out into nature -- many, many times; in a year, we might go out once every two months.

We learned the Bible in a good story form [so] that we could relate to other people about the Bible. We found out that we remembered the Bible, because we did it in an understanding way.

As you got older in Sunday School, you learned that people were all different, and you don't ridicule people for their thoughts, because they lived in a different culture. What was right in the United States was not always right. It was the same with religion . . . .

I was about the only one I knew, maybe in my whole [public school] class, that was Ethically oriented. I was quite secure. When they all would smoke, I would feel very free to not smoke, because I didn’t have to be one of the crowd -- I wasn’t one of the crowd. I was different. I didn’t want to be like everybody else -- and I knew I wasn’t, as far as religion was concerned. I was very content, and very secure. Nobody could ever shatter my thoughts. The kids today, they don’t know what to say if people say, "What do you believe?" I was very secure . . . . I was not going to be anything different than Ethically oriented in my life.

(Interview with Jane Arrigo, Sept. 30, 1986)

[FOOTNOTE 1; Schwarz, who immigrated in the 1870s, was a pillar of the Society’s German contingent. His marriage to Louise Rheinlander on April 16, 1899, was reputed to be the first marriage solemnized in the St. Louis Society. Walter L. Sheldon performed the service, which was then legitimized by a judge. An avid naturalist who had long been active in the Boy Scouts of America, Schwarz died in 1940 as he had once said he wished to die -- in a Scout uniform and at a Scout meeting. The Scouts to whom he had awarded merit badges minutes before his death formed an honor guard at his memorial service at Sheldon Memorial.]

[FOOTNOTE 2: The JSA had always operated without tuition, but that policy came under fire about 1950, when trustees noted that a sizeable number of non-Society members sent their children to the school. Thereafter, JSA officials tactfully asked non-member parents whose children had been in the Sunday School for more than a year to either join the Society or contribute to the school; some agreed, some did not. The board debated the policy for years, finally agreeing to keep the school free so as to
maintain its accessibility to the children of poor families. Until recently, the only fees charged were to cover the costs of materials used in special-interest groups.]

[FOOTNOTE 3: Rubin recalled that after the opening performance of "Jack and the Beanstalk" (the students gave a second performance at Neighborhood House), Percival Chubb told her that she had "reached the pinnacle" of the dramatic arts, adding, "Now do you think you can stay there?" (Interview with Emsy Rubin, Sept. 30, 1986) ]

[FOOTNOTE 4: Rau, who earned his living in real estate, wrote a book titled, "Jungle Bees and Wasps." Rau, Palm, Hermann Schwarz and other nature teachers augmented their classroom work by leading students on hikes.]

[FOOTNOTE 5: Wheeler's later married name was Jones.]
EXPANDING MINDS
Maturation of the Platform Program

During Hynd's term of leadership, platform offerings reached a new high of intellectual stimulation. The scope of visiting speakers was substantially expanded -- partly because the movement's founding crusaders were retiring and dying off, and partly because a Society member's generosity enabled the community to contract more eminent speakers from various fields of inquiry. Addressing the needs of the membership from new perspectives, Hynd and his advisers also experimented with changes in the structure, tenor, and promotion of the platform service.

Hynd addressed the Society much more frequently than had Chubb during his active leadership, sometimes occupying the platform on more than half the Sundays in the season. To sustain audience interest, he often presented platform series -- each comprising two to five addresses -- on such themes as "Crises in Contemporary Culture" (1934-35 season), "Educating Our Emotions" (1939-40), and "Dynamic Obligations of the Common Man" (1942-43). A 1938-39 series titled "Three Studies in Christian Sources" included talks on "The Mythology of Christianity," "The Moral Standards of Christianity," and "The Symbolism of Personality." In his spring 1942 series "Questions We Ask Ourselves," he addressed anxieties over suffering, uncertainty, and the worthiness of human life. He sometimes asked guest speakers to cooperate in platform series. For instance, a spring 1948 series titled "Cultural Origins and Contributions" encompassed talks by Hynd on "Evolution of the Idea of God" and "Origins of Christian Supernaturalism"; the series also included an address on "Our Judeo-Christian Heritage" by Unitarian minister Thaddeus B. Clark and a talk titled "Morality is Enough" by Chicago Ethical leader A. Eustace Haydon. As indicated by these themes, most of Hynd's addresses were philosophical and hortatory; regular attendants especially appreciated his expositions of newly released books. With the onset of turbulence in Europe, however, Hynd often turned his attention to social, political, and economic affairs. At war's end, he returned to the inner life with a series of four addresses on "Spiritual Reconstruction."

Hynd had a few platform associates near at hand. Throughout Hynd's term of service, leader emeritus Percival Chubb presented two or three platform addresses per season. William Hammond, during his two-year stint as leader-in-training, spoke only three times, but he frequently presided at platform meetings in Hynd's absence. Beginning in the mid-forties, Alexander S. Langsdorf spoke to the Society about once a year -- usually on ethical aspects of science and technology. After he was named honorary
associate leader in 1948, Langsdorf often presided at platform and community meetings, but his addresses remained infrequent. In addition to calling upon these associates within the institution, Hynd occasionally exchanged pulpits with Clark of First Unitarian Church; R. Lester Mondale, pastor of All Saints Unitarian Church in Kansas City; and Rabbi Julius Gordon of Temple Shaare Emeth.

In the thirties, Ethical leaders continued to preponderate among out-of-town speakers. In addition to veterans Algernon Black, Horace Bridges, John Lovejoy Elliott, David Seville Muzzey, Henry Neumann, and Nathaniel Schmidt, St. Louis now welcomed W. Edwin Collier, a Stanton Coit protege who succeeded S. Burns Weston as leader of the Philadelphia Society; Haydon, an author [FOOTNOTE 1] and professor of comparative religion who succeeded Bridges in Chicago; Vivian T. Thayer, director of education at New York's Ethical Culture Schools; George Beauchamp, leader of the nascent Washington, D.C. Society; and Arthur E. Briggs, founding leader of the Los Angeles Society. Leaders of the dominant societies exchanged platforms about once a year. In an era when transportation was slower and the pace of life more leisurely, these visits sometimes lasted up to a week; besides addressing a society on one or two Sundays, the visitor might meet with the society's subgroups, conduct seminars for Sunday School teachers, and join in community activities. In addition, established scholars such as Muzzey often spoke to civic and religious groups and gave radio and newspaper interviews.

The Society's tight budget militated against bringing in large numbers of Ethical leaders each season, but Percival Chubb urged that the practice continue. Such exchanges, he said, kept the societies in closer touch with each other and contributed toward the training of the younger leaders. Another advantage of relying on speakers within the movement was that the St. Louis and Chicago societies could share the costs of bringing Eastern leaders to the Midwest [FOOTNOTE 2]; similarly, coalitions of American societies hosted speaking tours by British leaders Coit and Lord Henry Snell. Furthermore, full-time Ethical leaders could afford to waive lecture fees by simply exchanging platforms. Communities supported these exchanges by putting up leaders in their homes; in St. Louis, members of the Hospitality Committee - under the supervision of Executive Secretary Meredith McCargo -- minimized costs by providing visitors with lodging, meals, and entertainment. Consequently, whenever financial constraints forced the Society to pare the number of out-of-town speakers it invited, Ethical leaders were the last to be cut from the list.

Money Talks

The quality of the Society's other visiting speakers, already high, received a tremendous boost in 1939 with the establishment of the John M. Prather Fund for Education in Ethics. Prather, a longtime
member of the Society, had taught science in the St. Louis Public School District for 33 years. He died in 1938 while touring Egypt — one of many adventurous sojourns he had undertaken since retiring in 1935. A single man who lived frugally and invested astutely, Prather left a $25,000 bequest to each of the three educational institutions from which he had earned degrees — Harvard and Chicago universities and Antioch College of Ohio. He also bequeathed $25,000 to the Ethical Society; income from the fund was to be used "for lectures or a series of lectures by eminent publicists, men or women, with a powerful ethical message and with a magnetism and manner of delivery that will attract large numbers of thinking people." The community was surprised and deeply gratified by the bequest. According to a resolution the board passed in Prather’s honor, the gift "was bestowed in the quiet and modest way that was characteristic of Dr. Prather’s demeanor in our midst. Despite his love of outdoors and his habit of wandering afield to study Nature, his was a familiar and welcome presence among us; but he was of a retiring disposition and offered no noticeable demonstration of the steadiness and depth of his devotion and faithfulness. This manifestation of his high regard for the part played by our fellowship in his life... serves to strengthen our common faith in its value and effectiveness." (minutes, March 13, 1939) A Prather Fund Committee composed of shrewd investors administered the bequest; under the committee’s care, the market value of the fund topped $28,000 by 1945.

Varying interpretations of Prather’s stated intentions for the fund sparked occasional disputes. R. Walston Chubb contended that the money should be used only for speakers who would not otherwise occupy the platform; specifically, he insisted that it not be used to pay the fees of visiting Ethical leaders. If the board dipped into the fund for ordinary platform expenses, Chubb said, its purpose would be defeated. The board occasionally overrode those objections, but it generally approved expenditures only for out-of-town speakers from outside the movement. In addition to paying speakers’ fees, the fund covered such ancillary costs as advertising and hospitality.

Hynd, acknowledging the limits of his erudition, used the fund to host complementary speakers. Because Hynd drew heavily on literature and the arts in virtually all of his platform addresses, the Society rarely hosted guest speakers who specialized in those fields; instead, it rounded out the platform program by inviting scientists, social analysts, and mental health experts. Hynd underlined the value of the fund when he noted that the Society’s list of speakers was “the like to which is not known on any other Sunday morning program in the city (blessings, here, on the head of the late John Prather — a member who saw the significance of the Sunday morning service and who made provision for the extension of its influence). Truly, the members and friends who attend the Sunday morning services should be outstanding persons, since they hear so many outstanding speakers!” (Leader’s report given at annual meeting, May 1946)
while he cherished the variety of speakers the fund enabled him to contract, Hynd feared that platform attendants might interpret a radical speaker's stand as the Society's "party line." In the forties, he ran this disclaimer in Sunday program flyers: "The speaker is granted full freedom of speech. Utterances from the platform commit the speaker, and not the Society as a whole."

A Potpourri of Piquancy

Philosophy and religion were among the most common topics of visiting speakers. Harvard professor Ralph Barton Perry, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author who was highly regarded for his development of value theory, opened the 1941-42 season with a talk on "The Values We Defend." Semanticist Samuel I. Hayakawa, an English professor at the Illinois Institute of Technology and author of "Language in Action," addressed the Society in 1946. Humanist philosopher L.M. Birkhead, director of Friends of Democracy and religious consultant to novelist Sinclair Lewis, also spoke in 1946. E. Burdette Backus, pastor of All Souls Unitarian Church in Indianapolis and president of the American Humanist Association, outlined his vision of "A Global Religion." Corliss Lamont, professor of philosophy at Columbia University and author of "Man Answers Death" and "Humanism as a Philosophy," made the first of his many visits to the Society in 1949.

Foreign affairs, with an emphasis on the struggle for world peace, was another mainstay of platform offerings. Throughout the season, and particularly on its annual Peace Sunday, the Society hosted representatives of peacemaking organizations such as the Carnegie Peace Foundation, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the National Council for the Prevention of War, the Institute of International Education, the Foreign Policy Association, and subsections and support groups of the League of Nations and the United Nations. In seeking to comprehend the ethical dilemmas of international relations, the Society drew upon the expertise of a variety of political observers and world citizens. Roger Baldwin, director of the American Civil Liberties Union, often spoke to the Society on the prospects for democracy in reforming nations such as postwar Germany and Japan. Suhindra L. Joshi, a professor of comparative religion in both the United States and India, and Kumar Goshal, an Indian author, actor, and radio commentator, spoke repeatedly on Oriental culture and politics; their addresses customarily were complemented by readings from Eastern scriptures and contemporary authors. After the division of Pakistan and India, the Society invited Pakistani professor Mohamad Haeez Toosy, a Moslem, to balance the perspective of the Hindu sympathizers. Sir Herbert Ames, a former member of the Canadian House of Commons and the financial director of the League of Nations Secretariat, spoke in 1937 on "Hungary --
Two Conceptions of the Right to Rule." Enrique S. de Lozada, a diplomatic consultant and professor of political science at Williams College, shed light on Inter-American cooperation. Naturally, American-Soviet relations dominated the Society's concern with international affairs. Author Frederick L. Schuman, professor of government at Williams College and principal political analyst for the Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service, spoke frequently on the changes required for an enduring peace -- if not partnership -- between the nations. Other speakers on the issue included Admiral William H. Standley, a former U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union; Emil Lengyel, Eastern European correspondent for the New York Times; and No-Yong Park, a professor of Oriental culture who addressed American and Soviet interventionism from the Chinese perspective.

Consistent interest in psychology and family life was reflected in the platform program. The most renowned mental health authority to address the Society was Viennese psychiatrist Alfred Adler, who spoke in March 1936 on "The Prevention of Neurosis and Crime." In the 1939-40 season, author and counseling consultant Roy E. Dickerson presented an address titled "Marriage, Family Life, and the Fine Art of Living." A frequent visitor in the forties was Harry Allen Overstreet, professor of philosophy and psychology at City College of New York and author of "The Mature Mind," a 1949 best-seller. Overstreet spoke on such themes as "Personal Balance in a Neurotic World" and "What We Owe to Ourselves as Human Beings." Other psychological authorities who spoke in the forties included Paul Popenoe, director of Los Angeles's Institute of Family Relations; Rudolph Dreikurs, director of the Chicago Community Psychiatric Center and author of "The Challenge of Marriage" and "The Challenge of Parenthood"; and Evelyn Millis Duvall, author, marriage counselor, and executive secretary of the National Council on Family Relations.

An array of social critics and civic theorists addressed the Society. The most frequent visitor in this field was Eduard Christian Lindeman, associate editor of The New Republic and advisory editor of Rural America. Lindeman, who taught at the New York School of Social Work and the New School of Social Research, conducted a number of studies on adult education and authored books on social problems. Among the addresses he gave in the thirties and forties were "The Modern Question of Values" and "The Quality of Democratic Culture." Other academics invited to address domestic social and political issues included criminologist Harry Elmer Barnes; Washington University law professor Ralph Fuchs; and Curtis W. Reese, Dean of the Abraham Lincoln Centre of Chicago and one-time president of the American Humanist Association. From the University of Chicago came T.V. Smith, professor of philosophy and editor of the International Journal of Ethics; Louis Wirth, professor of sociology; and Herman Finer, professor of political science and author of "The Theory and Practice of Modern Government." Mordecai
Ezekiel, economic adviser to the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and author of "Jobs for All," spoke twice during the 1943-44 season. Louis Adamic, founding editor of Common Ground magazine and author of "The Native's Return," "My America," and "From Many Lands," gave a 1942 Thanksgiving address titled "Immigrant Gifts to America." Social reformer Saul Alinsky, executive director of the Industrial Areas Foundation of Chicago and author of "Reveille for Radicals," first spoke to the Society in December 1946.

Though the Society, like white America generally, was reluctant to confront racial issues, civil rights became a hot topic in the forties. In 1936, the board dissuaded Hynd from presenting an address on the social significance of negro spirituals; he finally gave such an address -- accompanied by a presentation of spirituals by the Sumner High School chorus -- in 1943. Society member Fannie Cook, a novelist [FOOTNOTE 3] and ardent proponent of racial equality, presented three platform addresses on the topic: "Democracy and the Negro," 1943; "An American Dilemma -- The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy," 1945; and "The Tyranny of Prejudice," 1948. Civil rights advocate Carey McWilliams, a contributing editor of The Nation and author of "Factories in the Fields," "Brothers Under the Skin," and "A Mask for Privilege," proposed solutions to racial inequality in 1944 and 1948 addresses. Bringing to the issue an element of scientific inquiry, social anthropologist Allison Davis, a professor of education at the University of Chicago, examined the presumption of a "racial personality" in a 1946 address. On Race Relations Sunday, an unofficial nationwide observance in February 1944, University of Chicago history professor Walter Johnson commemorated President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation; in February 1950, Walter White, executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), provided a more provocative observation by assessing "Lincoln's Unfinished Business."

The Society's attention to civil rights was not limited to black equality. In 1939, Hynd spoke on "Semitism and Anti-Semitism: A Challenge to the Reign of Reason"; and in 1945, Jerome Nathanson, one of several Jewish Ethical leaders, presented an address titled "Must We Have Anti-Semitism?" With the division of Palestine and the establishment of Israel, Jewish identity and Zionism became frequent platform topics in the forties and into the fifties. The changing status of women in America also found expression from the platform. In February 1943, Fannie Cook and fellow Society member Delia Mares, also an author [FOOTNOTE 4] and then director of the National League of Women Voters, commemorated feminist leader Anna Howard Shaw in a platform presentation titled "Free to Fashion the Future." Notes in that Sunday's platform program declared that "we honor [Shaw] and the many women who were co-workers with her in the securing of political and other rights for women." A quote from C. Delisle Burns headed up that flyer: "Any community which attempts to live upon the abilities of one sex only, loses half
its vitality; and any community which makes one sex subordinate to the other, is headed towards barbarism.

A Question of Questions

The tone of the platform service -- at once intellectual and religious -- was at times difficult to maintain. Speakers were expected to provide the thoughtful stimulation of the college classroom, but they were to do so in the atmosphere of a church. Hynd and his advisers -- the ephemeral Committee on Speakers and the board of trustees at large -- sought to strike a balance in platform offerings between inspirational philosophy and specific social issues. Trustees often asked Hynd and visiting speakers to alter the topics of their addresses, but they had difficulty arriving at a consensus. Their social conscience ignited by wars and the Depression, many Society members felt platform talks should focus on action programs in such areas as housing, criminal justice, and community organizing. Most trustees agreed, believing that "while the Society was not organized for group action in fields of reform, it has a unique contribution to make in emphasizing practical applications of ethical principles [in] social and economic relationships." (minutes, November 1945) On the other hand, "several members of the board were inclined to demur on the ground that purely technical discussions by experts . . . would tend to change the more general religious character of the Sunday morning service." (Ibid.) In practice, the tension resulted in a healthy balance.

The Society's ambivalence over intellectualism was especially evident in its experiments with a question-and-answer period -- a custom deemed sacred by universities and sacrilegious by churches. Society members who came to platform meetings seeking information strongly favored the practice, while those who sought inspiration found it distasteful. When the discussions first were tried in 1943, they were held in the library after the platform meeting. That arrangement had the advantage of preserving the religious integrity of the service, but spatial limitations kept many members from taking part. In the 1947-48 season, on a recommendation of the Advisory and Planning Council, the board president was authorized to conduct question-and-answer sessions in the auditorium "when the address is on a vital issue." (minutes, October 1947)

One of the first experiments with the auditorium format resulted in a vitriolic exchange between audience members and a controversial speaker. Kurt Singer, a political lecturer, radio commentator, and author who had published an underground anti-Nazi newspaper in war-torn Europe, spoke at the Society January 11, 1948, on the ethical aspects of his book "Spies and Traitors." In his address, Singer railed
against both fascist and communist opponents of American government. In particular, he castigated Gerald L. K. Smith, the demagogic head of the right-wing America First movement, calling him one of the "grave-diggers of democracy." Smith recently had moved his headquarters from Detroit to St. Louis, and his chief lieutenant, Don Lohbeck, led a contingent of party members to the Ethical platform service. Lohbeck and one of his associates repeatedly interrupted the question-and-answer period by making vituperative remarks and launching imperious speeches. The tough-minded, barrel-chested R. Walston Chubb, who presided over the service, curtly silenced the men. Chubb, a vocal member of the Civil Rights Committee of the St. Louis Bar Association, asserted that he was a champion of free speech; when outraged St. Louisans attempted to block the party's move to St. Louis, he noted, he had vigorously supported Smith's constitutional rights to speak and organize without government interference. But he indignantly noted that the Constitution guarantees no one the right to disrupt a private religious service. He proposed a motion that the men no longer be recognized. The motion carried. (Information from Ethical Society program flyer, January 11, 1948; St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 12, 1948; and interview with Ted and Ruth Anderson, September 15, 1986)

In the wake of the incident, board president Alexander S. Langsdorf, insisting that the tone of the platform service be kept "on a spiritual plane," persuaded the board to discontinue the question period. (Minutes, February 1948) The practice occasionally was revived, but it was held after the formal adjournment of the platform service. Attempts by Langsdorf and his sympathizers to maintain civility -- by having questions submitted in writing or by limiting questioners to a few pre-selected Society members -- were shot down as undemocratic. Society members who participated in the question period were quite willing to accept the acrimony that sometimes arose.

Paying the Piper, Breaking the Pipes

Music remained a fundamental of the platform service. In the thirties, string trios and quartets were engaged occasionally; in the forties, the Spring Festival usually included recitals by cellist Pasquale DeConto and harpist Graziella Pampari of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. Otherwise, the music that accompanied meditations and collections emanated from the Society's glorious Kilgen organ. Florence Jewett, a skilled organist who had introduced the Society to a vast range of music, retired in 1939. A barely competent replacement served while an ad hoc Organist Committee conducted auditions. The committee contracted Society member Carl Werner in the middle of the 1940-41 season. Werner, a music teacher and director of high school orchestras, had belonged to a coterie of Society members that had gathered around
Jewett after platform services to discuss her selections and other things musical. Werner had studied under Jewett in his youth, and he recalled gratefully that taking lessons at Sheldon Memorial had permitted him to practice on "the most magnificent organ in town." (Letter from Carl Werner to the author, dated August 19, 1986) The setting of the instrument, however, took its toll on organ and organists:

After the Sunday meetings the heat would be shut off for the auditorium . . . . So when Mrs. Jewett practiced on the organ, in order to keep warm she . . . rigged up a canvas cover for the console and in this contraption she placed a small electric heater. This proved to be quite comfortable for practicing. (I wish I could have taken a picture of the setting.) I inherited this when I took over in 1941 . . . .

These drastic changes in temperature naturally would affect the organ pipes and mechanism, and eventually did. The wooden pipes, in particular, were affected . . . . [Cracks were] caused by the changes in humidity. The rapid changes in temperature as the heat was turned on would cause this . . . . To counteract the drying out of the air in the organ chambers, I would place several buckets of water in the organ chambers and hang up large wet towels near the pipe to raise the humidity. [Ibid.]

Despite Werner's affectionate pampering, the instrument that had been the pride of the Society in 1913 was on its last pipes in 1950. Peter Kintzele, chairman of the Building Committee, told the board it would cost up to $4,500 to refurbish the instrument. A comparable replacement would cost $35,000 -- ten times the instrument's salvage value. Kintzele noted that the venerable pipe organ could be traded evenly for an electric organ -- "but hastened to add that we would be trading our birthright for a mess of pottage." (Organ Report, January 1950) Minor repairs kept the organ functional for a few years, but when it again broke down in 1954, repair estimates ranged as high as $9,000. Against the Building Committee's recommendation, the board finally replaced the Kilgen instrument with a Hammond electric organ donated by Lucille and Douglas Dodds in memory of her father, Henry Ratz.

The use of congregational singing continued to be spotty. Emerson had prophesied that ethical religion would "fast enough gather . . . music . . . and poetry" [FOOTNOTE 5]; in practice, it did not gather them fast enough to satisfy jaded freethinkers. In the forties, ethical societies pooled their favorite songs and compiled a pathetic collection that no one deemed worthy of publication. St. Louis bought several hundred copies of "We Sing of Life," a Unitarian-Universalist song book partially financed by the AEU, but the community never used it with regularity. To expand the limited repertoire of "hymns" appropriate
for the Society, Hynd, like Chubb, wrote a few creditable inspirational songs. His "Promise of Spring" is representative:

"Onward moves the hast'ning year!
Heralds of the Spring appear!
Signs of waking life arise,
Light more fully fills the skies:
Promise of a brighter day
Gladdens now our common way --
Promise of the earth so fair,
All its fruits and beauties rare.

Let the gifts of Earth abound
Where the race of man is found!
Let the strife of nations cease,
Usher in the age of peace!
Let the rule of man be sure,
May his righteousness endure --
Sharing life with great and small,
Bringing health and joy to all."

(Sunday program, March 23, 1947)

Red-Letter Days and Red Tape

Cyclic festivals were demoted in the thirties. For all his fastidiousness in directing the ceremonies, Hynd generally considered them a children's affair. Only the Winter Festival -- which, curiously, the anticlerical Mr. Hynd renamed the Christmas Midwinter Festival [FOOTNOTE 6] -- was conducted as a platform service. Typically, the Midwinter Festival comprised carols, dramatic presentations by Sunday School students, a candle-lighting ceremony, a story told by Hynd or Chubb, special music, and a visit from a "Santa Claus" bearing candy for the children. As before, a social gathering was substituted for the
platform service on one Sunday during the holiday season. The Thanksgiving and spring festivals were
conducted by Sunday School personnel -- usually under Hynd's direction -- during the regular school hour;
these festivals, which adults were encouraged to attend, were followed by straightforward platform
services. The services on those days included festive touches -- congregational singing, Chubb-era
responsive sentences, and instrumental recitals -- but a topical address remained the dominant element.

Hynd also relegated the Ceremony of Recognition to the Sunday School hour, sparing the platform address
that he believed adult members cherished. Chubb continued to conduct the New Year's Eve Quiet Hour,
which consisted of music, carol singing, a few words of inspiration, and time for quiet reflection. The
service, which drew twenty to thirty stalwarts, was a poor match for good ol' American revelry, and the
tradition was permitted to die quietly in the early fifties.

Other special observations were conducted within the basic format of the platform service.
Outstanding humanist philosophers -- such as Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, and Mark Twain -- were
commemorated on signal anniversaries of births and deaths. The annual Shakespeare Sunday was
celebrated on the Sunday nearest April 23, the birthday of the dramatist; Hynd, Chubb, or a visiting
English professor spoke on the ethical import of Shakespearean drama, and program readings were
excerpted from the bard's poems and plays. Peace Sunday, held annually in November, featured addresses,
readings, and songs exalting world peace. On Y.P.A. Sunday, members of the Young People's Association
selected the readings and the speaker and presided at the service. The speaker was asked to address the
needs and concerns of youth. For example, Harold D. Meyer, chairman of the Department of Sociology at
the University of North Carolina and director of the North Carolina Recreation Commission, spoke in the
1945-46 season on "Youth -- A Dynamic Force in Modern Society: How Shall We Direct It?" And in
the 1948-49 season, Virgil L. Border, associate Regional Director of the National Conference of Christians
and Jews, spoke on "What is Youth Doing Today?"

Apart from platform services, the Society's only distinctly religious ceremonies were namings,
weddings, and memorials. The right of an Ethical leader to solemnize marriages again was called into
question after Hynd's arrival. Percival Chubb, a naturalized U.S. citizen, satisfied the Missouri marriage
statute's citizenship requirement and the prevailing bureaucratic interpretation of the statutory term
"minister of the gospel." But Hynd, always a resident alien, failed to persuade the recorder of deeds to
honor his authority as a minister. When he performed a wedding, therefore, a civil authority was invited to
legally sanction the ceremony. In 1941, the board considered proposing legislation that would allow
Ethical Leaders, regardless of citizenship, to perform weddings, but no one undertook serious lobbying
efforts. In response to a request from the board's legal counsel, Harold Hanke, the state's assistant attorney
general in 1950 rendered the informal opinion that a licensed or ordained preacher need not be a citizen to solemnize marriages. Hanke, calling the opinion "vague and non-committal," asked the recorder of deeds to request a formal opinion from the state's attorney general. The matter was dropped when Hynd announced his resignation in February 1950.

No legal restrictions apply to memorial services, but the Ethical service traditionally is conducted only by people authorized by the acting leader. Before departing for cooler climes, Hynd each summer commissioned several Society members to perform memorials in his absence. Percival Chubb sometimes was available to perform this service. When both leaders were absent, the duty fell to lay members including R. Walston Chubb, Alexander Langsdorf, Hermann Schwarz, Henry Putzel, Dewey Schill, and Harold Hanke. Leaders from the Chicago Society also were called in on occasion. There is no definite format for an Ethical funeral, but it customarily includes a eulogy, music, reading, and silent reflection.

**Setting Clocks, Marking Calendars**

The Society tried several arrangements of its Sunday morning essentials -- the Sunday School, Adult Discussion Group, Post-Graduate Discussion Group, platform service, and Play Group. For years, the Sunday School began at 9:30 and ended just before the platform service, at which time children who did not attend the service joined the Play Group. The discussion groups, meanwhile, began at 9:45, ending in time for participants to attend the platform service at 11 o'clock. But the platform service often ran well past noon, making for a long morning for families with children. To lighten the schedule, the Platform Committee in 1948 asked the leader to end the service no later than 12:05 or 12:10, giving members time to visit together before hunger pangs drove them home. And in 1950, newly hired Sunday School director Mildred Smith moved the starting time of the Sunday School up to 10 a.m. Discussion groups were started at the same time, so that programs for adults and children now were conducted concurrently.

The Society's season continued to parallel the academic September-to-May calendar, but many members wanted it to be lengthened by a few weeks at each end. On a recommendation of the Advisory and Planning Council, the board in 1940 distributed a questionnaire on the matter. Of the 198 members who responded, 110 indicated they wanted the season to start earlier in September, end later in May, or both. Nonetheless, the board dropped the proposal when Hynd, who had pushed for an even earlier closing date, objected. Hynd claimed to oppose the extension because discomforting heat and waning interest precipitated a drop-off in attendance toward the end of the season; however, his habit of leaving town on a long sabbatical promptly after the last platform Sunday indicates his reasons may have been more personal.
Not until the 1947-48 season did the board vote to extend the season until the end of May. The season then was topped off with the annual picnic on the first Sunday of June.

[FOOTNOTE 1: Haydon, who had travelled the Ethical circuit for years before retiring from his post at the University of Chicago, wrote "The Quest of the Ages" and "The Biography of the Gods."]

[FOOTNOTE 2: Beginning in 1950, the Society occasionally cooperated with Temple Shaare Emeth in bringing to town speakers from outside the Ethical movement. Visitors would speak to the temple congregation on a Friday night and stay in town to address the Society the following Sunday, with the communities splitting speakers' fees and travel and lodging costs.]

[FOOTNOTE 3: Cook, a social worker, wrote "Mrs. Palmer's Honey," "Bootheel Doctor" "The Hill Grows Steeper," and "Storm Against the Wall."]

[FOOTNOTE 4: Mares, a high school history teacher, wrote a book titled "Know Your Enemy."]

[FOOTNOTE 5: Excerpt from essay "On Music," by Ralph Waldo Emerson.]

[FOOTNOTE 6: Trustees, though sensitive to the objections of non-Christians, generally held that Christmas had lost its denotative meaning and become synonymous with "the holiday season." (minutes, January 1949)]
A Sluggish Movement

The AEU continued to serve as a loose federation of independent societies. Its principal function was to facilitate intercourse among the societies by coordinating speaking tours, publishing a nationwide journal, and conducting national assemblies and leadership colloquiums. Generally, Ethical leaders and Sunday School administrators benefitted from the association. But other Society members, despite their appreciation of visiting Ethical leaders, felt little identification with the movement at large and often questioned whether the Union merited the annual dues St. Louis paid. Nationally, the movement was holding its own, at best: After more than half a century, it had added only the Brooklyn and Boston societies to the original American societies in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and St. Louis; it had no definite plans to expand to other cities, and until 1942, it had no formal program for leadership training. In their contacts with representatives of other societies at annual assemblies, St. Louisans learned that the heartfelt congregationalism they cultivated was atypical of the movement -- an observation that diminished their already scant sense of belonging to a national community.

In terms of productivity and inspiration, the AEU's annual assemblies have been uneven. Those hosted by East Coast societies naturally have drawn the largest number and greatest variety of delegates; assemblies held in Chicago, St. Louis, and Cleveland have drawn disproportionate Midwestern representation. In efforts to offset such imbalance, the AEU and the New York Society have helped underwrite transportation costs for Midwestern delegates to assemblies held in the East. Also, each society's contingent is permitted to vote according to its allotment of delegates rather than being limited to one vote per delegate in attendance. As a rule, each society is allotted one at-large delegate plus one delegate for each fifty members; the St. Louis contingent, with nine to eleven votes, consistently has been among the most influential. To maximize its impact, the Society in 1948 adopted a policy of casting its votes as a block; in most cases, the St. Louis contingent votes privately on all issues coming before the full assembly, then casts its delegate votes unanimously according to the majority vote of the caucus. Matters put to a vote at assemblies include reorganization and policy proposals; dues increases and the establishment of special funds and projects; the election of national officers and the expansion of the Union's paid staff; and ethical resolutions on such issues as peace, race relations, and the government's domestic programs and foreign policy. Assemblies also feature subordinate colloquiums for religious educators, youth groups, women's groups, and so on. Each society's delegates divvy up participation in these workshops, then report back to their communities and subgroups.

From time to time, the Union has asked the societies to form standing AEU committees to promote the movement's publications; endorse and publicize the Union's national programs; inform the
AEU secretary of local activities that would be of interest to other societies; cooperate with the secretary in planning assemblies; and keep society members informed of AEU programs and activities. St. Louis formed such committees a few times in the thirties and forties, and even established the makeup of a standing committee in a 1949 by-law amendment, but primary responsibility for maintaining relations with the Union usually fell to the leader and a single lay representative. Between assemblies, decisions are made and assembly proposals drafted by the AEU's board of directors and executive committee.

Percival Chubb served a stint as AEU president -- a non-administrative advisory post -- in the thirties. In the thirties and forties, active Society members such as Edna Gellhorn, Alexander S. Langsdorf, Frederic Arnstein, and Harold Hanke represented St. Louis on the board and kept the community informed of its proceedings.

Through correspondence and meetings of the Fraternity of Leaders (later renamed the Leaders Council), Ethical leaders helped each other hone their thought and organizational skills. After the death of Adler, who personally had selected leaders from the movement's inception, the Fraternity also developed informal standards for leadership qualifications and screened applicants for training and service. Fraternity members and AEU administrators sometimes proposed methods of equalizing employment conditions through the establishment of a national pension fund and a minimum pay scale, but the larger and more affluent societies blackballed such notions. In 1941, for example, the president of the Chicago Society proposed that Union members jointly provide compensation for leader Horace Bridges, who had served the movement for some 29 years. Bridges' failing health had forced him to curtail his platform appearances, but he continued to write; because his writings benefitted all societies, Chicago contended, it was reasonable to ask them to help pay his pension. St. Louis trustees replied that the individual societies were responsible for maintaining their own pension plans; the St. Louis Society recently had designed an annuity policy to provide for Hynd's retirement benefits, and the board's attitude was that of the wise virgins.

The pension proposal was but one indication of the societies' wavering loyalty to each other and the movement at large. In 1943, when the Chicago Society asked St. Louis to share Hynd's services while it sought a replacement for Bridges, the board's response was again parochial: It authorized Hynd to speak in Chicago at his discretion, but it made clear that the number of midweek addresses the Chicago Society wanted Hynd to present would pose an unacceptable burden. Hynd visited Chicago from time to time, but made no commitment to the Society; the community limped along without a full-time leader until 1945, when it hired A. Eustace Haydon. However, later in the decade, Hynd -- like his colleagues on the coast -- substantially assisted in the formation of the Cleveland Ethical Society.
Furthermore, St. Louis aided the community's development by inviting a representative of the group to visit St. Louis for observation and advice. [FOOTNOTE 1]

Uncertain loyalty also made the International Ethical Union (IEU) a shaky alliance. The association, which at one time comprised Ethical unions from the United States, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, Italy, Britain, Japan, and occasionally other nations, was formed in 1896. The IEU held conferences on and off until World War I, during which European ethical societies floundered. At the initiative of Percival Chubb and his cohorts overseas, the Union conducted occasional moral education conferences between the wars, but the second war naturally precluded even those. The association was revived in 1952 as the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU). It has held conferences every four years since 1957.

In the thirties, the IEU asked the societies to help support the Vienna community, which was served by outstanding leaders but lacked sufficient funding. Citing budgetary constraints, the St. Louis board declined to contribute to the fund, but Society members independently scraped together the community's quota. In 1938, Vienna leaders Wilhelm Boerner and Walter Eckstein were imprisoned for anti-Fascist activities, and the IEU again asked the societies to offer support. John Lovejoy Elliott secured the leaders' release in a visit to Berlin, and members of the New York Society underwrote the costs of bringing the men to the United States; at the urging of the AEU, the St. Louis Society started a Boerner-Eckstein Fund to help maintain the refugees. In 1943, however, the board denied the AEU's request to solicit further contributions to the cause from Society members; the men had forfeited St. Louis's good will by declining to speak at the Society.

Though slow to expand, the AEU did attain a measure of institutional stability. In the forties, the Union obtained sorely needed legitimacy when it was incorporated as a non-profit religious and educational institution. The articles of the New York State incorporation extended tax-exempt status to all member societies; a concomitant IRS ruling acknowledged the deductibility of donations and bequests to ethical societies. Furthermore, AEU dues -- which for decades had comprised a flat 3 percent of each society's annual income -- were augmented by a per capita fee in the late forties. Since the institution of that "head tax," societies have more consistently kept their rolls clean of inactive members.

Tightfisted Support

In honor of the movement's 70th anniversary, the AEU in 1946 sought an additional $20,000 from the societies to provide for the expansion of the movement -- which would include hiring a full-
time field secretary -- and the establishment of an educational camp for youth. The expansion work was to be initiated over five years. The board of the St. Louis Society balked at the vagueness of the proposals, but the Society ultimately supported the expansion fund, increasing its annual pledge by $500 to $2,500 from 1946-50. Locally, the campaign was included in St. Louis's 60th Anniversary Fund drive. Society members contributed $21,000 toward the local goal of $30,000; the lion's share of the proceeds was used to retire the mortgage on Sheldon Memorial. The remainder included only enough cash to cover St. Louis's obligation for the first two years of the Five-Year Plan; the rest of St. Louis's annual pledges were drawn from the operating fund. Several times during the implementation of the AEU's Five-Year Plan, St. Louis temporarily withheld a portion of its pledge to protest the AEU's procrastination in hiring a field secretary and its use of the expansion fund to cover operating deficits. However, the edifying success of the youth camp, the Encampment for Citizenship, impelled the Society to make good its pledge.

At the start of the expansion program, the AEU adopted a clearly defined procedure for the admission of associate groups to the Union. No permanent field secretary was hired, but the Union occasionally subsidized "leaders-at-large" to assist in the formation of new societies. In addition, the Union in 1948 instituted at-large membership for residents of cities that had no ethical societies. A handful of embryonic societies was spawned during the five-year program; at St. Louis's Annual meeting in May 1949, the board president reported that delegates to the AEU assembly had had "a feeling of belonging to a forward-moving organization."

In 1949, the AEU formed a committee to devise ways of observing the movement's 75th anniversary in 1951. The committee recommended that the AEU and member societies jointly conduct a fund-raising campaign in the 1950-51 season aimed at increasing societies' pledges by 30 percent. The committee suggested that local projects be included in the drive, but that priority be given to the minimum requirements of proposed AEU projects, including a subvention fund for fledgling societies and any society in need; a graduate institute or summer school of ethics for leadership training; financial support of the Encampment for Citizenship; publication of books and organizational manuals; a fund for the work of the Religious Education Committee; and travelling lectureships.

The St. Louis board favored the proposals for a subvention fund; a fund for the Religious Education Committee; and a fund for the publication of manuals on organizing societies, Sunday Schools, and social groups. It disapproved proposals regarding publication of a book on the history of the movement; a graduate school; travelling lectureships; and support of the Encampment. In evaluating the proposal, R. Walston Chubb reviewed the AEU's track record in fulfilling the objectives of the Five-Year Plan. He noted the Union had established the at-large membership program; facilitated the attempt
to form a Cleveland society; helped develop Sunday School programs through the work of the Moral Education Committee; and provided field assistance to some of the newer Societies. Trustees were not convinced of the efficacy of a centralized development program. They believed that the growth of the movement would best be served by the building up of model societies that would demonstrate the principles of liberal religious communities in their respective communities. With this in mind, the board recommended that the Union restrain its field work. The consensus of the board was that the AEU, drawing upon its experience with the Five-Year Plan, could meet it objectives by carefully administering its present revenues. The board asked the Advisory and Planning Council to evaluate the AEU proposal.

After discussing the proposal with AEU Executive Secretary Cornelius R.P. Cochrane, the Advisory and Planning Council issued its report in March 1950. The council contended that the proposed fund drive was, at least in part, an attempt to garner support for routine functions of the Union, and it questioned whether some of those functions merited increased expenditures. It called for an agreement among member societies on the priority of budget proposals; if the Union failed to reach its monetary goal, it said, friction could be avoided only if funds were diverted from one project to another according to a prior agreement. The council's evaluation of the proposals virtually paralleled the board's. The council supported the proposal to raise a fund for subventions, but it urged that such a fund be used only to provide leadership. Leadership, it said, was the crucial factor in organizing and strengthening societies; where leadership was lacking, financial assistance was wasted.

The council was cool to most of the plan. It opposed the proposal to support the Encampment with Union funds, stating that the program's directors should solicit support directly from society members and the public. It also opposed the establishment of travelling lectureships, preferring that the proposal be incorporated into the plan to provide permanent leaders who would have a more substantial impact on the movement. Likewise, it opposed the notion of establishing an academic graduate institute; in light of the limited funds available for leadership training, the council felt that the Union's emphasis should be on providing communities for on-the-job training. The council also disputed the efficacy of proposed "commissions of inquiry," noting that the plan was virtually identical to the low-cost Public Affairs program conducted in the thirties. Another proposal that failed to win over the council was the establishment of satellite groups on college campuses; the council felt that, while such a program might aid the movement's long-term prospects, the Union could ill afford to spawn youth groups at a time when nascent adult communities were struggling for survival.

With these reservations, the council recommended that the Society pledge limited support to the campaign. It proposed that the Society set its fund-raising goal at $32,500 -- $12,500 for the AEU projects and $20,000 for local projects, including finding a replacement for Hynd and buying or building
a community center in St. Louis County that would be served by a full-time director of activities. Should the Society fall short of its goal, trustees agreed that St. Louis would stand by that ratio, devoting 40 percent of its proceeds to the AEU. Noting that the proposed St. Louis allotment represented nearly 20 percent of the Society's budget, the council recommended that other societies similarly base their proposed contributions on membership and income levels. The board approved the council's report and sent it to the AEU as representing the Society's position on the campaign.

The St. Louis pledge, which represented no increase over the dues the Society paid during the Five-Year Plan, angered the AEU. The board eventually agreed to raise the local campaign goal to $40,000, but it affirmed that the Society would support only those projects approved in the Advisory and Planning Council's report. By April 1951, the Society had collected pledges amounting to only $24,550. Initially sticking with its original plan to allocate only 40 percent of its take to the AEU, the board actually reduced the Society's pledge to $10,000 -- $2,000 a year instead of the $2,500 a year the Society had contributed for the previous five years. By fall, however, the board was persuaded to raise its pledge to $3,250 to promote new societies and provide for increased travel by the executive secretary.

Without substantially increased financial support from the societies, the AEU could do little more than maintain the status quo. As per St. Louis's recommendation, it used its subvention fund primarily for leadership training. It proceeded with the production of organizational manuals, but no comprehensive history of the movement would be written for two decades. The proposed graduate school, campus satellite program, and commissions of inquiry did not materialize.

The Encampment: Initiation in Democracy

In the wake of World War II, Ethical Culture undertook to strengthen world peace by initiating youths in the ways of democracy. The Encampment for Citizenship, begun in 1946 by New York Ethical leader Algernon Black and an associate, Alice K. Pollitzer, was an intensive six-week program of lectures, discussion groups, field trips, and recreational activities. Virginia Harris, a graduate of the St. Louis Society's Sunday School and later a forceful member of the board of trustees, spoke of the Encampment as "the high point of my growing up. It was the most meaningful thing I ever did." (Interview with Virginia Harris, July 31, 1986) Through lectures on such topics as international relations, urban affairs, civil rights, war and peace, and economics, the Encampment sought "to inculcate a certain sensitivity to what being a citizen of the United States should entail." (Ibid) Speakers included economists, journalists, public servants, scientists, artists, psychologists, and sociologists. Workshops taught the youths leadership skills such as public speaking, news analysis, and organizational techniques;
often, those skills were sharpened and tested by role-playing legislators, lobbyists, and labor negotiators. Field trips included visits to neighborhood settlements, human services agencies, labor union headquarters, large corporations, governmental and private agencies, migrant farm labor camps, and industrial plants. Reflecting its devotion to the principles of representative democracy, the program was theologically neutral, non-partisan, and promoted no fixed economic doctrine.

Fittingly, the Encampment's admission policy was exemplarily democratic. The program included -- but was not dominated by -- Ethical Society members and their children. Participants were youths in their late teens and early twenties who came from a variety of ethnic, religious, social, and economic backgrounds. The program brought together blacks, whites, Asians, Native Americans, and Latinos; Southerners, Midwesterners, Easterners, and foreigners; and urban, rural, and small-town youths. Harris, who attended the Encampment in 1961, recalled that the interweaving of disparate social elements was a priceless element of the experience:

That was the beginning of student activism regarding race relations and voting rights. To a person, the people who went there were open to this kind of experience. We never had any racial problems. People were really high on the idea that we were in the vanguard of what was going to happen to our whole country.

(Ibid.)

The Encampment's approach was more participatory than academic. By living together, playing together, and developing decision-making mechanisms, the campers explored the essential democratic virtues of tolerance and compromise. The political facts of cohabitation made real the science of politics: The students' elected government established and enforced work schedules and rules of conduct; general sessions of the campers were held to vote on issues of broad significance, such as adoption of a constitution and establishment of a curfew. Harris recalled:

The thing that was most meaningful to me was the way they organized the student governance of the Encampment. The second or third night we were there, they told us we were all supposed to go to this meeting that had to do with student government. All hundred of us packed into this auditorium, and the director got up and said, "You guys have to set up a student government," and walked off the stage. And so we all -- this mob -- created a student government, with no guidelines. We were sort of angry at first, because they had left us in a void, a vacuum. You could see certain natural leaders
emerging and getting the group to accept this idea or that idea. That made a real emotional impact on me, because I thought, "If you were in the midst of a revolution, where anarchy prevails, what happens? Where does government come from?" The thought did stay with me that the way government is formed is crucial.

(Ibid.)

Harris's perception of social idealism among campers was validated in a 1959 statistical study conducted by the Bureau of Applied Social Research of Columbia University:

The campers became more appreciative of our traditional civil liberties; became more tolerant of freedom for non-conformists; became stronger in defense of civil rights for minorities; became more optimistic about solving pressing social problems; felt less sense of social isolation; showed a small increase in tendency toward political action through accepted social channels; [and] implemented the philosophy of the dignity of man in the friendships they formed during the summer, irrespective of race.


The Encampment usually was conducted at Fieldston School, a high school affiliated with the New York Society. For several years, Encampments also were conducted at the University of California at Berkeley and the Caribbean National Forest in Puerto Rico; one of the last of the Encampments was held on Navajo territory in Arizona. In addition to funding from the AEU, the project was supported by educational grants and private donations. The Encampment provided a limited number of scholarships, and various civic organizations underwrote the costs of hometown participants. Eleanor Roosevelt helped publicize the Encampment by chairing its board of sponsors from 1946 until her death in 1962; she also participated in the program by visiting with campers each summer. President Kennedy commended and encouraged the Encampment.

Members of the St. Louis Society supported the Encampment by donating funds, providing local publicity, and referring potential participants to the program's administrators. More than thirty St. Louis youths took part in Encampments. The Advisory and Planning Council in 1948 recommended that St.
Louis organize a Midwestern version of the Encampment, but the board pooh-poohed the proposal as overly ambitious.

Undaunted, the Y.P.A. that year raised its share of funding for a weekend conference which brought together about fifty youths from liberal religious and political groups. The gathering, dubbed "Intergroup Youth Encampment: A Preparation for Action on St. Louis Minority Problems," was held at Camp Taconic near Eureka, Missouri. Participating groups, in addition to the Y.P.A., were the Channing Club of First Unitarian Church, the Council on Intercultural Relations, the Interracial Committee of Washington University, Hillel House, and the American Veterans Committee. The stated purpose of the encampment was "to study the problems of prejudice in St. Louis, and to discuss actions and techniques by which St. Louis youth can most effectively combat those problems." (Encampment publicity flyer) Jennie Wahlert, a Society member who worked diligently toward the racial integration of the St. Louis public school system, was among the principal adult organizers.

Substandard Standard?

The quality, cost, and distribution of the AEU journal The Standard was a constant source of debate among the societies. Begun in 1914, The Standard comprised thought-provoking essays and editorials as well as book reviews and bits of news from the AEU and the separate societies; it was published monthly from October to May. The journal's name was suggested by historian and Ethical leader David Seville Muzzey for reasons he expounded in its inaugural edition:

In the "critical period" of our early history, those distressing years in which we were laboring to maintain our union at home and our honor abroad under the impotent authority of the Articles of Confederation, George Washington advocated the adoption of a strong national Constitution in the ringing sentence: "Let us raise a standard to which the wise and the honest may repair!" That sentence has inspired the name of this periodical.

There is not lurking in the name any slightest suspicion of that arrogance of finality which would claim that the views presented in these columns are the "standard" of ethics as the meter bar kept in the Observatory of Paris is the "standard" of linear measure. Our title is a rallying cry, and not a catechism.

In the Middle Ages the armies of the Italian communes went out to battle with the standard of their city streaming from the top of a mast fixed on a huge car, the
carroccio, which moved in the center of the host. So in the battle of to-day, amid the clash of creeds and the confusion of moral judgments, we raise our standard. May it be an inspiration to courage, to clarity, and to candor!

(Quoted from first edition in fortieth anniversary edition, May-June 1954, Volume XL, No. 3; p. 75)

The Ethical movement was blessed with such brilliant leaders as Muzzey, Jerome Nathanson, Henry Neumann, Horace Bridges, and W. Edwin Collier--not to mention kingpins Adler and Elliott--and its members were fortunate to have access to the provocative reflections of these men through The Standard. However, the journal's subscription level was consistently low, indicating that American ethical society members did not have much of a taste for its unabashedly scholarly content. The St. Louis board repeatedly told managing editor George O'Dell that he could hope for few new subscriptions unless he "livened up" the content and layout of the journal. When the matter arose at AEU assemblies, delegates of other societies often agreed that the publication should be recast in a more popular magazine-type format. It also was suggested that the journal might be made self-supporting if it broadened its market by soliciting more entries from outside the Leadership Fraternity. Such changes, however, would have entailed increased its fee scale and production costs, forcing the subscription price higher and threatening to further depress readership. From time to time, it was suggested that the subscription cost simply be deducted from the societies' AEU dues, thus placing every ethical society member on the mailing list, but delegates would not support the dues increase that such an extension inevitably would have forced. In 1949, the St. Louis delegation proposed that The Standard reduce its drain on the AEU budget by halving the frequency of publication; the assembly, however, voted not only to retain the journal's eight annual editions but also to expand its size.

The societies also cooperated in the production of books and publicity pamphlets. St. Louis supported the publication of Adler's 1933 magnum opus An Ethical Philosophy of Life by pledging to order substantial quantities of the book. However, when Bridges in 1937 proposed to author a history of the Ethical movement, the Society hedged its support, refusing to place an order until the book was published and its price ascertained. The Society did help underwrite the production of the AEU-Unitarian song book "We Sing of Life" by promising to buy a few hundred copies. It also bought reams of philosophical pamphlets written by Ethical leaders, and Hynd contributed modestly to the program by rewriting a few of his outstanding addresses for publication. Beyond those efforts, the societies tended to handle their publicity needs independently. St. Louis opted to take part in a nationwide public relations campaign the AEU proposed in 1938, but the program foundered when Chicago and Philadelphia--
which already had funded local publicity campaigns -- declined to take part. The New York Society proceeded with its program, which included an analysis of membership needs and fund-raising methods as well as the development of propaganda; St. Louis piggybacked on the New York program.

[FOOTNOTE 1: Despite subsidies from the AEU and gratis speaking trips by Ethical leaders, the Cleveland Society never attained stability.]
THE GREATER COMMUNITY

The Ethical Society is fundamentally a spiritual greenhouse, an institution for the growth and sustenance of truth seekers. For Adler and Sheldon, this greenhouse was trivial if it did not cultivate compassion. They believed that the quest for human fulfillment necessarily entails works of charity and active intervention in the social and political structures of the larger community. After giving the Self-Culture Halls Association a life of its own, however, the St. Louis Society was disinclined to undertake social service communally; its strong-willed members preferred to venture beyond the greenhouse as solitary citizens. The community took great pride in the achievements of its activist members, among them Edna Gellhorn, a founder and guiding spirit of the League of Women Voters; Jennie Wahlert, a solicitous educator devoted to the racial integration of St. Louis's public schools; and Harold Hanke and R. Walston Chubb, attorneys who fought diligently for civil rights and the integrity of church-state separation. The desire to band together in assessing and addressing the needs of the city, the nation, and the world has arisen only sporadically. When it has taken hold, the Society has commonly evaluated ethical issues and opened the door to the intellectual and aesthetic nurturance of its greenhouse.

Taking a Stand on Taking Stands

Throughout the first half of its history, the Ethical Society, as a body, refrained from taking sides on ethical issues. Leaders and members alike were free to voice strong opinions, but no position was sanctioned as a "party line." When the American Neutrality League asked the Board of Trustees to endorse its anti-war stand in 1915, the board passed a resolution declaring that it would not commit the Society to any public stands, nor would it even bring such requests as the ANL's before the membership. The prevailing fear was that sanctioned stands, like the moral mandates of a traditional church, would tend to make dissenters feel disloyal. The community would brook no compromise of that most cherished of values, free thought.

After World War I, however, the Society began to rethink its anti-position position. In the face of international tensions and economic disaster, neutrality smacked of timidity and equivocation. With the specter of ecclesiastical hovering over the deliberations, the community tentatively decided that certain positions command the assent of all ethical people. Accordingly, the membership in 1934 ratified
an innocuous disarmament resolution proposed by the Women's Club of Philadelphia. The resolution expressed opposition to war and support of all movements and legislation for the advancement of peace among the peoples of the world. A telegram expressing the kernel of the resolution was sent to President Roosevelt.

Other ethical societies also were questioning the movement's traditional neutrality. At the 1934 assembly, the AEU proposed to establish a Public Affairs Committee that would be authorized to make pronouncements on ethical issues. According to the proposal, the committee would include all recognized Ethical leaders and at least one lay representative of each society. Societies would be free to abstain from the program, and pronouncements would state exactly which societies had given their endorsement. In the St. Louis Society, R. Walston Chubb headed up a 10-member committee to study the proposal. At the committee's recommendation, the membership rejected the AEU proposal as stated and instead supported the committee's more democratic formula.

The revised proposal placed principal emphasis on the educational potential of a public affairs program -- not on the intrinsic usefulness of conclusions. It was modeled on the policy-making program of the National League of Women Voters, under which no position is actively supported until the membership has given it thorough consideration. In its report, the local committee noted that communal, in-depth study of such issues as foreign policy, industrial law, and government aid would further the Society's traditional aim of fostering enlightened decision-making. It recognized the program's hazards -- the erection of dogmas, erosion of the societies' autonomy, and the alienation of dissenters -- but expressed confidence they could be avoided with institutional safeguards. According to the proposal, the Public Affairs Committee would set the national agenda for discussion, then tabulate and publicize the resulting conclusions. It would be bound to publicize minority opinions along with its pronouncements. No Society member -- and no member Society -- would be bound to uphold the program's conclusions. Positions would be statements of support for governmental or social action -- not theoretical convictions. Only issues of paramount ethical importance would be studied. To guard against clericalism, the role of the Fraternity of Leaders would be limited to deciding whether issues proposed for study met that criterion; otherwise, leaders would carry no more weight than other Society members.

With the support of the membership, the committee drafted a by-law for presentation at the 1935 annual assembly. In addition to formalizing the policies outlined above, the proposed by-law set the terms of committee service and voting rights. The national committee would be composed of one representative of each participating society. These delegates would be charged with overseeing local study programs, and no delegate could enter a vote until the society he or she represented had studied the issue for at least a year and had taken a poll. In cases in which the committee's vote was not unanimous,
any delegate could demand that the vote be weighted according to membership totals; the votes of a particular society could be cast as a block or divided according to the results of a local poll. Each society would have the right to abstain from voting on an issue, and only propositions on which a majority of the societies voted could be announced as representative of the AEU. Positions would be decided by a simple majority. The Public Affairs Committee would meet once a year at the annual AEU convention. At a special meeting in October 1935, the membership of the St. Louis Society ratified the proposed by-law and asked that it be presented at the convention.

The national Public Affairs Committee, with R. Walston Chubb as chairman, was established at the convention. The other societies accepted St. Louis's proposal that the program be treated as an educational exercise, with the national committee setting an agenda for study, but policies regarding representation and voting were left indefinite. Some societies were willing to authorize their boards of trustees or executive committees to take stands on behalf of the membership, but the St. Louis Society, at a membership meeting in January 1936, voted that only a poll open to the entire membership could determine its stand. However, the membership did authorize the board to appoint the Society's delegates to the national committee.

The board appointed a nine-member local Public Affairs Committee charged with initiating discussion groups to study national proposals. According to the procedure adopted by the membership, the conclusions of the study groups would be reported to the local committee, which would then put the proposals to a vote of the membership. The St. Louis delegate would be bound to vote the membership's conclusions in votes of the national committee.

In 1936, the AEU Public Affairs Committee instructed the societies to study New Deal unemployment and relief programs, American foreign policy, and a proposal to establish a register of conscientious objectors in the Ethical movement. In St. Louis, two groups formed to evaluate the efficacy of the Works Progress Administration, a New Deal agency that put millions of Americans to work building schools, roads, sewer systems, and other public facilities; one group focused on W.P.A. projects employing men, the other on projects employing women. Members of the study groups investigated W.P.A. projects in St. Louis and St. Louis County, interviewing workers and supervisors, visiting work sites, and studying building reports. At a membership meeting in October 1936, the study groups delivered a glowing report on the program. The investigators said the workers' "attitude toward life and toward their government is greatly improved by the feeling that they can perform work useful to the community," and declared that the material and moral benefits of the program fully justified the budget deficits it helped create. (minutes, October 1936) The membership unanimously ratified the approbation and instructed its delegate to the national committee to vote accordingly. A group formed to
study American foreign policy reported that its investigation of trade barriers, adherence to the World Court, and membership in the League of Nations resulted in no position "which would clearly warrant the support of ethically minded people"; it faulted the national committee for failing to restrict the scope of the issue.

Also at that meeting, the membership considered the proposed register for conscientious objectors, which would have incorporated the following declaration:

I, the undersigned member of the __________ Society for Ethical Culture, hereby record my opposition to any and all kinds of war. Out of the convictions developed by membership in the Society, and with due respect to the convictions of those fellow-members who give a different interpretation to the Society's principles, I affirm my sense that the slaying of human beings in war, even in war of defense, is morally wrong, and I further affirm that for my own part I will in no way whatever assist knowingly the waging of any war that may come. I am aware that in time of war those who stand by a declaration like this will suffer the consequences; but I am making this considered statement now because conscience impels me.

The membership unanimously voted down the proposal. As a compromise, those present unanimously declared their sympathy with efforts to secure official recognition of conscientious objectors regardless of religious affiliation.

Initially, few societies shared St. Louis's enthusiasm for the Public Affairs project. At the 1936 assembly, only St. Louis and Philadelphia provided comprehensive reports on their in-house studies. Brooklyn's public affairs committee had undertaken an agenda of its own, and Chicago, New York, and Westchester deferred their reports. On the national level, the program sputtered. Algernon Black of the New York Society attempted to win unified support for the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War; the national Public Affairs Committee distributed a proposed resolution on the issue early in 1937, but no consensus was reached. The local Public Affairs Committee remained active for three or four years, but involvement in what had now become an unofficial debate program waxed and waned. Society subgroups such as the United Nations Discussion Group, the Men's Club, and the Young People's Association regularly discussed public issues, but few attempts were made to reach or publicize firm conclusions.

In 1947, Black asked the societies to ratify a "Declaration of Human Rights and Responsibilities" he had drafted. The declaration was an idealistic statement of universal goals at the personal,
community, national, and international levels. For the most part, it was radical only to the extent that the principles enunciated in the U.S. Bill of Rights represented a condemnation of the authoritarianism prevailing throughout the globe. However, it included distinctively liberal components: In addition to rights traditionally recognized in America, such as freedom of speech and religion and equal protection under the law, it advocated progressive principles such as the right to a guaranteed living wage and "a social minimum" of housing, medical care, and education; the right to plan parenthood and obtain divorce; and the right of labor unions to strike. At the global level, it would recognize the right of all nations to participate in a federation for the settlement of disputes and protection from aggression, as well as the right of access to raw materials, credits, and markets without religious, ideological, or cultural prejudice. The document enumerated the responsibilities that necessarily correlate with each stated right; for example, the right to a living wage and social security carries the responsibility "for contributing at least as much productivity as a worker as one demands as a consumer," and the right of nations to self-government implies the responsibility of political subgroups to vigorously employ the tools of democracy. Reflecting the terror of the dawning Nuclear Age, the document declared that "whether men achieve ... unity or are divided into destructive conflict against one another, whether they enjoy the fruits of nature and of human effort or destroy one another, is the basic ethical problem of our time." (Draft of "Declaration of Human Rights and Responsibilities," by Algernon D. Black, May 1947.) St. Louisans were less than enthusiastic about the declaration. Copies of the draft were distributed to trustees and other "representative members" of the Society at the beginning of the summer. After discussing the declaration at length at its first meeting in the 1947-48 season, the board voted to "tactfully reject" the proposal. In its response, the board suggested that the AEU henceforth submit study questions -- rather than prepared statements -- to the member societies.

The AEU revived the Public Affairs Committee in 1948. At the request of the national committee, the St. Louis membership approved a by-law re-establishing a local committee to oversee the study of public issues and to report its conclusions and recommendations to the board. As before, the board would submit proposed resolutions to the membership before instructing its delegate to the national committee. (minutes, May 1949) In its first year, the reconstituted AEU committee asked the societies to evaluate three resolutions supporting the United Nations and federal aid to public education. This time, no groups were formed explicitly to examine the proposals, but the U.N. resolutions -- which called for international adherence to the United Nations as a step toward world federalism -- were studied in depth by the Society's U.N. Discussion Group and were made the topic of discussion at a community dinner. The membership ultimately approved locally drafted versions of the resolutions, which were later adopted in substance at the AEU assembly. This process of confirming resolutions would be
invoked frequently in the decades to come, but members of the St. Louis Society generally minimize the practice: The tiny AEU wields little clout in the public arena, and its freethinking members are hardly inclined to adopt moral convictions simply because a majority of their confreres has sanctioned them.

Amid the efforts to establish a national mechanism for making ethical pronouncements, the board grew ambivalent over its own policy of neutrality. When the Social Hygiene Association in December 1937 requested the board's endorsement of an ordinance that would reorganize St. Louis's venereal disease treatment program, the board's reply reaffirmed that it did not have "the authority to ... take any definite action which would commit the society as a whole on any public question." However, the board hedged on that policy when New York's John Lovejoy Elliott in 1938 asked the societies to support a congressional bill raising the intake limit on German refugees. Again, the board refused to commit the Society to a firm stand, but it did agree to inform the membership of Elliott's letter-writing campaign.

Church-state separation, the one controversial principle championed by virtually all Society members, is the only issue on which the board readily suspended its neutrality. In 1948, the board applauded the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that children could not be released from compulsory secular education to attend classes in religious instruction. The board sent a telegram to New York leader V.T. Thayer congratulating him on his lobbying efforts in the legal battle. On the local scene, board president Harold Hanke, an attorney, was authorized to write the St. Louis Board of Education commending a committee recommendation that the district discontinue its released-time program in light of the ruling. The letter stated the Society "is deeply concerned ... in the problems of moral instruction of children, but shares the view of many other religious organizations that these problems cannot be met by the released time plan, or any other use of the public school system to further sectarian instruction." (letter from Harold Hanke to Mervyn E. Wiethaupt, secretary of the Board of Education of St. Louis, dated April 12, 1948) At the Board of Education meeting held to air the issue, Hanke forcefully conveyed the Society's opposition to the released-time program. (On the advice of its legal counsel, the school board discontinued the program.) Likewise, when New York's Jerome Nathanson in 1950 requested support for a congressional bill barring private schools from receiving federal financial assistance, the board swiftly complied with letters to congressional representatives and the House Committee on Labor and Education.

Racial Integration: A Call to Integrity

The community may have had difficulty reaching a consensus on issues facing Congress and the United Nations, but the weightiest ethical issue it tackled was in its own home: The question of admitting
blacks to unqualified membership, a controversy that had been shunted for decades, finally was answered in the forties. The Society's by-laws never explicitly excluded blacks, but the community was less than hospitable to early black applicants. Ironically, one of the Society's founders had struck a powerful blow for civil rights: In 1916, Charles Nagel, the former White House cabinet member in whose offices the nascent community held organizational meetings, was one of four attorneys who fought for -- and secured -- a temporary federal restraining order preventing enforcement of St. Louis's recently adopted residential segregation ordinance. [FOOTNOTE 1] That ardor for equality was not in evidence in 1921, when the board decided not to invite a newly accepted black member to the annual dinner for inductees. (minutes, May 17, 1921) At that meeting, the board voted that "this question of the status of negro members be thoroughly gone into at some future meeting of the [Executive] Committee."

The notation "colored" beneath one of the names in a list of new members indicates at least one more black joined the Society in that decade, but there is no evidence that the question was "thoroughly gone into" in those years. So while blacks were welcome at the Society's lectures and concerts, their admissibility as members remained dubious. The Society's welcome was untested in the thirties and early forties: Several blacks regularly attended platform services, but apparently none applied for membership. The practical question confronting the community was whether to make it known that blacks would be welcome to join the Society and its Sunday School.

Amid the collective postwar sigh of relief, the denial of civil rights to millions of black Americans finally pricked the nation's conscience. Blacks who had fought in the war (in segregated platoons) were less accepting of second-class status in the nation for which they had risked their lives; the assertiveness of these veterans gradually spread through their communities. In the Ethical Society, the "Negro problem" had become a frequent topic of lectures and discussions. In 1939, a Sunday School assembly in honor of Abraham Lincoln was combined with an observation of the Urban League's twentieth anniversary; the league's secretary spoke at the assembly, the theme of which was "Helping Our Negro Neighbors." In the fall of 1944, the Adult Discussion Group took up the question of "What the Negro Wants." Novelist Fannie Cook, author-journalist Carey McWilliams, and University of Chicago professor Allison Davis advocated black equality in platform addresses. Hynd, going against the tenor of the times, invited NAACP director Walter White and other blacks to speak at Ethical services; on one such occasion, the board asked that the speaker not be "billed as a negro and so imply that we were trading on the racial issue." (minutes, November 1944)

The Society was not all talk: In the manner of Walter L. Sheldon -- who instituted the Colored People's Self-Improvement Federation as a corollary to the Self-Culture Clubs -- the Society exhibited a certain noblesse oblige toward the black community. Though ordinarily stingy about rental fees, the
board several times granted free use of Sheldon Memorial for black forums conducted by the YMCA and the Works Progress Administration. And, in authorizing the president in 1943 to hire a new janitor, the board asked him to bear in mind "the possibility of colored help or perhaps a Japanese American." (minutes, September 1943) Hynd and several Society members served on the board of the Urban League; and a 1941 article in the community's monthly bulletin noted that Hynd was "cooperating with Bishop Scarlett in seeking to reduce the discriminations against the Negro population in the National Defense program. Do you know that the Negro population is likely to be excluded almost entirely from the benefits accruing from the building and industrial programs for National Defense in Saint Louis and vicinity? The situation may become very serious." (News Notes, February 1941, Vol. III, No. 6)

As progressive St. Louis churches slowly began to encourage integration, the Society's board cautiously tested the members' openness to the forthright admission of blacks. In February 1945, on a recommendation of the Advisory and Planning Council, the board authorized the Adult Discussion Group to hold a dinner meeting to which blacks would be invited and at which a black would speak; the council hoped the event would elicit white members' attitudes toward mingling with blacks. In May, the council formally recommended that blacks be invited to membership in the Society with full rights and privileges, and that the Membership Committee be informed the policy was to take effect immediately. Most trustees favored the proposed policy but were reluctant to antagonize the few sharp dissenters. The recommendation was tabled until the June meeting, when the board held its first on-the-record debate on the matter. One trustee asked the board to bear in mind "the attitude of the older members" -- i.e., hostility to integration -- but others noted that prospective membership applicants "might decide adversely, feeling that discrimination indicated a discrepancy between the professed and the actual practice." (minutes, June 1945) The question was not resolved, but the trustees agreed to resume the discussion in the fall. They did not.

The issue was brought to a head in December, when a black woman named Mabel Curtis asked to send her twin 10-year-old sons, Robert B. and Thomas A. Curtis, to the Sunday School. A "lengthy and spirited discussion" of the request was held at the December board meeting. Board president Henry Putzel, who felt passionately that the Society was ethically obliged to welcome the boys, vacated the chair to symbolically release himself from the duty of impartial mediation. It was noted -- for the first time -- that a proposal to admit blacks to the school previously had been dropped after meeting with resistance from teachers. Some board members contended that sentiments had changed substantially since blacks last expressed interest in the school; others, however, held that the retention of state segregation laws [FOOTNOTE 2] indicated Missourians were not prepared to accept integration. They warned that the admission of blacks likely would spur resignations from membership and withdrawals.
from the Sunday School. While the issue no doubt challenged the trustees' personal readiness to associate more closely with blacks, opponents of admission simply voiced concern that the membership was not prepared for such a change. On the other side of the issue, several trustees saw the refusal to admit blacks as an unjustifiable violation of basic ethical principles; unless the policy was changed, they warned, the Society would be rightly branded as hypocritical. Hynd timidly sat out the controversy, assuring the board that he would abide by its decision. Finally, agreeing that setting a policy unilaterally could incite more ill will than the policy itself, the board asked its Sunday School liaison to investigate the attitudes of parents and teachers.

The PTA likewise dragged its feet. Jennie Wahlert, the Sunday School liaison, reported in May that "the question had been discussed informally with the teachers but should have further consideration." (minutes, May 1946) The PTA did not place discussion of the issue on its agenda until February 1947 -- 14 months after the board requested its input. The board, meanwhile, held another "lengthy discussion" on the issue in December 1946, agreeing that "the question should be carefully studied and that a program of education should be worked out whereby outstanding negroes are invited to address various groups and meetings of the society." (minutes, December 1946) In February 1947, the PTA reported to the board the results of its poll: 24 parents favored the admission of black pupils, while six were opposed; among teachers, seven were favorable and two opposed. Having debated the issue for two full years, and having satisfied its obligation to consult parents and teachers, the board finally voted "that it be the policy of the Board to admit to membership in the Ethical Society and to the Sunday School persons regardless of race, creed, color or national origin." (minutes, February 1947)

A few Society members resigned over the policy, but otherwise it had no dramatic effect. The community made no special effort to solicit black membership applicants. In the forties and fifties, only a handful of blacks joined the Society, but those who sought active roles found their contributions -- as trustees, Sunday School teachers, and, in one case, as AEU representative -- were welcomed.

Despite its open-door policy, the Society, as a body, was slow to support racial equality in the larger community. In 1947, the board sent a representative to the Race Relations Institute. (minutes, January 1947) But when asked in 1948 to support pending equal-rights legislation, the board invoked its traditional neutrality. (minutes, June 1948) Likewise, in 1950 the board declined to reply to a questionnaire from the Missouri Association for Social Welfare soliciting the Society's attitude toward the admission of blacks to state-supported colleges. (minutes, June 1950 [second meeting of month]) In the following decades, however, Hynd's successor and numerous Society members were to take decisive action in the civil rights movement.
(In a soul-searching commemoration of slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., the Society in 1986 resurrected its squabble over the admission of blacks. An excerpt from King's letter from Birmingham Jail, in which he inveighed against "moderate" whites who would govern the pace of change, was juxtaposed with a dramatization of the board's deliberations. Modern dances by a black member and her daughter, poignantly conveying both rejection and acceptance, were included in the service. Underscoring the challenge to welcome contemporary pariahs, the observation concluded with the submission of membership applications by actors portraying an ex-convict, a homosexual, a drug addict, and a person with AIDS. The commemoration was re-enacted at the AEU assembly held later that year in St. Louis. Thomas Curtis, whose family's application to the Sunday School had forced the issue, attended the second event at the Society's invitation. Harold Hanke, who presided over the board in its concluding deliberations in 1947, also was honored.) [FOOTNOTE 3]

[FOOTNOTE 1: The injunction was made permanent in 1918 after the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional a similar ordinance in Louisville. Source: James Neal Primm, Lion of the Valley (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company, 1981), p. 439]

[FOOTNOTE 2: In 1938, the U.S. Supreme Court, in chipping away at the precedential "separate but equal" principle of segregated schooling, ordered a black admitted to the University of Missouri law school because no black law school existed in the state. Not until the 1954 case of Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka did the court unqualifiedly declare educational segregation unconstitutional.]

[FOOTNOTE 3: An edifying footnote attends this story. Robert Byrd Curtis, one of the first two blacks to graduate from the Society's Sunday School, grew to become one of St. Louis's most vocal and controversial civil rights activists. In 1959, while a law student at Washington University, Curtis and two black companions were arrested and convicted of trespassing when they attempted to eat at Santoro's, a restaurant near the university. Their convictions in University City court were overturned on appeal, but the experience apparently strengthened the resolve Curtis's mother had instilled in him. A few years later, while serving in the Army at Fort Hood, Texas, he was involved in sit-ins that led to a ruling that military police could not be used to enforce local segregation policies. After beginning his law practice in 1962, Curtis became chairman of CORE (Congress of Racial Equality). In 1963, CORE launched a campaign to urge banks to hire more black employees. After a sit-in at the Jefferson Bank and Trust Co., Curtis and eight others were found guilty of violating a circuit court restraining order. The heaviest sentences -- nine months in jail and a $1,000 fine each -- went to Curtis and William L. Clay, \( \int \)
who later became a U.S. Congressman. Curtis served as an assistant attorney general while his appeal was pending, but was forced to resign the post to serve four months of his sentence. The Jefferson Bank case stirred tremendous controversy in St. Louis and is considered a signal confrontation in the local fight for economic equality. At a memorial service for Curtis, the Reverend Buck Jones noted that blacks who work "in banking in St. Louis, at Southwestern Bell, in the department stores, and elsewhere, should not forget the contribution of Robert Byrd Curtis." (St. Louis American, April 24-30, 1986)

In 1968, Curtis ran for the Democratic nomination for governor to protest the actions of incumbent Governor Warren E. Hearnes, who had quickly sent National Guard troops into Kansas City to quell the riots that followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Curtis charged that the Guard had acted in a brutal, repressive manner. He also criticized Hearnes for failing to sponsor a state open-housing law and failing to appoint blacks to high government positions. In addition, he accused Hearnes of attempting to gerrymander the First Congressional District in North St. Louis to undercut the black vote. Curtis ran a distant second in a field of three.

In 1969 and 1970, Curtis served as a staff attorney for the Legal Aid Society of St. Louis and St. Louis County. His tenure there was a rocky one. His penchant for defending militant civil rights activists such as Percy Green, and his volunteer position as legal adviser to ACTION (Action Committee to Increase Opportunities for Negroes), a splinter group of CORE, cost Legal Aid $76,000 in funding from St. Louis County and the United Fund. Curtis resigned from the agency after a year and a half, and for two years directed the Newark Legal Services Corporation of New Jersey. He then returned to Missouri, where he served as a regional attorney for the St. Louis and Kansas City offices of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission until his death in 1986.
Throwing Open the Doors

In addition to conducting in-house discussions -- in the Adult Discussion Group, at community dinners, at question-and-answer periods in platform services, and at evening forums in the auditorium -- the Society continued to experiment with public service programs.

The Society marked its fiftieth anniversary by hosting an AEU convention and sponsoring a single large-scale public forum on the social changes indicated by the Great Depression. The meeting, held November 27, 1936, was titled "What Changes Are Required for Social Reconstruction?" The keynote speaker was Paul Kellog, editor of Survey Graphic. Alexander S. Langsdorf, dean of the schools of engineering and architecture at Washington University and president of the Society's board of trustees, presided over a panel discussion that included J. Lionberger Davis, president of Security National Bank, who represented the business community; Mary Ryder, vice president of Central Trade and Labor Union, representing labor; Robert D. Kohn, past president of both the American Institute of Architects and the Construction League of the United States, representing technical professions; Isidor Loeb, dean of the Washington University School of Law, representing government; Mark McCloskey, director of the National Youth Administration of New York City, representing education; and Horace J. Bridges, leader of the Chicago Ethical Society, representing religion.

In 1935, Percival Chubb had proposed a series of discussions be arranged as the first step toward founding a "People's School of Politics and Civics" in preparation for the 1936 presidential election. The proposal died in the water. When the community forum idea again arose in 1937, Hynd agreed to chair a committee to investigate the possible use of Sheldon Memorial for a series of public meetings. While interviewing the directors of social welfare agencies about participating in the series, Hynd learned that the Adult Education Council had mapped out a series of lunchtime forums to be held in East St. Louis from January through March of 1938. Borrowing on the Council's organizational efforts, Hynd proposed that the Society sponsor a series of corresponding evening meetings at which the same speakers would address the public on this side of the river. The board agreed to finance the program from its speakers' fund, and Society subgroups provided publicity and hospitality services. No admission fees were charged, but collections were taken to offset costs. At the first forum on January 14, 1938, Elizabeth P. MacCallum discussed, "Partition of Palestine: Betrayal or Solution?" On February 11, Maxwell S. Stewart, associate editor of The Nation, spoke on, "Security or the Dole?" At the final meeting in the series on March 11, Walter Laves, secretary of the Chicago chapter of the League of Nations Association, spoke on "Can America Remain Neutral in Another World War?" The meetings drew as many as 150 people per evening, but the board was dissatisfied. When a board member proposed that
the Society independently conduct a similar series in the 1938-39 season, the consensus was that public interest did not warrant the effort.

In addition to the series based on the Adult Education Council's program, the Society in 1938 co-sponsored a daylong conference on the merit system in civil service with the St. Louis chapter of the League of Women Voters. Held on February 25, the conference included morning, afternoon and evening sessions. At the evening session, David L. Robinson, associate director of the Public Administration Service in Chicago, spoke on "What the Merit System Can Do for Missouri." The following year, the groups collaborated in presenting a similar daylong conference, this time on housing. Hynd and league president Jeanne Blythe presided over the February 13 conference, which presented a variety of perspectives on the problem of St. Louis's decaying slums and the use of federal subsidies. The program included an open discussion of labor problems and construction costs. Speakers represented the St. Louis Health Department, the City Planning Commission, the St. Louis Housing Association, the St. Louis Real Estate Exchange, and the St. Louis Foundation for Neighborhood Improvement. Attendance at the three sessions ranged from one hundred to two hundred.

The Adult Discussion Group, under the leadership of Leslie D. "Mac" McIntyre, attempted in 1944 to launch a "Freedom Forum" in which social issues would be publically explored. Using a $100 allotment from the Prather Fund, the group hired a name speaker for an October 1 forum on the Missouri Valley Authority. The lecture-discussion drew more than a hundred people, but, despite publicity efforts, few non-Society members attended. McIntyre envisaged a series of highly publicized forums which would feature unpaid speakers and be open to the public free of charge, but the dream -- like its predecessors -- never materialized. Instead, the discussion group presented, in addition to its Sunday morning sessions, periodic in-house dinner discussions.

Similarly, the Young People's Association, with financial backing from the board, conducted a conference titled "Youth Faces the Post-War World" in April 1945. The lauded conference, modeled after one the New York Society had sponsored, included forums on "The World Youth is Facing," "Finding a Job in Tomorrow's Economy," and "Overcoming Prejudice." The featured speakers were Edgar C. Taylor, headmaster of the Taylor School for Boys; Arno J. Haack, executive secretary of the Washington University branch of the YMCA-YWCA; and Francis P. Chisholm, professor of English at Stephens College. Leader-in-training William Hammond trained Y.P.A. members to serve as leaders of small-group discussions. The symposiums, held on three consecutive Sunday afternoons, were open to college students and high school juniors and seniors.

Hynd suggested that the Society observe its 60th anniversary in 1946 with a Midwestern version of a recent New York conference on "the Scientific Spirit and Democratic Faith." As an alternative, he
proposed a daylong institute of religions to which ministers, rabbis, and priests would be invited. The proposals did not get off the ground. The Society belatedly observed the anniversary by hosting the AEU assembly in 1947. The conference included two public lectures: On May 16, Emily Taft Douglas, a former Illinois representative to the U.S. Congress, spoke on "Women in National and International Affairs"; the next day, V.T. Thayer of New York's Ethical Culture Schools presented an address on "Religious Freedom and Public Education."
A Civic Institution

The Chamber Music Concerts the Society began presenting in the 1930-31 season quickly became a St. Louis institution. A string quartet under the direction of Max Steindel, solo cellist and personnel manager of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, provided most of the performances in the thirties and early forties. Steindel's ensemble was augmented by local instrumental and vocal soloists, including Ethical Society organist Florence Jewett and soprano Helen Traubel Carpenter, a church choir singer who later embarked on a distinguished operatic career. A series subscription -- two tickets to each of three concerts -- cost $5. The three-concert series were designed to provide an education in music history: The 1933-34 series, for instance, contrasted Classicism, Romanticism, and Impressionism; concerts in the 1934-35 series gave listeners a taste of Russian, English, and Spanish composition styles; and the 1936-37 season provided an overview of Beethoven's maturation as a chamber music composer.

To help concertgoers cultivate a discerning ear, program notes provided background on musical trends and the distinctive contributions of noted composers. Countless newspaper reviews praised the Steindel Ensemble, [FOOTNOTE 1] which coalesced via these performances, and congratulated the Society on filling a void in the city's cultural life. Praises also abounded for Sheldon Memorial, which musicians and concertgoers alike hailed as one of the nation's most acoustically excellent music halls.

(Unfortunately, the hall also was renowned for its matchlessly hard seats.)

The stellar performances and glowing reviews belied an ongoing struggle to keep the series alive. After the Society absorbed deficits on the 1932-33 and 1934-35 series, the board questioned whether the program could feasibly be continued. The Music Committee secured enough guarantors -- mostly civic boosters from outside the Society -- to win the board's go-ahead for the 1935-36 series, but it was put on notice that the series would be the last if it did not pay for itself. Fortunately, the series brought in enough proceeds to allow the Music Committee to reimburse the Society for the debts it had carried. Percival Chubb, a steadfast supporter of the series, braced organizers' hopes that the program would find sure footing as the public acquired a taste for the music:

Chamber Music has been the Cinderella of the musical family. She was once in high favor among the courtly aristocrats in Europe, who set the great composers to catering for them in their small music halls. But she has not attracted the populace.

Happily, the younger generation is being educated by [the increasing vogue of symphony concerts] -- witness our Students' Philharmonic Concerts. But there is a
difference. They present a spectacle, including the engaging figures of great soloists. Orchestras add a dramatic interest. How different these quiet, undemonstrative little ensembles! Besides, the music is different. It is pure music, whereas much of the symphony music is descriptive program music; the pieces often have literary titles which give their themes a structure -- for instance, "Romeo and Juliet" and "Midsummer Night's Dream." But education is making headway! Young people are being educated in our Music Settlements. We have our Community Music Schools [FOOTNOTE 2] here in St. Louis; and our Concert Committee has been liberal in supplying their best pupils with tickets to our concerts . . . .

(Undated handwritten notes, apparently in preparation for a promotional talk prior to the 1939-40 series)

The Music Committee in the thirties was headed up by Rudolph Schmitz, founder of the program. Schmitz, a longtime Society member who had served on the board from 1903-19, so adored chamber music that he briefly resigned from the Society in protest when organ music replaced string quartets as the staple of the platform service. Schmitz's passion for fine music often conflicted with the board's pragmatism. Anguished by the number of seats that sat vacant during outstanding performances, he gave complimentary tickets to public schools for distribution to exceptional music students. He wanted to give still more tickets to private schools and symphony musicians, but the board, concerned that extensive giveaways would hamper ticket sales, checked his generosity. The board also curbed Schmitz's penchant for booking costly soloists. But Schmitz was less than conciliatory. For the sake of music lovers and musicians alike, he regularly proposed expanding the number of concerts offered per season. Much to his chagrin, the board regularly turned him down. The conflict came to a head when Schmitz proposed to arrange a six-concert series for the 1939-40 season. The board referred the proposal to the full Music Committee -- which Schmitz himself was disinclined to consult -- for a recommendation. The Music Committee voted down the proposal as financially unfeasible. Schmitz, true to form, resigned the chairmanship in protest. He soon attempted to retract his resignation, but the board, wearied of his recalcitrance, insisted on accepting it. Schmitz served out the season as chairman. In May 1939, the board named him "honorary chairman" of the program, but took pains to ensure that authority to sign contracts be held solely by Schmitz's successor, Jules Bebie. Despite the strained feelings, the Music Committee was anxious to assure Schmitz that the Society deeply appreciated his initiation and -- for ten years -- direction of the program. In an ironic tribute to him, the committee added a fourth concert to the 1939-40 series at no extra cost to season-ticket holders. [FOOTNOTE 3]
Bebie headed up the Music Committee for three seasons, Jennie Wahlert for one. From 1943 into the fifties, the program was directed by J.G.W. Schoenthaler, an accomplished musician and chamber music aficionado who readily cooperated with the board.

Appointing the chairman was not the only authority the board exercised over the Music Committee. In its efforts to make the concert series a going concern, the board in 1937 placed the sale and distribution of tickets into the hands of the Entertainment Committee, which oversaw the Society's social and fund-raising events. It also persuaded the Music Committee to contribute the slim proceeds from the concerts directly to the Society instead of unilaterally determining their use for special platform music; naturally, the committee retained seed money for the ensuing season. Perturbed by the committee's assumption that the concerts were the inevitable highlight of the Society's calendar, the board insisted that the committee clear proposed dates with the Organization Committee to avoid precluding other Society events. And, prompted by occasional notes of criticism in concert reviews, the board also demanded that the committee more closely supervise the preparation of participating local musicians. At the same time, however, the board consistently supported the program. Once the reputation of the Chamber Music Concerts was established, trustees adopted a wholehearted commitment to maintaining the program's viability. The board continued to insist that the concerts pay for themselves -- which they usually did -- but it regarded the program principally as a community service, not a fund-raising device. The board encouraged Society members to volunteer for the enormous amount of work the concerts required. It also drew the community into the administration of the program; beginning in 1949, it permitted non-Society members to serve on the Music Committee, demanding only that Society members predominate.

Under the supervision of the Entertainment Committee, ticket sales hit a record high in the 1939-40 season. Buoyed by the success of the series, the Music Committee continued the four-concert format for several years. In the 1942-43 season, however, the board had to save the committee from a deficit by reducing the Society's rental fee and appealing for support from the membership. Consequently, the 1943-44 series was reduced to three concerts; that series turned a tidy profit, and the three-concert format was retained for the next fifteen seasons. [FOOTNOTE 4]

A twist of fate pushed the music series to new heights of quality in the 1944-45 season. The St. Louis Ensemble, which had been booked for all three concerts, backed out of two of them because of scheduling conflicts. The Music Committee, forced to reach beyond the city limits to fill out the season, booked the Philharmonic String Quartet of Chicago for the open dates. The cost of the Chicago quartet drove the series into the red, but public response to the guests was more than encouraging. With its limited funds, the committee scaled back the 1945-46 season to two concerts but booked out-of-town...
artists - the Chicago quartet and Toronto's Hart House Quartet -- for both. These touring ensembles proved such a strong draw that local musicians were entirely eased out of the program by 1948. In 1947, the Society introduced to St. Louis the famed Paganini Quartet, [FOOTNOTE 5] which returned frequently to Sheldon Memorial. In the ensuing years, the Society brought in the Budapest, Italian, Pascal, and Julliard string quartets, among many others.

The Chamber Music Concerts brought the Society high regard in the St. Louis community. Among music lovers, the name Ethical Society was forever associated with memorable aesthetic experiences. Conscious that many members -- and potential members -- first encountered the Society via the concerts, the community subtly noted that its message could be heard in the strains of Schumann and Strauss. Many of the series' program booklets carried this foreword:

Across the stage of the National Music Camp at Interlochen, Michigan appears in large letters the legend:

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF WORLD FRIENDSHIP
THROUGH THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE OF THE ARTS

In this spirit, these concerts are sponsored by the Ethical Society of St. Louis, which believes that religious dedication may be tested by what men do for one another on this earth.

[FOOTNOTE 1: FOOTNOTE: In the course of personnel changes, the ensemble went by the names Guidi-Steindel Quartet, Farbman-Steindel Quartet, the St. Louis String Quartet, and finally the St. Louis Ensemble.]

[FOOTNOTE 2: A forerunner of the St. Louis Conservatory and Schools for the Arts (CASA).]

[FOOTNOTE 3: Using a portion of the proceeds from that series, the committee gave Schmitz a set of classical recordings as a token of gratitude. The tribute came none too soon: Schmitz died in 1941 at the age of 89. The first concert of the 1941-42 season was dedicated to his memory, as was the last concert of the 1949-50 season -- the series' twentieth.]


[FOOTNOTE 4: Exceptions were the 1945-46 and 1948-49 series, which financial constraints limited to two concerts.]

[FOOTNOTE 5: The Paganini Quartet of San Francisco was billed as the "all-Stradivarius Quartet." All of its instruments were created by the renowned craftsman and had been owned by Paganini.]
Apart from sponsoring chamber concerts, the Society, as a body, remained disinclined to undertake community service. The prevailing attitude, often enunciated by the influential trustee R. Walston Chubb, was that the Society is an "ethical powerhouse" which inspires members to take on charitable causes privately. As before, the Society's chief contribution to the community was in granting use of Sheldon Memorial to charitable and civic groups. In 1934, the Society donated use of the auditorium for a concert by blind musicians -- the opening event of Educational Week for the Blind. In 1935, the board provided the building for a public forum on the Wagner-Lewis bill, which was to become the National Labor Relations Act. And in 1939, a college alumnae association was permitted to hold a Christmas party for needy children in the Assembly Hall. But the board turned down more requests for free building use than it granted. Organizations with a direct tie to the Society were most apt to win the board's approval. In the mid-thirties, the board permitted the St. Louis Consumers Cooperative Club -- which include several Ethical Society members -- to use the library once a month. Society member Edna Gellhorn, a national and local leader of the League of Women Voters, often obtained use of the building for league meetings at reduced rates. The American Civil Liberties Union, an agency initiated by members of the Ethical movement, also was given preferential rates. Likewise, the Neighborhood Association -- into which the Self-Culture Halls Association had merged -- was given free use of the building for its 50th anniversary celebration in 1938. During the war, the Society provided use of the building for several relief programs. In January 1943, relatives of war prisoners used the building to draft strategies for establishing communication with the men. Later that year, the U.S. Navy was given free use of the auditorium for a graduation service.

Beyond these occasional offers of assistance, the board was chary of committing the Society to outside agencies. In 1915, the board had formally banned the posting or voicing of announcements regarding organizations other than the Society. That policy still was in effect in 1925, when the board prohibited the distribution of leaflets urging passage of child labor laws. However, in 1931, the board did appoint a delegate to the embryonic Vigilance Committee of Washington Boulevard, an organization intended to "combat the vice evils on this boulevard." Similarly, when the American League Against War and Fascism in 1935 asked the board to appoint a representative to its executive committee, the board appointed Elsie Langsdorf to attend committee meetings and report to the Society on the league's activities. Even still, the action was taken with the understanding that Langsdorf's status was unofficial; the minutes noted that "the board has no authority to appoint a delegate to participate in the activities of an outside organization." Bracing its traditional policy, when the Society in 1940 was invited to join the
Public Education Association, the board advised the association that the Society does not commit itself to outside federations. Successive boards often asked Society members who served in community organizations to act as observers for the Society, but never authorized them to bind the Society to ethical stands or political strategies. [FOOTNOTE 1]

Although skittish about formal commitments, the Society did cooperate with other religious communities. It promoted and participated in interdenominational civic meetings held at Sheldon Memorial and elsewhere. In 1935, Hynd delivered the first of a series of four talks on religion held at Washington University; his address -- later complemented by Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish speakers - - was titled "Meaning and Concepts of the Ethical Movement." Hynd, like his predecessors, participated in pulpit exchanges with Unitarian and other liberal ministers. Likewise, Society Sunday School teachers observed the operation of sectarian Sunday schools and took part in interdenominational training programs.

The Society did form a rather ineffectual alliance with two like-minded St. Louis communities. In 1950, it formally struck a liaison with the Rationalists Society and the Freie Gemeinde, a dwindling German freethinkers' group from which many of the Ethical Society's earliest members were drawn. At a meeting at Sheldon Memorial, group representatives agreed the three societies would band together in defense of religious liberty. Each group appointed a liaison to the other groups; board president Alexander S. Langsdorf was the Society's first representative. Proposals for common action adopted by the central committee were to be referred to the respective societies for membership action. As a sign of its firm intentions, the coalition in 1951 marked the Freie Gemeinde's 100th anniversary with a public address on church-state separation at Sheldon Memorial. In the years to come, Society members who held joint membership in the other groups sustained the loose alliance, but it produced no substantive actions. [FOOTNOTE 2]

As a matter of policy, the Society did not donate funds to charitable causes. The board made an exception in 1946, when it appropriated funds to send food parcels to famished members of a Freie Gemeinde community in Hamburg, Germany. In 1950, the National Women's Conference of the AEU asked the Society -- via the United Nations Discussion Group -- to contribute a Sunday collection to a campaign to benefit UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund). The board, sympathetic but wary of setting a precedent, turned down the request, and instead simply publicized the fund in the Society bulletin.

One of the Society's rare ventures into community service was a small-scale vacation school conducted in the summer of 1944 for neighborhood children and the children of Society members.

Weekly art classes, which Josie Wangelin had conducted every summer for years, were augmented by a
weekly day camp directed by leader-in-training William Hammond. About eighteen children, ranging in age from 6 to 12, took part in this recreational "Friday Club." Hammond departed the following year, and nothing similar was attempted until the Society initiated its nursery school. The Advisory and Planning Council in 1948 revived the 1927 proposal to buy or build a community center, preferably in St. Louis County, but the scheme was sentenced to death by committee.

[FOOTNOTE 1: At the annual meeting in 1949, the membership approved a by-law requiring that all delegates of the Society to outside organizations be Society members.]

[FOOTNOTE 2: The Freie Gemeinde, upon its dissolution, was to donate its assets to the Society. See Chapter ??]
A PRUDENTIAL PATH

Tackling Challenges with Sparse Tackle

A small, young religious community, like a small, young business, is harshly taxed by social and economic crises. To sustain itself until more propitious times, it must marshal its limited resources wisely. The tiny Ethical Society of St. Louis was buffeted by the Great Depression and World War II: Its finances were decimated; its young men were called to the front. Having no stockpile of money or abundance of people power, it plodded its way through those storms with caution, forethought, creative leadership, and a modicum of luck.

Of the Members, by the Members

Board President Alexander S. Langsdorf, whose administrative duties at Washington University left him with little spare time, demanded efficiency. He constructed a standing order of business, and he rarely allowed meetings to run longer than two hours. Only reports that had been submitted in writing could be presented. On his order, written instructions for the heads of all standing committees were drawn up in 1935. Langsdorf recognized that, contrary to custom, board members were not always ideal candidates for the chairmanships of standing committees; he sought the freedom to invite especially talented Society members to take on leadership roles. In 1936, the board proposed -- and the membership approved -- by-law amendments allowing the president to appoint non-trustees to head up committees.

Langsdorf served as president from 1930 to 1937, at which time he asked to step down because of increasing professional demands. Henry "Max" Putzel, who had served as vice president from 1934 to 1937, assumed the presidency from 1937-46. Harold Hanke was president from 1946-49. R. Walston Chubb was elected president in 1949, but soon declared that he would be unable to take office immediately. Frederic Arnstein reluctantly consented to serve as president that year, with the understanding that Chubb would take over at the end of the season. Meanwhile, Chubb took Arnstein's old job of co-vice president. The "understanding" did not work out as Arnstein had hoped: He was president until 1952, when Chubb finally began a two-year stint. Chubb had served as secretary throughout the thirties and forties. Other steady officers during this era were Wendell P. Kundermann, who served as treasurer throughout the thirties; and Jennie Wahlert, who served as co-vice president in the thirties and throughout the forties.
The remarkably long terms served by some trustees and officers spawned concern that the board was stagnating and growing less responsive to the membership. In 1948, trustee Frederic Arnstein, stating that he wanted to ensure more Society members would serve on the board, proposed a cap on trustees' terms of office. The president appointed a committee to consider drafting a by-law limiting the number of consecutive terms a trustee may serve. At Arnstein's suggestion, the committee also examined the possibility of limiting the number of consecutive terms board officers could serve. The committee concluded that the proposed by-laws would hinder the board's effectiveness. Fixed limitations on service, it said, "would undoubtedly deprive the Society of the advice and counsel of some of the most interested and worthy members." The committee acknowledged, however, that it would be in the Society's interests to have as many members as possible learn about the community's problems and contribute to its growth by serving on the board.

To increase the level of rotation, the committee suggested that the Nominating Committee be made a standing committee instead of being formed just before the annual meeting, thus allowing Society members to recommend candidates for the board throughout the season. The committee further suggested that, as a matter of policy, the Nominating Committee include in its slate of candidates at least one person who had not previously served on the board. By soliciting more input from the membership, the committee reasoned, the Nominating Committee and board president -- who annually appointed non-elected members to one-year terms -- would consider a wider range of members for board service. The Nominating Committee immediately adopted the policy: The membership was asked to submit recommendations to the committee four months before the 1949 annual meeting, and the slate of candidates presented at the meeting included two Society members who had never served on the board.

In 1950, the board's authority to add to its number was widened. The president long had held the authority to annually appoint three non-elected trustees; at the annual meeting in 1950, the membership approved a by-law amendment allowing the board to appoint up to six Society members to one-year board terms. The additional posts raised the maximum number of board members to eighteen -- twelve elected and six appointed.

A Block off the Ol' Chip

R. Walston Chubb's delayed -- and brief -- presidency belies the power he wielded on the board, both in deliberations and behind the scenes. According to Charles "Bud" Blake, Chubb "always sat near the head of the table [at board meetings] and always had more to say than anyone else, whether he was
president or not." (Interview with Charles and Garnet Blake, July 1986) Chubb served on the board for nearly three decades -- probably a record term. After he stepped down, trustees continued to consult him on pending board actions. Like his father, Percival, R.W. "Wally" Chubb was one of the most colorful characters in the Society's history, but his colors were of a different stripe. Percival was a slight man, and, though capable of biting sarcasm when referring to moral opponents, he was canny and gracious in personal intercourse. Walston, by contrast, was "a big bear of a man" (Interview with Ted and Ruth Anderson, Sept. 15, 1986) who had a bawdy sense of humor and the tact of a Missouri mule. "He had a very nasty habit of telling awful, very, very dirty jokes -- I mean real dirty jokes," recalled Walter Hoops (himself no prude), who tapped Chubb's legal expertise in the transfer of Freie Gemeinde property to the Ethical Society. "Our German fellows did not go for that at all. They could take a joke, but he had some real humdingers." (Interview with Walter and Eleanor Hoops, Sept. 18, 1986) Chubb's widow, Louise "Lee" Langenohl Chubb, admitted that her own vocabulary turned a few shades bluer after their marriage. Not surprisingly, some trustees and Society members found Chubb vulgar and bombastic, but most were endeared by his directness, ingenuity, and stubborn loyalty to the Society.

Robert Walston Chubb was born in Brooklyn on May 15, 1894. His mother, whose maiden name of Walston became the boy's moniker, died about 1905. The generosity of his stepmother, Anna Hartshorne Sheldon Chubb, enabled him to attend Harvard, from which he graduated in 1915. He went on to study law at Harvard, Washington University, and Columbia University, taking his law degree from the last institution in 1920. From 1917 to 1919, he took a break from his studies to fight in World War I, serving as a captain in the 342nd Field Artillery of the 89th Division; he later wrote a history of the regiment's experiences in battle. He met his first wife, Irene Sylvester, at Columbia University, where she was working toward a master's degree in economics. The couple had three children -- Louise, Walston Jr., and Elliott, who was named after the revered New York Ethical leader John Lovejoy Elliott. The couple also took in a niece, Rosemary Chubb, when she fled the ravages of World War II England.

Spurning repeated suggestions that the Ethical Society promulgate political stands and communally undertake social action, Chubb believed that the Society should function as an "ethical powerhouse," informing and enlightening members and motivating them to serve the greater community. His position was no empty justification of detached, laissez-faire philosophizing; he exemplified the concept in a lifetime of vigorous community service.

Chubb guided his professional career according to his ethical ideals. After his admission to the New York Bar in 1920 (he had been admitted to the Missouri Bar in 1917), he worked for the New York firm of Cravath and Henderson. Although the firm had "a very high standard of case and thoroughness," (letter from R. Walston Chubb to Percival Chubb, dated Oct. 7, 1921; courtesy of Louise "Lee" Chubb)
he left it after a year because he had "had enough of it and did not see how further work in that line would lead very far." From 1921-24, he served as assistant counsel to the War Finance Corporation, a federal government agency which financed agricultural banks and co-operative associations. Upon the termination of that position, his search for work led him to reassess the value of his vocation. He turned down a lucrative offer of a "nice, respectable, permanent job" as corporate finance counsel to New York's National City Bank because, as he told his father, "I figured I could do better than to spend my life serving Wall Street." (undated letter to Percival Chubb; courtesy of Louise "Lee" Chubb) In response to his father's suggestion that he consider leaving the profession, he expressed his ambivalence:

As for leaving the law, I do not intend to tho I do not think it is easy to use the law as a means to service. Modern lawyers serve corporations -- which are simply property. People separate their property from themselves. By means of the corporate fiction and all, [all] the corporation represents is the acquisitive side and not the human. On its public side the law deals also with property -- its protection and the organization of economic units.

I am not an economic determinist and I like people. Hence my occasional discouragement about the purposive aspects of law -- especially in N.Y.

Unless some rare opportunity shows up between now and summer I think I will hit for the West -- the materialistic West. I can at least try to live in a community and share its problems and perhaps deal with human clients a little more than corporate entities.

(Ibid.)

In 1924, he did indeed head West -- to the same community his father had come to call home. He joined the law firm of Lewis, Rice, Tucker, and Allen, becoming a partner in 1926 -- hence the firm's longtime name of Lewis, Rice, Tucker, Allen, and Chubb. He quickly built a reputation as a brilliant and tenacious lawyer. In addition to representing such imposing entities as the St. Louis Stock Exchange, he took on countless low-yield and pro bono cases. He regularly counseled citizens' groups and all levels of government on the drafting of legislation. In 1932, the governor of the Federal Reserve Board appointed Chubb special counsel for the formation of the $2 billion Reconstruction Finance Corporation, which made loans on the assets of state banks that folded during the Depression; while serving in that capacity, he personally advised President Hoover. Also in the thirties, Chubb served on the St. Louis Bar Association committees that drafted the Missouri Plan for the selection and retention of judges; a
variation of the association's final proposal was approved by voters. In 1938, he was appointed to the St.
Louis Bar Committee, the Missouri Supreme Court's disciplinary body for lawyers in St. Louis. In the
forties, he chaired the Bar committees for the Eighth Judicial Circuit and the Bill of Rights. Reflecting
his passion for protecting civil rights, Chubb in 1956 headed a special committee of the St. Louis Bar
Association which provided counsel to citizens subpoenaed by the Un-American Activities Committee of
the House of Representatives -- a committee formed by Sen. Joseph McCarthy to investigate Communist
activities in the United States. In an editorial, the Post-Dispatch commended Chubb for his vigilance in
protecting the Sixth Amendment in this "unpopular cause." (Post-Dispatch, May 28, 1956)

In addition to freely dispensing his expertise in law and finance, Chubb energetically fought for
liberal causes. As an officer of the St. Louis Social Planning Council, he lobbied the state legislature to
adopt the merit system and other progressive government programs. In 1939, he drew the ire of the
Senate Appropriations Committee by agitating for state social security allotments for children and the
disabled proportionate to the allotments for senior citizens. When one senator questioned the
constitutionality of appropriating relief for children -- which, unlike relief for the elderly, had not been
specifically approved by voters -- Chubb indelicately declared the senator was "concealing the real
reason for his opposition" with a legal technicality. Senator Phil Donnelly of Lebanon, a member of the
committee, sternly warned Chubb he would "get along with the committee much better if you make no
more statements of that kind." (Post-Dispatch, May 11, 1939) In addressing the St. Louis delegation,
Donnelly added: "What we don't like is for people like Mr. Chubb to come here and impugn the motives
of this committee. If all of your delegation were like him, in my opinion, you would not get a cent out of
the General Assembly." (Globe-Democrat, May 11, 1939) The Post-Dispatch castigated the legislature
for sidestepping the issue:

The hearing before the Senate Appropriations Committee yesterday on the State
social security bill was a farce. Instead of giving earnest attention to those who went to
Jefferson City to plead the cause of the unemployables and dependent children, the
committee chose to fall back on its dignity and go into a huff because of a wholly
justified stricture delivered by the spokesman for the St. Louis Social Planning Council.

When R. Walston Chubb made the remark implying that fear of the the power of
the old-age pensioners at the polls is the true explanation of why the Legislature is
willing to treat this class of indigents so much more liberally than other classes, he was
speaking the mind of every thinking citizen in the State. There is no shadow of reason or
of social equity in making an appropriation which allows 16 times as much to an old-age
pensioner as to a person who is physically or mentally incapacitated. (Post-Dispatch??, date??)

Chubb worked heartily in Democratic Party politics. Although he was considered a strong potential candidate for a U.S. congressional seat, he preferred to remain behind the scenes, serving as a party campaigner and an officer of Americans for Democratic Action. In the 1964 presidential election, he served on the National Lawyers Committee for Johnson and Humphrey. Chubb came to regret his support of Johnson as the president escalated the Vietnam War. By 1967, he was "firmly convinced that if the Johnson administration doesn't change its policies, it will bring the Democratic Party down to disaster." (Post-Dispatch, Dec. 9, 1967) Accordingly, Chubb supported pacifist Sen. Eugene J. McCarthy in his challenge of party centrist Sen. Hubert Humphrey, chairing the McCarthy for President State Committee in the 1968 primary. At a Kansas City, Missouri, campaign rally, Chubb echoed his father's ardent pacifism:

"I have heard about the generation gap," Chubb told the young people in the audience, "but I am as young as you are. I was about where you are in 1914. I read then and reviewed Norman Angell's book The Great Illusion. War is still a great illusion.

"I think the cannon fodder . . . has gotten better educated. I want to congratulate you for being here. Now we have found a candidate. I think there is a kind of mystical bond between this man, Gene McCarthy, and all of us who ask the question, 'How can we tolerate this kind of madness?'

"Now there has been a rebirth of confidence in the potential of mankind, and there is a kind of miracle of loyalty to a man who embodies this conviction."

(Kansas City Times, April 3, 1968)

[FOOTNOTE 1]

Chubb's professional and political hero was U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis, whom he was proud to call a friend. It is unclear how the men met, but their association was long and deep. Chubb had consulted Brandeis before turning down the National City Bank job, and the two visited and kept up correspondence until Brandeis's death in 1941. Brandeis put Chubb in touch with professional and social acquaintances in St. Louis, where he had begun his law practice in 1878 with George and James Taussig (the latter of whom became the principal organizer -- and first de facto
president -- of the St. Louis Ethical Society). Chubb spoke on the jurist's career at a number of public events. In 1936, on the twentieth anniversary of the date on which Brandeis took his place on the bench, Chubb gave the keynote address at the dedication of a plaque marking the site of Brandeis's first law office on Chestnut Street. [FOOTNOTE 2] The plaque read: "From this spot spread the influence of a great lawyer, a social philosopher and a wise and just judge." (The plaque, initially installed in the sidewalk, was removed in the course of reconstruction, and in 1964 was mounted on the wall of a restaurant which now stood at the site. At the rededication, Chubb again spoke on behalf of the Bar Association.) In his address, Chubb lauded Brandeis for "his development of a new spirit and a new method in the solution of our great social and economic problems" and referred to the jurist as "the great educator of the court and of our democracy." (Typewritten text of address delivered June 5, 1936; courtesy of Louise "Lee" Chubb) Chubb considered Brandeis the model attorney, a servant of people rather than corporate entities. He was fond of quoting Brandeis as saying, "I would rather have clients than be somebody's lawyer."

Chubb, true to his desire to share in the problems of a community, performed countless civic services. He was an officer of the city and county YMCA for years, and served as the first chairman of the Webster Groves branch of the Y. He was a founder and longtime executive committee member of the St. Louis Council on World Affairs. He was a board member and one-time president of the International Institute of St. Louis, which helps aliens settle and obtain citizenship. He also served on the boards of the World Peace Through Law Center, the Social Planning Council, and the Missouri School for the Blind. He was for several years president of the board of trustees of the John Burroughs School, which both his sons attended. He served on the first mayoral race relations committee in 1949, and in 1953 the St. Louis County supervisor appointed him to a citizens commission to study law enforcement and recommend improvements in police protection. An unabashed civic booster, he led several fund-raising campaigns for United Charities in the thirties. He is best remembered for his presidency of the St. Louis Regional Open Space Foundation in the late sixties and early seventies. Under Chubb's leadership, the foundation raised three-quarters of a million dollars to match a Land and Water Conservation Fund grant used to buy 1,100 acres along the Meramec River for use as state park. He also headed up the foundation's campaign to raise the $197,000 with which St. Louis County matched a federal grant to establish Bee Tree Park, a 190-acre tract of woodlands and river bluffs along the Mississippi River in South St. Louis County. The park, which opened in 1974, features a hiking trail named after Chubb.

Like his father, Chubb was a highly regarded public speaker. Corporations, civic organizations, and academic institutions often called on him to give addresses, participate in debates, and emcee
ceremonial banquets. He was forever eager to air his views on politics, economics, religion, and all things controversial. Despite -- or perhaps because of -- his characteristic bluntness, he also became a skilled mediator. After Chubb moderated a 1949 Town Hall talk by Harold E. Stassen, who was then embarking on his notoriously eccentric political career, a St. Louis businessman praised Chubb on his finesse in handling the crowd of 3,500 people, adding that Chubb's voice was "at least as good as that of the late Franklin D." (Letter from Garret F. Meyer, vice president of the Warner-Jenkinson Manufacturing Co., to R.W. Chubb, dated April 5, 1946) [FOOTNOTE 3]

Through his remarkable record of public service, Chubb vindicated his faith in the Society as an "ethical powerhouse." Among the tributes he cherished was a letter from a conservative Christian associate who could not help but humbly acknowledge Chubb's benevolence:

I . . . want you to know how very much I have and do appreciate your friendship over forty years. It has sometimes been a source of wonder of some of my associates as to how I could be so closely affiliated in my business life with not only a Democrat, but a liberal Democrat, and a person who is not a Christian to-boot. I don't think these questioning friends of mine are as familiar as they should be, perhaps, with the Book of James that says something to the affect [sic] that "faith without works is dead," and somewhere in the Book of John where Our Lord said to some of his antagonists "If you do not believe what I speak, judge my faith by my works" or something to this affect. [sic] If these friends knew all the great things that Walston Chubb has done in his life on a person to person basis, I think they would be a little bit slower to criticize my judgment in the selection of attorneys and personal friends.


[FOOTNOTE 1: When McCarthy lost the primary, Chubb half-heartedly encouraged McCarthy backers to vote for the Humphrey-Muskie ticket as a lesser evil than the Nixon-Agnew ticket.]

[FOOTNOTE 2: Originally designated 505 Chestnut Street, the site is about a third of a block west of Broadway.]
[FOOTNOTE 3: The Town Hall, on whose steering committee Chubb served, was a public forum conducted by the YMCA.]
Slogging through the Depression

The Society suffered a severe drop in income during the Great Depression: Members were forced to cut back on their pledges, securities dropped below face value, fund-raisers were less lucrative, and building rentals plunged. Expenditures were slashed, but the Society nonetheless faced a deficit virtually every year in the thirties. Board President Alexander S. Langsdorf complained that "some of our members . . . do not seem to take this situation seriously . . . [T]here are even some who believe that the deficit is not really a deficit." (President's report, 1933) The board's pattern of coping with the crisis was less than promising: Each spring, it borrowed on the Society's securities enough cash to meet operating expenses, then paid off the loans with dues collected in the fall -- thus inviting yet another deficit. The principal bequest of Anna Sheldon Chubb, which had been intended for the retirement of mortgage bonds, was used to cover interest costs and operating deficits. The Society was living off its capital, and the $35,000 mortgage taken out in 1928 remained intact into the early thirties.

The Society's annual operating deficits ranged from $1,000-$3,000 during the thirties; the exception was the 1937-38 season, when a bequest briefly put the Society in the black. Besides disposing of securities, the board met these deficits by holding periodic canvasses. The drives, which usually were conducted in an air of panic, began with solicitations of a select group of high-level contributors; R. Walston Chubb was known for putting the squeeze on his friends among the Society's more affluent members. All-member meetings then were called to outline the Society's financial needs and to solicit canvassers. Prospect cards listing each member's history of giving were drawn up for use by campaign members; when needs were most acute, canvassers approached members with requests for specific increases. Some years, canvassing efforts were limited: A mailing was sent to the membership, and only those who did not respond were solicited personally.

As the nation's economy improved in the forties, midyear deficits grew smaller and rarer, and annual fund drives ultimately kept the fellowship in the black. The budget, which had hovered around $13,000 for years, jumped to more than $20,000 by the end of the decade; the biggest increases in expenditures were for AEU subsidies and office, maintenance, and Sunday School personnel. The yearly custom of billing members for the amount they had contributed the previous season would not accommodate such a sharp rise in expenditures. Beginning in 1948, members were asked to make a new pledge each year. The first year of the system proved singularly successful: Overall, pledges were increased by more than 50 percent over those of the 1947-48 season.
Low membership contributions were the principal cause of deficits during the thirties. According to a 1933 report by the Ways and Means Committee, the average pledge was $15 -- half the Society's per capita cost of $31. Later in the decade, as the membership fell off and deficits mounted, the per capita cost rose to about $50. The board began to see the folly of maintaining a dues minimum: Many members mistakenly regarded the minimum figure as a fixed expectation, comparable to the dues of a union or civic organization. Those who pledged only the minimum dues -- $10 a year for members over 25, and $5 for junior members -- were specifically asked to raise their contributions, as were members who declined to contribute to special funds. Not surprisingly, dues delinquency became acute in the Depression. When nagging and threatening brought no response from those in arrears, the board turned to more honeyed approaches. In June 1936, for instance, the president of the board sent out notices offering amnesty on back dues to anyone willing to resume making pledge payments. Of the 29 letters sent out, only one brought a response -- and that was a formal resignation.

Hynd was ambivalent about pledge policies. Believing the Society should be run on the same basis as a church, he disliked references to "dues" and objected to the cancellation of memberships. On the other hand, he noted that Society members gave proportionately less than many churchgoers, and he admittedly envied pastors who were able to assist needy parishioners out of their congregations' largesse. Nonetheless, he consistently pleaded for delicacy in solicitation and collection procedures; he and most trustees were reluctant to press members too hard for fear of losing them altogether. In 1939, he told the board that delinquent members should be interviewed personally before any action was taken to drop them; he even agreed to interview the latest batch of delinquents himself. The success of his approach -- at least in numbers -- was not encouraging: Only one of the members he spoke to agreed to resume paying dues. He did succeed in persuading the Finance Committee -- which assumed the Membership Committee's collection duties in 1941 -- to help delinquents maintain membership by switching to associate status.

In the thirties and forties, member pledges accounted for a little more than half the Society's income. The next highest sources of revenue usually were Sunday collections and non-member contributions, but bequests -- which amounted to more than $15,000 in the forties -- sometimes topped the list of ancillary income. Rental fees and donations from Society subgroups substantially augmented the budget. Beginning in 1941, the Women's Auxiliary and the Junior Auxiliary sponsored monthly "Hostess Dinners," which, in addition to the fall bazaar and occasional rummage sales, permitted them to contribute several hundred dollars a year to the Society. Other subgroups -- such as the Y.P.A. and the Adult Discussion Group -- contributed smaller sums out of their dues collections. In addition, an
Entertainment Committee formed in 1934 organized such one-time fund-raisers as motion picture presentations and benefit performances at community theaters.

During the Depression, some of the Society's investments turned sour. A Florida church that sold the Society several $1,000 building bonds repeatedly defaulted on its payments; the Society did not recover its investment until the mid-40s, and it never realized a return. Other hard-pressed debtors were granted frequent extensions on bond payments, and what solid investments the Society held were apt to be liquidated. In the mid-30s, the Finance Committee informally adopted a conservative policy of limiting investments to government bonds and other securities held legal for trust funds in Missouri. The board in the forties paid closer attention to its investments. In 1943, a by-law amendment provided for a five-member Investment Committee with authority to buy and sell securities for the Prather Fund and other Society trusts.

In 1936, the Walter L. Sheldon Memorial Library Fund finally was abolished. Martha Fischel, who chaired an ad hoc committee formed to study the fund, determined it could no longer serve the purpose for which Anna Sheldon Chubb had intended it: There was no need to reprint Sheldon's books -- his dated ruminations and Sunday School curricula were no longer in demand -- and the core of books in Sheldon's collection did not merit the preservation efforts the donor had anticipated. The cash and securities in the fund were transferred to the Walter L. Sheldon Memorial Building Fund. In place of the restricted fund, a new Library Maintenance Fund was created for the upkeep of the facility and the purchase of new books needed by the leader, Sunday School teachers, and Society subgroups.

Also in 1936, the board established a Tribute Fund for donations in honor of loved ones. A three-member committee was established to publicize and administer the fund. In subsequent years, the fund and the committee became a source of prolonged bickering on the board. The fund had not been dedicated to any specific purpose at its inception, and the committee appointed to oversee the fund objected to the board's dipping into it for ordinary operating expenses. At the committee's insistence, the money contributed to the fund in its first few years was held in abeyance until the committee settled on a stated purpose. Some committee members believed that devoting the fund to a neglected cause -- such as leadership training or an insurance plan for leaders -- would attract more contributions. Others could imagine no purpose more pressing than the retirement of the mortgage. The latter contingent won out in 1940, when the fund was devoted solely to debt retirement.

The Society made slow progress in paying off the mortgage during the thirties. On the recommendation of the Ways and Means Committee, the board in 1934 established a Sinking Fund, contributions to which were used solely for mortgage payments. Throughout the decade, the Society offset the debt in minimal increments of $500-$1,000. Elaborate plans to pay off the mortgage by selling
low-interest bonds of indebtedness to members were frequently presented to the board, but none was adopted. Because campaigns for operating funds so taxed the membership, only one fund drive specifically devoted to the mortgage was held in the decade. In the spring of 1936, Society members who anticipated leaving bequests were asked to donate those allotments pronto. A small committee of canvassers obtained $3,500 from a select group of Society members; no general solicitation was held. Those contributions brought the mortgage down to $25,000 -- the level at which it was renewed.

In the early forties, as operating deficits became less burdensome, the Society reduced the mortgage by a few thousand dollars a year, drawing primarily on the Tribute Fund. By 1946, the debt had been brought down to $15,000. The 1946-47 season marked the Society's sixtieth anniversary, and the fellowship decided the time was ripe to settle an old debt. But paying off the mortgage was not the Society's only aim: It had agreed to contribute to the AEU's ambitious five-year extension program, and Sheldon Memorial was sadly in need of renovation. The goal of the 60th Anniversary Fund was set at $30,000 -- $15,000 for mortgage retirement, $10,000 for the AEU project, and $5,000 for building repairs. More than 30 canvassers took part in the drive, which was led by Frederic Arnstein, R. Walston Chubb, and Arthur Schwarz. The Society's wealthiest stalwarts, the first members tapped by the committee, contributed more than $16,000 in amounts ranging from $200 to $1,000. The general solicitation that followed brought the total up to $21,000, indicating that members found a fund drive directed toward specific purposes more compelling than a drive intended simply to cover operating expenses. The mortgage -- the top priority of the drive -- finally was paid off on February 23, 1947. At the annual meeting in May, Jane Hanke -- wife of board President Harold Hanke -- had the honor of celebrating the landmark occasion by burning the cancelled papers on the final $15,000 mortgage. Because the fund fell short of the goal, it was decided to allot from it St. Louis's obligation for only the first two years of the AEU program; allocations for subsequent years were drawn from the Current Fund. The remainder of the anniversary fund was insufficient to cover the cost of a new roof, but a special solicitation in the fall of 1947 made up the difference.

Tight budgets continued to restrain the Society's ambitions. In 1948, the Advisory and Planning Council recommended that funds be budgeted for a full-time organizational assistant to the leader. The proposed aide would coordinate social and educational activities, develop a youth program, and provide various membership services. Other plans concocted by the council in the late forties included the establishment of a community center in the county; the purchase of prime air time for radio advertising and Ethical messages; construction of an annex behind Sheldon Memorial; and employment of an associate leader. The board generally was receptive to such ideas but was chary of pushing for the
necessary funds; rather than "cutting the cloth to fit the pattern," it tended to snip its pattern from the meager cloth at hand.
Cultivating Ethical Leadership

With atypical foresight, the Society had begun taking an active interest in leadership training during Hynd's tenure. Because the Ethical movement has never had a formal academy for training leaders, and because employment opportunities in the movement are sparse, the AEU has had difficulty keeping leadership prospects in the wings. In the forties, the Union sought to fortify the movement's future by instituting an ongoing training program. A two-year program was adopted in 1942: Inductees would spend the first year training under New York leaders, and the second as assistant leaders in other societies. The program was engineered largely by the New York Society, which agreed to bear the cost of the first-year practicums and to help arrange financing for the second-year apprenticeships. The first trainees accepted into the program were William Hammond, Henry B. Herman, and James F. Hornback -- known among Ethical leaders as the "Three H's."

St. Louis became the program's first beneficiary outside New York when it hired Hammond as leader-in-training at the start of the 1943-44 season. Half of Hammond's salary was paid out of the Sutro Fund, which was inaugurated by a member family of the New York Society to provide for leadership training; the remaining costs were borne by the St. Louis Society and the Fischel Fund, a fund set up by the Fischel family of St. Louis and administered by the AEU. Hammond served as director of the Sunday School, but his other roles were poorly defined. Lay leaders of the Society had hoped Hammond would complement Hynd by visiting congregants, organizing educational programs, and vigorously promoting membership. Hynd, however, saw himself as Hammond's academic mentor, and urged the young man to concentrate on his studies. Hammond rarely spoke from the platform, and he took on few pastoral duties, leaving many Society members feeling dissatisfied with the undertaking. The Society retained Hammond through the 1944-45 season, with the second-year costs borne equally by St. Louis and the Sutro Fund, but the board decided by the end of that season to sever the relationship. In a letter to the AEU, board president Henry Putzel said Hammond gave "evidence of having an enlightened and sincere devotion to the principles and aims of the movement, and of having the character and the potential ability by which his enthusiasm and devotion can be made effective in leadership. He shows ability as a speaker, and an aptitude for administration work and group activity." Putzel added, however, that Hammond's direction of the Sunday School had not been "especially creative; and his application to his studies has not been as intensive and consistent as it might have been in view of the generous margin of time and opportunity afforded him." (Letter from Henry Putzel to David Seville Muzzey, then chairman of the AEU Leadership Committee, dated April 10, 1945) In sum, Putzel recommended that Hammond continue his training, but that he do so elsewhere. Hammond took that advise, and embarked on a lifelong career in the Unitarian ministry.
Though less than enthusiastic about Haammond, the St. Louis Society remained committed to the training experiment. In 1944, the board urged the AEU to proceed with the program, promising the Society's assistance in training candidates and installing fledgling leaders in expansion communities. Unfortunately, no leaders-in-training were available to replace Hammond. Herman became a full-time leader in the New York Society, and Hornback temporarily dropped out of the program to serve in the armed forces. Some St. Louis trustees felt the movement should stabilize the training program -- and hedge its bets -- by soliciting probationary assistant leaders who maintained outside vocations in education and social work. Still, no promising new candidates were forthcoming.

So it happened that the AEU had no replacements to offer when Hynd resigned. Hornback had completed his apprenticeship after the war, but he was committed to the Westchester (New York) Society. Hammond was considered for the post, as was George Beauchamp, part-time leader of the fledgling Washington, D.C., Society; Edward "Ted" Haydon, son of Chicago leader A. Eustace Haydon; Lester Mondale, a Unitarian minister then serving in Kansas City, Missouri [FOOTNOTE 1]; and Huston Smith, a professor of world religions. In the short run, however, St. Louis faced another limbo.

Alexander S. Langsdorf, former board president and retired dean of Washington University's School of Engineering, came forth to hold down the fort. Langsdorf was a natural for the interim position. Long active in the Society as an organizer and speaker, he had been elected "honorary associate leader" at the 1948 annual meeting, and had been inducted into the AEU Fraternity of Leaders the following year. The Society paid him a monthly wage for his part-time service in the 1950-51 season. Langsdorf, a firm and gracious administrator, provided an air of calm in which the Society could choose a permanent successor to Hynd.

Langsdorf had an illustrious professional career and a long history of civic service. He began teaching at Washington University in 1901. An expert in electrical engineering, he served on the Jury of Awards at the 1904 World's Fair. In 1915, he published a textbook on direct-current machinery which quickly became a standard in the field; he published a follow-up book on alternating-current machinery in 1937. He served as dean of the School of Engineering -- and sometimes simultaneously as dean of the School of Architecture -- for a total of thirty years. Raymond E. Tucker, a longtime mayor of St. Louis who later served on the university faculty, said Langsdorf "brought honor to the University by his technical competence and professional conduct. He gave to his students a healthy attitude toward life and demonstrated that attitude in his own actions." (Washington University Magazine, Winter 1969) [FOOTNOTE 2] Langsdorf's community service -- in addition to his seven years as president of the
Ethical Society -- included a twenty-year stint on the City Planning Commission and the inaugural presidency of the Committee for Nuclear Information, an organization formed in 1958 to monitor radioactive fallout. [FOOTNOTE 3]

During his year of interim leadership, Langsdorf regularly presided at platform services but gave only two addresses; although a seasoned lecturer whose platform talks were well-received, he wisely recognized the limited value of his scientific perspective on ethics. When he did address the Society, he brought a wealth of empirical knowledge to the naturalistic themes Hynd had popularized. As might be expected, Langsdorf considered scientific research of equal value to philosophical inquiry, and he ventured that the two paths converge in rational religion. Disputing the classical supposition of a matter-spirit dichotomy that necessitates superhuman grace, he asserted that virtue evolves from animal instinct in the same manner that human life evolved from lower organisms -- in other words, the origin of ethics is as humble as that of the species itself. But while scientific discoveries had shorn the race's comforting myths about its environment, Langsdorf urged that such demythologization be seen as a step toward a higher level of ethical evolution:

Nowhere in all the vast reaches of outer space, or on our own little planet, can science detect the slightest sign of a purpose imposed from within or without, that works for the welfare and security of mankind. So it is an austere picture, severe and forbidding to those who have been nurtured to believe that there is an overriding providence that takes account of the sparrow in its fall. We are obliged to think of ourselves and the other living creatures that share this earth with us as minute organisms riding on a tiny speck of matter that is microscopic in the cosmic scale. The heaven and the hell that were very real places to the ancients just do not fit into the picture because there is no room for them. Both concepts are thought fossils, and like fossils in general, they are as dead as the dodo.

* * *

Whether we like it or not, science tells us that the universe is indifferent to man's existence, and that so far as can be detected it would continue its own cycle of the birth, life, and death of stars if animate life on this earth were to be snuffed out. Primitive man, finding himself in what seemed to him, and certainly was, a hostile environment, sought security by inventing a multitude of gods -- beneficent gods charged with responsibility for his well-being, malevolent gods that bore the onus for his misfortunes. These gods, refined in character, to this day dominate religious thought. They represent a flight from
the world of the natural to the world of the supernatural; they serve as convenient crutches upon which to lean when strength is lacking to stand alone; they serve to impart a sense of security in an unfriendly environment that cannot be shaped to minister fully to man’s needs. But if the scientific approach means anything, it means that above everything else man must not regard himself as an alien spirit in a hostile world, serving a period of probation before being translated to another one; he must instead see himself as a child of nature obligated to feel at home under the conditions into which he is born, and to mold those conditions, by his own efforts, as nearly as may be to the form he desires. Looking out upon an uncaring universe he must discover in himself the strength and the ability to stand on his own feet; and to understand that it is in his own nature, and there only, that there resides the divinely unifying purpose which makes life meaningful. ("Ethics, and Man's Search for Security," platform address given Jan. 8, 1950)

Opting for Youth

The search for a new leader began in earnest in the fall of 1950. Alfred Daniel "Buck" Buchmueller chaired the Search Committee, which included Putzel, Langsdorf, and R. Walston Chubb. To help Society members and trustees make an informed choice, Langsdorf frequently scheduled potential leadership candidates to speak from the platform. Mondale addressed the Society three times during the 1950-51 season, Hornback twice. Smith and Beauchamp each spoke once, as did John Gill, a Unitarian minister from Alton, Illinois, who emerged as a dark horse in the running. Buchmueller solicited trustees' assessments of each man. The board instructed the Search Committee to draft a clearly defined set of qualifications for the leadership post, but the committee balked, reporting it did not wish to be "too rigid" in its expectations.

In the spring of 1951, a Leadership Committee was formed to advise the board in its final selection proceedings. Chaired by Peter Kintzele, the committee included Putzel, Langsdorf, R. Walston Chubb, Harold Hanke, and Walter Haase [FOOTNOTE 4]. By April, the committee had narrowed the field to Hornback and Mondale. Mondale, then approaching 50, commended himself by virtue of maturity and experience. The son of a Minnesota Methodist minister and a graduate of Harvard Divinity School, Mondale radiated warm, rustic manliness and exhibited remarkable intellectual acumen. He had been the youngest signer of the Humanist Manifesto of 1933, and had established himself as a leader of the humanist wing of Unitarianism during an earlier stint at a parish in Evanston, Illinois. Trustees agreed that Mondale promised to stabilize and expand the community after Hynd's lackluster final years. Long
interested in Ethical leadership, Mondale wanted the post badly. Hornback, at 31, projected youthful enthusiasm; trustees felt he would help draw younger generations to the slowly aging Society. Also the son of a Methodist minister, Hornback had graduated from Central Methodist College in Fayette, Missouri, and pursued post-graduate studies in philosophy at the University of Chicago and Columbia University. As a product of the AEU's experimental training program who had served the Westchester Society since 1947, his commitment to the Ethical movement was established. In contrast to Mondale, Hornback explicitly disavowed his candidacy for the St. Louis post in remarks voiced from the platform; in fact, he recommended that the Society take the opportunity to broaden the movement's leadership by hiring Mondale or someone of Mondale's experience and caliber. In debating the choice, the board gave considerable weight to the financial needs of the two men: Mondale, a husband and father -- as well as a veteran of the ministry accustomed to a moderate income -- would require a higher salary than Hornback, who was married but had not begun a family. In the board's first informal poll, most of the trustees who expressed a firm preference favored Hornback. However, at the urging of those who wanted a surer grasp of Mondale's philosophy, the board invited the minister to an all-Society community dinner and a luncheon with the trustees.

At a special meeting of the board on April 30, 1951, the board chose Hornback as the sole leadership candidate to be presented to the membership. To avoid creating divisiveness in the community, the trustees -- acting on Hanke's recommendation -- agreed before the vote to unanimously support the victor. Hornback, despite his declaration of non-candidacy, won by a tally of ten to five, with one abstention. [FOOTNOTE 5] In a phone call that Hornback later described as surprising and embarrassing, board president Frederic Arnstein persuaded him to consider applying for the position; after consulting with the Westchester board, which made no special effort to retain him, Hornback agreed to accept the post if approved by the membership. According to the Society's by-laws, a two-thirds majority of those present at the community's annual meeting was required to elect a leader; Society members' only options would be to elect Hornback or instruct the board to continue its search. Members were told that a vote would be taken at the meeting, but the candidate's identity was not revealed in advance. At the May 24 meeting, Kintzele presented the board's recommendation; Langsdorf seconded the nomination and outlined Hornback's background and qualifications; and Hanke moved that Hornback be elected. He was -- unanimously.

Hornback's starting salary was even lower than that which had so displeased Hynd. Hornback reluctantly accepted the offer, although it represented no increase from the compensation he received in Westchester. Years later, after learning that Arnstein had reduced the board's proposed offer, Hornback repeatedly expressed resentment over the transaction. However, members who served on the board at the time of Hornback's hire said the offer was commensurate with Hornback's experience and allowed for
raises as he grew in the position. They also pointed out that most of the savings were placed in a speaker’s fund, which enabled Hornback to rely heavily on guest lecturers while adjusting to the post. Furthermore, Langsdorf remained on salary throughout the first half of the season to help ease Hornback into his duties.

[FOOTNOTE 1: Mondale is a half-brother to Walter Mondale, who served as vice president under Jimmy Carter and ran for the presidency on the Democratic ticket in 1984.]

[FOOTNOTE 2: In the 1960s, the university bestowed a series of engineering fellowships in Langsdorf’s name, and the Alexander S. Langsdorf Seminar Room in Cupples Hall II was dedicated in 1967.]

[FOOTNOTE 3: FOOTNOTE: After broadening its focus to include air and water pollution, the organization was renamed the Committee for Environmental Information.]

[FOOTNOTE 4: Haase was a scion of the Haase family whose food company bore its name. The company, which was sold to outside interests after Walter’s death, is now known almost exclusively for its imported olives.]

[FOOTNOTE 5: Mondale, whose Kansas City church was destroyed by fire a few months before the leadership vote, served for a time as leader of the Philadelphia Ethical Society and later worked in various capacities as an advocate of humanism. He and his wife retired to a remote cabin in the Missouri Ozarks, where they continued to live at the time of this writing.]