

**THE HISTORY OF ADULT EDUCATION,
IN WHICH IS COMPRISED A FULL
AND COMPLETE HISTORY OF THE
MECHANICS' AND LITERARY
INSTITUTIONS, ATHENAEUMS**

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The History of Adult Education, in Which Is Comprised a Full and Complete History of the Mechanics' and Literary Institutions, Athenaeums by J. W. Hudson

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HISTORY
OF
ADULT EDUCATION,
IN WHICH IS COMPRISED
A FULL AND COMPLETE HISTORY
OF THE
MECHANICS' AND LITERARY INSTITUTIONS,
ATHENÆUMS,

PHILOSOPHICAL, MENTAL AND CHRISTIAN IMPROVEMENT
SOCIETIES, LITERARY UNIONS, SCHOOLS OF DESIGN, ETC.,
OF GREAT BRITIAN, IRELAND, AMERICA, ETC. ETC.

BY J. W. HUDSON, Ph. D.,

SECRETARY OF THE MANCHESTER ATHENÆUM, FOUNDER OF THE
SCOTTISH AND NORTHERN UNIONS OF LITERARY AND
MECHANICS' INSTITUTIONS, &c.

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TO

Edward Baines, Esq.,

PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER OF THE YORKSHIRE UNION OF
MECHANICS' INSTITUTIONS ;

THE

TRUE FRIEND

OF

INTELLECTUAL PROGRESS AND ENLIGHTENMENT,

AND THE

ZEALOUS ADVOCATE

OF

MORAL EDUCATION,

THIS WORK IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

BY

THE AUTHOR.

Prospectus.

THE work contains an exact comprehensive register of the principal changes which have occurred in the management of the Mechanics' and Literary Institutions in the large towns in Great Britain. The history of each Institution is given at length, accompanied with tabular annual returns.

The history of the Educational Societies of the middle classes, and the Adult Poor Schools in an unbroken chain, for upwards of a century, exhibited by statistical details and annual returns, and proving by existing societies, that Mechanics' Institutions were established long prior to their extension and development by the late Dr. Birkbeck.

The operations of Adult and Benevolent Evening Schools, Village and Farmers' Clubs, Young Men's Reformation and Mental Improvement Societies, &c.

The failure of Public and Itinerating Libraries, as tested and demonstrated after an experience of fifty years in Great Britain.—Decline of Philosophical Institutions in England.

The rise, progress, and present state of Literary and Institutional Unions, Schools of Design, Museums, Factory News Rooms, and Libraries, &c.

On the management of Athenæums, Literary, and Mechanics' Institutions—their extension and present tendency—new features—the necessity for internal improvement and general development. The Mechanics' Institutions in all quarters of the world.

A Tabular return of all the Institutions in Great Britain, Ireland, &c. The present number of Members, extent of Library, and their educational operations. Name of the Secretary, &c., &c.

PREFACE.

THE unexampled efforts now making in every part of the kingdom for the intellectual and physical improvement of the lower classes of the community, distinguish the present, as the age of philanthropy and good-will to all men. The middle classes vie with the rich in promoting the great and good-work of education. The brightest minds in literature and science direct their talents to its development; preparing the ignorant by addresses, by lectures, and by their writings, to receive and understand the great and interesting truths which the Creator unfolds before them. The beloved Sovereign of these realms lends her fair and royal name in behalf of Bazaars, to increase the stores of Institution Libraries. The lawned Divine, and the ermined Duke feel a pleasure in presiding over the festivals of the artizan and the day labourer. The press is prolific with carefully collated proofs of the connection between offences and ignorance, as they appear in the calendar of crime; civic magistrates begin to hold it a duty to take part in all meetings which have for their object, the dissemination of useful knowledge amongst the multitude; the agriculturist is alive to the importance of the allotment system, and institutes Farmers' Clubs; while the manufacturer finds it profitable to form schools and factory libraries, to rear amateur hands of musicians amongst his workmen, to encourage frugality by savings' banks, benefit societies, sick clubs, clothes clubs, burial associations, and by occasional tea meetings, at which, he and his family partake, to destroy that barrier between men, which pride and wealth sometimes ungraciously erects.

The rapid increase of adult Educational Institutions, and the attention now bestowed on them, render it important that the public should be placed in possession of such facts as can be collected, to afford, not only a just estimate of the nature and extent of the efforts which have been made, in behalf of adult education, and the effects it has produced, but, also to correct the erroneous statements which have been so frequently reiterated, with regard to the first establishment of Mechanics' Institutions. The evidence which has been produced on the latter point, is easily verified by existing societies, and the only regret to those who record the historical facts is that one (Dr. Birkbeck,) who devoted his life, and sacrificed half his fortune, to advance Mechanics' Institutions is not entitled to enjoy the minor honour of being their originator. From the same cause, Birmingham possesses the

palm which has been awarded to Glasgow, and it is creditable to the "cast iron metropolis," that it invited Dr. Birkbeck to lecture to its inhabitants, before he commenced lecturing as Professor of Anderson's Institution.

From the list of Institutions compiled with great care and labour and appended to this work, we are enabled to afford satisfactory evidence of the growth and extent of the Literary and Mechanics' Institutions of the United Kingdom. In England, we have a complete record of 610 Institutions with 102,050 subscribing members, and possessing 691,500 volumes in their libraries. If the smaller Mutual Improvement Societies, Christian and Church of England Institutions and Evening Adult Schools are added to this amount, the aggregate return for England will be 700 Adult Educational Institutions, with 107,000 members.

It is to be regretted that neither Literary or Mechanics' Institutions have obtained permanent success in Wales or in Ireland. It was not until 1830, that a Mechanics' Institution was formed in the principality, and in Ireland no less than fifteen Mechanics' Institutions with the advantages (or disadvantages) of government aid, have met with a premature decay.

The Scottish Mechanics' Institutions are less numerous and less effective than similar societies in England, owing to the practice of closing them entirely during the summer and autumn. From this cause the issues from the libraries are limited, the periodicals are deprived of half their interest, and the attractions of the newspaper are disregarded by members and committees.

The total returns from the Literary and Mechanics' Institutions of the Kingdom at the present time, present the following statistics:—

	No. of Institutes.	Members.	Vols.	News-rooms.
England	610	102050	691500	372
Wales	12	1472	6825	8
Scotland	55	12554	59681	15
Ireland	25	4005	57500	13
	702	120,081	815,516	408

The educational advantages which these Institutions have disseminated in the past year, may be regarded as evidence of the superiority they possess over other means of imparting intellectual instruction to the adult population, and of their claims upon public attention as a means of advancing morality and diminishing crime, by drawing men from those evil resources which the absence of intellectual culture is sure to lead to. The extent to which the intellectual stores and appliances of the Institutions of the United Kingdom have been made available, by the members, after the ordinary business of the day has been performed, may be gathered from the following return:—

	Issues of Books in 1850.	Number of persons attending evening classes.	Number of lectures delivered in 1850.
England	1830748	16080	5084
Wales	16800	280	115
Scotland	154747	1538	481
Ireland	33800	182	210
	<u>2,026,095</u>	<u>18,120</u>	<u>5,840</u>

The universal complaint that Mechanics' Institutions are attended by persons of a higher rank than those for whom they were designed, applies with equal force to the Athenæums and Literary Institutions of the country. It will be found on investigation, that Athenæums have ceased to be the societies of young men, not only the roll of members, but a glance round the news-room will show an assemblage of men of middle age, principals of firms, professional men, managing and confidential clerks, factors, brokers, agents, and wholesale shopkeepers, who form both the directory and the majority of the association. Hence it has been assumed, that the employer and the employed are to be seen side by side perusing alike the newspaper and the review, drawing knowledge from the same fount; but such is not the fact, the clerk turns aside from his employer, either from respect or humility, and when he joins his companions he generally gives utterance to his discontent by an intimation that he shall join the Mechanics', for he will not subscribe to an Institution where "the governor" is present. The same influences are produced in the other Institution, the warehouseman, the packer, the carter, and the mill-hand shun the society of the clerk and the foreman, and they in turn quit the Institution which was established expressly for them. The result is made manifest in the classification of the occupation of members of these societies, but wherefore should the educationist complain, since it only demonstrates the necessity for creating another class of societies, to which the working operative shall alone be admissible. With the increase of population, society has extended and developed itself in new circles, and the requirements of the age, demand for the labouring classes, not only free public libraries, free public news-rooms, free public lectures, but evening classes, free to the half-educated shopboy, and the unlettered apprentice. Mechanics' Institutions, and Literary Societies must be immediately rendered self-supporting; for the donations of the wealthy and benevolent are demanded for higher services.

It is essentially necessary that another attempt should now be made to provide entertainment and instruction for the bulk of the working men and their families, "to whom, as yet, the ray of knowledge has not penetrated,

who form the hard pressed substratum, the rich mine of thought and intelligence, which the mining tool of education has scarcely reached."

Two other causes have operated, to a great extent, in excluding the working classes from Mechanics' Institutions,—the time and troubles of suitably attiring themselves to appear in the company of the middle classes, and the quarterly and annual terms of payment. The first may be obviated by an influx of the fustian jackets, provided the second is corrected by the introduction of a system of weekly payments, and the entertainments prepared are of a character suited to the taste of working men. It has been shown in the chapter on Lyceums that one attempt of this kind has failed, and the causes have been indicated. It will not be difficult to adduce, examples of complete success. The Huddersfield Mechanics' Institution, the Birmingham, and the Liverpool Northern Institution have fully realised the anticipations of their founders. The penny news-rooms of Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow, and Edinburgh, and the Institutions in which newspapers are issued to the members, are no unimportant witnesses in this case; nor are the thousand small coffee-houses in London, and temperance refreshment rooms throughout the country, to be omitted in proof that there exists a wide field of useful operation for the philanthropist who has energy to work out, in his own circle, by the means indicated, the elevation of the lower grade of society to light and to real moral life.

Much as we may congratulate ourselves at the useful operations of "the Mechanics" and other middle class Institutions, it would undoubtedly be a source of unmingled pleasure if they could be induced to extend their operations, by branch societies, to supply the chief wants of the actual working population, and they have the means within themselves of furnishing the intellectual food required in smaller societies. Their newspapers and magazines when a month old, their well stocked libraries, and their young men ready to serve as voluntary teachers, or lecturers and participants in discussions, are appliances which should neither be overlooked nor disregarded, when it is remembered the large sums these societies receive as donations, and from the subscriptions of honorary members on the plea of educating the mechanics and working classes of the community.

While we discern circumstances of a political and general nature which are giving to the working classes a greater amount of influence and prominence in society than they have hitherto enjoyed, the demands for their mental and moral instruction became more imperative. The labouring classes must be admitted sharers in that knowledge which is no longer a monopoly, but like the gentle rain from heaven, beautifies creation; they are deserving of greater