
Charles M. Sheldon and the Uplift of Tennesseetown

by Timothy Miller

CHARLES M. SHELDON of Topeka was a prominent religious leader at the turn of the century, and arguably the most prominent Kansan of his era. Sheldon was a household name throughout—and beyond—the Protestant world. Although the generation which has grown up in the last half century is often not familiar with him—fame, alas, is transitory—many still remember him as a popular writer, a compassionate pastor, and a paragon of virtue in daily living.

While pastor of Central Congregational Church in Topeka, Sheldon wrote a spectacular best seller, an inspirational novel called *In His Steps* which sold tens of millions of copies—exactly how many we will never know because a defective copyright let the book be issued by over seventy publishers and no overall sales records have ever been kept. It may well still be the best selling novel of all time; at last report it was in print in some eight American editions in English and one in Spanish. The book was published in 1897, and sales reached their zenith in about 1900. Protestants, Catholics, and even many non-Christians were absorbed by the simple story of a band of midwestern Protestants who vowed to live lives in which they would do their best to act at all times as Jesus would, asking, when faced with a moral decision, “what would Jesus do?”¹

Sheldon also received a good deal of public attention when, in 1900, he decided to apply the question “What would Jesus do?” to the operation of a daily newspaper. He had long advocated the founding of a Christian daily newspaper as an alternative to the popular press, which he considered coarse and insufficiently uplifting. Frederick O. Popenoe, then the owner of the *Topeka Daily Capital*, offered him total editorial authority over that paper for a

week, and Sheldon diligently showed the world—circulation that week topped 360,000 per day—what clean journalism could look like.²

Most of what has been recorded of the life of Sheldon, however, quits at that point. Beyond the book and the newspaper, the record—at least in the sense of reliable scholarship—is nearly blank. This article seeks to fill one part of that gap, because Sheldon was far more than the author of a single best seller or the proprietor of a highly publicized journalistic experiment. He was a dedicated social reformer, a sometime critic of many features of organized religion, a champion of the rights of labor, minorities and women, a powerful spokesman for prohibition and pacifism, a prodigiously hardworking pastor, and a loving friend to the thousands of Topekans who adored him. Here we will examine the work of Charles M. Sheldon in his earliest major social-reform project, one in which he helped improve the living conditions of Topeka's destitute blacks.

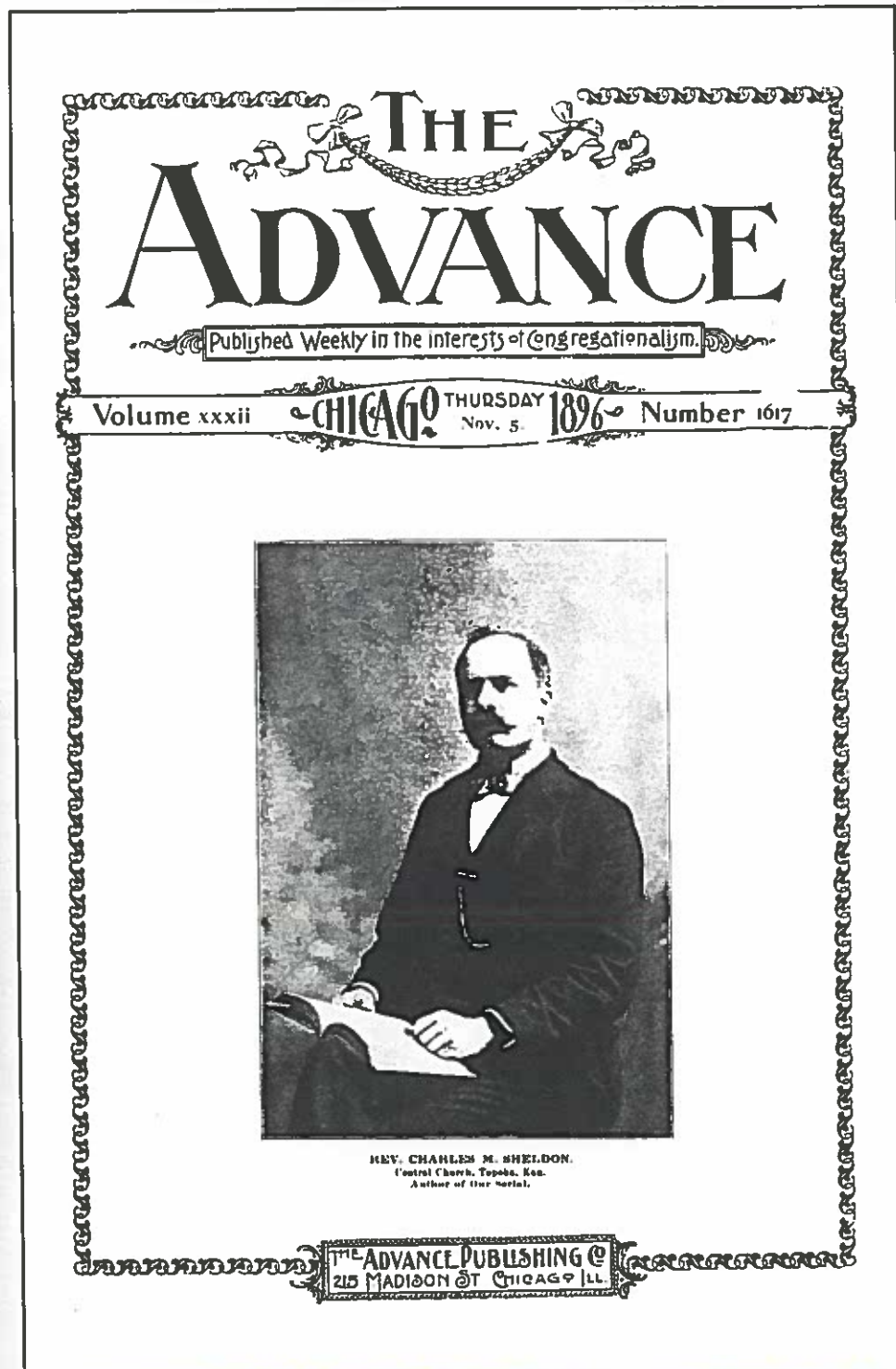
Sheldon arrived in Topeka in 1889, having been called to pastor the newly founded Central Church, and found that the new church building, then still under construction, was located adjacent to Tennesseetown, a squalid settlement of ex-slaves who had managed to escape wretchedly poor living conditions on southern farms only to end up equally poor in the urban North. Sheldon, who from early childhood had been taught by his parents the essential equality of all human beings, spent three weeks studying Tennesseetown intensively, and by the end of that period was so appalled at what he had seen there that he was ready to undertake a major series of projects to help lead the settlement up from destitution. The projects were innovative for their day, and they provided Sheldon with his first taste of fame for they were reported throughout the Midwest and in social gospel religious publications even further afield. They also provided Sheldon with the stuff of one of his books, a thinly disguised piece of fiction called *The Redemption of Freetown*.³

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1. The two best accounts of the phenomenal success of *In His Steps* were both written by John W. Ripley. See John W. Ripley, “Last Rites for a Few Myths,” *Shawnee County Historical Society Bulletin*, no. 44 (Winter 1967): 14-26, and John W. Ripley, “The Strange Story of Charles M. Sheldon's *In His Steps*,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 34 (Autumn 1968): 241-65.

2. John W. Ripley is also the author of the most complete study of Sheldon's Christian daily newspaper project. See John W. Ripley, “Another Look at the Rev. Mr. Charles M. Sheldon's Christian Daily Newspaper,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 31 (Spring 1965): 1-40.

3. Charles M. Sheldon, *The Redemption of Freetown* (Boston: United Society of Christian Endeavor, 1898).



*The Advance, a Congregational weekly based in Chicago, originally published Sheldon's **In His Steps** in serial form, and it was for this work that Sheldon became best known.*

The Tennesseetown settlement emerged as a result of the Compromise of 1877, which ended Reconstruction and led to a massive emigration of ex-slaves out of the South. Stories circulated of cheap lands in the West, and thousands of these "exodusters," as they came to be called, left the Mississippi Valley for unknown destinations. Kansas was as logical a place to stop as any; the state had been admitted into the Union in 1861, at the beginning of the Civil War, and was widely known as a bastion of antislavery sentiment. There were already a few blacks living more or less comfortably, if not elegantly, in Topeka, and so about 1879 a pilot party showed up to survey eastern Kansas and found it acceptable. The exodusters begged passage as fourth-class freight from their Tennessee homeland to St. Louis. Because they were not wanted there, they received charitable assistance which sent them on up the Missouri River to the Kansas City area.⁴ Unwanted there, they were sent upriver to Topeka where some of them were taken in.⁵

By 1880 some forty thousand exodusters had passed through Topeka. About three thousand of them stayed, making their homes on the southwestern outskirts of town. A bankrupt real estate development had left some very cheap lots for sale; the exodusters congregated there in such numbers that the area has been called "Tennesseetown" ever since.⁶

Many people in Topeka were less than thrilled about the influx of large numbers of destitute and uneducated ex-slaves whose clothing was little more than rags and who had no money at all.⁷ Dr. Karl Menninger has noted that white racism was rampant then: "I wish I could recall and put into words the attitude of people toward blacks in those days. It was almost as if someone had imported a lot of people with leprosy or cancer or something terrible."⁸ Topeka's Republican mayor Michael C. Case and other public officials refused to spend public funds or use municipal facilities to help the strangers, stating that the time and money would be better spent sending the emigrants back to the South.

Some of the churches were not much more helpful than the government. The Board of Church Extension of the Kansas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church met in Topeka in April 1879 to address the situation of the exodusters and adjourned without providing any material

relief; they instead discussed "how they shall be educated and christianized and prepared for honorable citizenship."⁹ But gradually help began to emerge. First Congregational Church, true to its New England antislavery roots, provided some services and helped underwrite the construction of the Tennesseetown Congregational Church building, with the understanding that it would be a relief center as well as a religious edifice.¹⁰

Houses began to be built, mainly by the residents, although few of them were more than shacks hardly suitable for prairie winters. Gradually other urban conveniences—small businesses, schools, churches—came to dot the Tennesseetown landscape, and it was clear even to the hardliners that the exodusters were in Topeka to stay. In the 1880 census, blacks were found to constitute thirty-one percent of the city's population—a higher percentage of blacks than was found in New Orleans (thirty percent) that year.¹¹

Living and social conditions in Tennesseetown were abysmal from the beginning. Unemployment was rife, a fact which the local white press attributed to the incompetence of the settlers.¹² A more accurate analysis, which Sheldon was the first white Topekan to enunciate, at least in public, was that white racism kept blacks in menial, terribly underpaid jobs, when jobs were available at all, and Tennesseetown's problems stemmed mainly from the neighborhood's wrenching poverty. One history of black Topeka reports that although there was some minimal improvement in conditions through the 1880s and early 1890s (some residents began to garden and traded produce for clothing and other necessities, for example), the district had minimal, if any, medical or educational or other basic human services, and by the 1890s it had become the center of a fair amount of illegal activity with "dramshops" and "Popular Resorts for Sports" being advertised regularly in the black press.¹³ Frequent police patrols tried to contain rampant juvenile crime and gambling, and even such police duty was dangerous.¹⁴ Perhaps the biggest symbol of Tennesseetown's freewheeling nature was Jordan's Hall, a large one-story building built by one Andrew Jordan, a black, in the middle of the settlement for use

9. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka*, 52.

10. A. B. Whiting, "The Beginning of Central Congregational Church," manuscript, Sheldon Memorial Room, Central Congregational Church, Topeka. Early Topeka city directories refer to the church in Tennesseetown as the "Colored Congregational Church," but contemporary Central Church documents consistently use the name "Tennesseetown."

11. Giles, *Thirty Years*, 153.

12. *Topeka Daily Capital*, September 9, 1906.

13. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka*, 105-107.

14. *Topeka Daily Capital*, September 9, 1906.

4. F. W. Giles, *Thirty Years in Topeka: A Historical Sketch* (Topeka: Geo. W. Crane & Co., 1886; reprinted, Topeka: Copper Special Services, 1960), 152.

5. Interview with Lenore Stratton, August 19, 1981.

6. Giles, *Thirty Years*, 153.

7. Thomas C. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas, 1865-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 48.

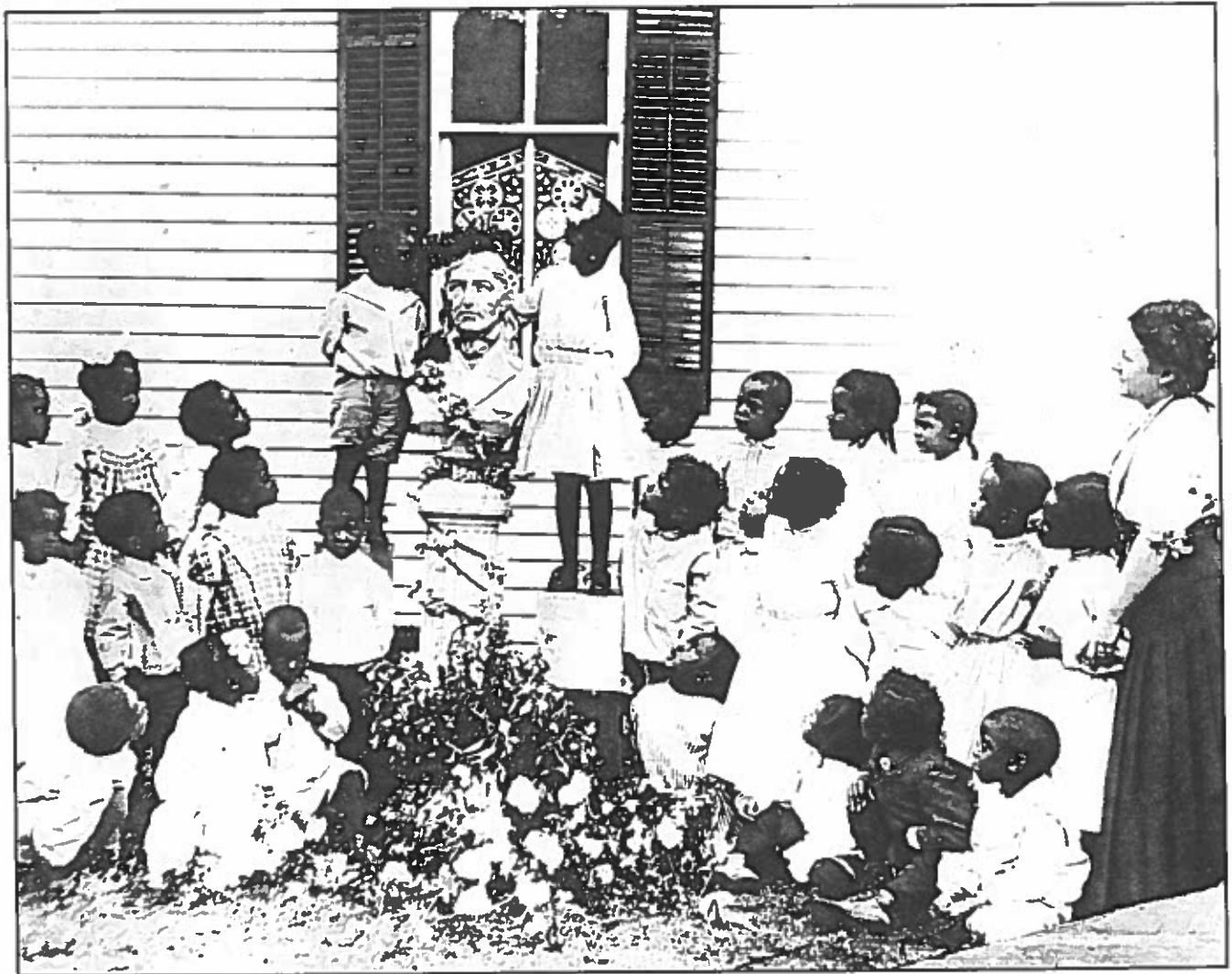
8. Interview with Dr. Karl Menninger, August 27, 1981.

as a dance hall. Fights usually accompanied the weekly dances, and liquor was always for sale.¹⁵

The Central Church site bordering Tennesseetown gave Sheldon a good vantage point. That the ghetto was a seamy place was well enough known in Topeka, but Sheldon surprised many of his fellow white citizens by plunging into the settlement for three weeks, not long after arriving in Topeka. What Sheldon did at that time was to conduct a simple sociological study, the results of which he published in the social gospel magazine *The Kingdom* a few years later. He found about eight hundred people in Tennesseetown, divided into three "distinct classes": those raised on plantations who had come to

15. Robert A. Swan, Jr., *The Ethnic Heritage of Topeka, Kansas: Immigrant Beginnings* (N.p.: Institute of Comparative Ethnic Studies, 1974), 72.

Kansas during the Great Exodus; men and women who were children during the exodus and "have been raised under a definition of freedom which uses 'liberty' and 'lawlessness' as synonymous"; and children ten years old and under, including about one hundred between three and seven who might be considered of kindergarten age. Sheldon found four black churches which "were controlled by negro preachers, and exercising considerable influence, but not very much that could be called Christian influence." He noted seeing ignorance, poverty, vice, idleness, and rowdyism. During Sheldon's three weeks he ate, worked, and talked with the residents, spending quite a bit of time in their homes and seeing their sordid poverty up close. At the end of the period he published his conclusions, protesting the closing of decent jobs to blacks and the white prejudice which seemed so



Tennesseetown kindergarteners pose with a bust of Friedrich Froebel, father of the kindergarten movement, during a school celebration of his birthday. Teacher June Chapman can be seen at right.

pervasive and finding that the biggest part of the solution lay in reforming the attitudes of whites: "I do not have much hope of Christianizing the negro until we have Christianized the Anglo-Saxon. It is a present question with me now, sometimes, which race needs it more."¹⁶ Tame stuff now, perhaps, but in the mid-nineties Sheldon was a lot more perceptive than most members of his race.

Congregational and other Protestant missionary activity was being pursued in Tennesseetown well prior to the foundation of Central Church. In Sheldon's first study of the settlement in 1891 he found four churches there, three of them with pastors.¹⁷ One of those churches was the Tennesseetown Congregational Church, a small missionary outpost. Tennesseetown as a whole was in any event largely unchurched, and the churches that existed were feeble, unable to combat the area's towering social problems.

Sheldon's first contacts with Tennesseetown were apparently hostile ones, as the self-described "rabid prohibitionist" urged raids on Jordan's speakeasy. But by 1891 Sheldon and a nearby Presbyterian minister, a Mr. Harris, began to give lectures every other Monday night to the men and boys of the settlement. The first one was an illustrated chemical and electrical lecture on "Light"; later ones in the series were on such topics as "One Dollar and What It Can Buy," "A Quart of Whiskey and What It Can Do," and "What Has Been Done for the Negro Since the War." The lectures were apparently popular, and Sheldon and Harris used them as a foot in Tennesseetown's door. They began to visit the homes of those who attended the lectures, as well as other homes where they might find interested persons. Thus, in fairly short order they were able to learn quite a bit about Tennesseetown.¹⁸

This informal survey, incidentally, was only the first of several serious efforts on the part of Central Church members to find out in detail about the needs of their black neighbors. The most important such effort was a probing house-to-house survey undertaken by Leroy Halbert and Mrs. M. L. Sherman in 1898. They visited 146 families, inquiring about religious preference (sixty-one families each for Baptist and Methodist Episcopal; six each for Catholic, Christian, and Congregational; one for Presbyterian; and five either had no preference or had not spoken to the survey takers); earnings (the average was \$6.15 per week for men, \$3.22 for women); average house size (3 1/2 rooms); health; marital status; birth situation (167 had

been born slaves); educational level achieved (generally quite low); and a host of other things. They discovered a very few fairly prosperous Tennesseetown residents, notably John Williams who lived in a five-room painted house with a piano, made twelve hundred dollars per year, subscribed to the newspaper, and owned two hundred books. The norm, however, was a household consisting of approximately six persons with few, if any, of those goods enjoyed by the Williams family, and on the opposite end of the spectrum was the Wallace family with twenty-three children all living at home, no assets, and virtually no income. The census document recording these findings makes for fascinating reading.¹⁹

But we are getting ahead of our story. Sheldon's early and less comprehensive survey led him to the conclusion that several important social services needed to be supplied to the settlement, and he determined that the first would be a kindergarten. Andrew Jordan, the dance hall and speakeasy proprietor, readily agreed to lease his building for two years for the project (one must presume that the price offered him was more lucrative than income from the dance-hall business), and in the summer of 1892 fund raising was undertaken in earnest. Some of the children who would be in the kindergarten helped raise money for it; Leroy Halbert's history of the Tennesseetown projects tells that a choir of "fifteen little darkey boys" sang a program of plantation songs at Central Church and made some money for the project.²⁰ More substantial amounts of money were raised from white charitable organizations and from individuals.

The renovation of Jordan Hall (which for the duration of the kindergarten's stay there was known as Union Hall) was a first step; the building had never been properly finished and was in poor repair. Many Central Church young people spent long evenings working on the structure and then plastering and painting.²¹ By spring the work had been finished, and the first black kindergarten west of the Mississippi opened its doors on April 3, 1893, in the hall on Lincoln Street between King (now Munson) and Twelfth. There were three teachers: Carrie R. Roberts, the principal, and assistants Jeanette Miller and Margaret Adams. By the time the lease with Andrew Jordan expired two years later, the kindergarten had become such a resounding success that more permanent quarters were established for it in the Tennesseetown

19. 1898 Tennesseetown Census, Kansas State Historical Society. See also, *Topeka Daily Capital*, March 3, 1973.

20. Leroy A. Halbert, *Across the Way: A History of the Work of Central Church, Topeka, Kansas, in Tennesseetown* (privately printed, 1900), 4.

21. Glenn Clark, *The Man Who Walked in His Steps* (St. Paul: Macalester Park Publishing Co., 1946), 8.

16. Charles M. Sheldon, "A Local Negro Problem," *The Kingdom* 8 (April 10, 1896): 828.

17. Charles M. Sheldon, "Sociology from the Preacher's Standpoint," *Seminary Notes* 14 (December 1891): 80.

18. *Ibid.*



"Game time" at the kindergarten brought the children out of doors.

Congregational Church building down the street to the north.

Many of the people of Tennesseetown had misgivings about the white intrusion into their community; some of them, quite naturally, saw it as an enemy invasion. But many Tennesseetown mothers had a desperate need for day care, and the kindergarten was a lifesaver for them. The children immediately liked the kindergarten, and their parents soon appreciated the colorful craft projects their children began to carry home. Soon the kindergarten's acceptance was total, and a foot was in Tennesseetown's door.²² Dozens of Tennesseetown children were enrolled from the first; by 1900, there had been 287 of them, including 57 enrolled at that time. The school stayed in business for eighteen years, until 1910, by which time the city of Topeka had decided to support kindergartens and this one was moved to nearby Buchanan School.²³ Some of the alumni became important leaders in the Topeka black community, using the kindergarten as a first step toward formal education which would help lift them out of poverty. Probably the most prominent alumnus was Elisha Scott, in whom Sheldon took a special interest and years later arranged financial support for Scott to attend law school at Washburn University. Scott became a leading Topeka attorney, as did his sons John Scott and Charles Sheldon Scott. The Scotts argued many early civil rights and school desegregation cases. Their most illustrious moment came in 1954 when Charles Scott argued

the winning side of the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* school desegregation case before the U.S. Supreme Court. The Scott family law firm continues to handle civil rights cases today.

Little information has been preserved about what actually was done on a daily basis in the kindergarten during its first five years. In February 1898, however, an assistant in training, Mrs. June Chapman, was promoted to the head teachership when her predecessor resigned, and she kept that job for twelve years—as long as the kindergarten lasted.²⁴ A good deal of information has been preserved from her era.

Chapman's first morning on the job, it appears, was chaotic with children running everywhere. As their first task, the teachers undertook to clean up their charges, washing them and putting clean aprons over their dirty clothes. Evidently Chapman's cleanliness program infiltrated the children's homes because by 1900 they were reported to be arriving in neat and clean fashion.²⁵ Making an impact on Tennesseetown home life, in fact, seemed to be a main point of Chapman's program. For example, she had the children eat lunch at the kindergarten every Friday in order to drill them in table manners, and once she made each child a set of cardboard keys, writing on them such things as "Good morning," "Good night," "If you please," and "Thank you."

But Chapman did not limit her interest in home life to instructing her pupils. She also made a regular practice of

22. *Topeka Daily Capital*, September 9, 1906.

23. *Ibid.*, November 17, 1963.

24. *Topeka State Journal*, November 17, 1928.

25. Halbert, *Across the Way*, 5.

visiting Tennesseetown homes in the afternoons, and soon became welcome in homes throughout the settlement. Several of the women of Tennesseetown joined her in the visits. Among them was "Aunty" Ransome, an elderly ex-slave who also visited the kindergarten from time to time to tell stories of slavery days.

The warm response Chapman received to her home visits led her to create an organization, a sort of PTA, for the mothers of the pupils. On one Wednesday afternoon a mothers' meeting was held at the kindergarten, and so many mothers attended and voiced their enthusiasm about the project that a permanent organization was formed.²⁶ A December 1900 count showed forty-three

26. "Kindergarten Notes," undated newspaper clipping, kindergarten scrapbook, Sheldon Memorial Room. See also *Topeka Daily Capital*, September 9, 1906.



Mrs. June R. Chapman is credited, primarily through her leadership at Sheldon's kindergarten, with pioneering early education in the Topeka school system.

Tennesseetown mothers in the Sheldon League of American Mothers.²⁷ By 1906, at least, the Sheldon Congress of Mothers, as it was then called, was planning its monthly meetings so carefully that an annual brochure listing meetings and topics was printed.²⁸ Meanwhile, Chapman organized yet another group, the Tennesseetown Kindergarten Auxiliary, from outside the settlement to provide volunteer help with the class and to help raise funds for equipment and supplies.²⁹

In the summer the kindergarteners got lessons in gardening. An undated clipping from the turn-of-the-century era described the young students as getting ready to harvest the produce of their garden at King and Lincoln streets: cotton, watermelons, and popcorn, "as well as a number of other garden and field products."³⁰ They also grew flowers, and at least once took advantage of a *Topeka Daily Capital* seed giveaway designed to promote flower gardening among children. Chapman marched her charges down to the newspaper office to pick up the seeds, and the paper reported that "They yelled with a vim, and the boys swung their caps in the air over their heads while straining in their lungs to the utmost. They brought with them some handsome tulips which they raised on the kindergarten grounds from bulbs planted last fall."³¹

Yet another Chapman project was a kindergarten band, an ensemble of twenty-five cornets, which specialized in marches.³² There were other outings as well, including one to the state capitol where the class visited Gov. Edward W. Hoch.³³ There were also frequent special observances at the kindergarten building. In 1898, for example, the kindergarten had a celebration of the birthday of Friedrich Froebel, founder of the kindergarten movement, with lots of colorful decorations, a new picture of Froebel, and a grand march around the classroom with the children carrying American and German flags.³⁴ Once a year there was a "crumb party" for feeding birds and animals in the winter.

The verdict on Chapman's leadership seems to be unanimous. She did marvelous work for the kindergarten,

27. *Topeka Daily Capital*, December 16, 1900.

28. *Sheldon Congress of Mothers, 1906-7: Parents Meeting at Sheldon Kindergarten*, pamphlet, Kansas State Historical Society.

29. Halbert, *Across the Way*, 6.

30. "Colored Children Grow Cotton Here," undated newspaper clipping from *Topeka Daily Journal*, kindergarten scrapbook, Sheldon Memorial Room.

31. "Organized the Last Juvenile Flower Club," undated newspaper clipping from *Topeka Daily Capital*, kindergarten scrapbook, Sheldon Memorial Room.

32. "Colored Children Have Cornet Band," undated newspaper clipping, kindergarten scrapbook, Sheldon Memorial Room.

33. "Governor Hoch and the Colored Kindergartners," undated newspaper clipping, kindergarten scrapbook, Sheldon Memorial Room.

34. *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 22, 1898.

and probably played no little part in convincing the citizens of Topeka to fund kindergartens in all the elementary schools of the city. Twice Chapman and her charges received recognition from other parts of the country for their work. In 1904 she packed up some of the children's arts and crafts and sent them to a kindergarten competition at the St. Louis Louisiana Purchase Exhibition, gaining second place in the nationwide contest. Another bundle of similar materials was sent to the Jamestown Tercentennial Exposition in 1907, and another national second prize was awarded to the Topeka youngsters. Incidentally, the name of the school was changed at the time of the St. Louis competition; the proud Kansas sponsors of the entry feared that those attending the fair might confuse Tennesseetown with the state of Tennessee, and so the name of the kindergarten was changed from "Tennesseetown" to "Sheldon."³⁵

Sheldon himself was held in near-reverence by the children. His frequent visits were favorite occasions in the classroom, and at least once, in 1905, when Sheldon was ill, the students made a wicker basket, filled it with a pumpkin, popcorn, vegetables and flowers they had raised, and rolled it in a wagon over to his house. Sheldon repaid the compliment by writing a verse in honor of the pupils:

My brother of whatever tongue or race,
 Whatever be the color of thy skin;
 Tho' either white or black or brown thy face,
 Thou art in God's great family—my kin.³⁶

In 1981 there was at least one surviving student from the Sheldon kindergarten, Minus Gentry, then eighty-five. His memories of Sheldon were all sweetness and light: "He was a fine man, he was. He'd come on down here to the kindergarten, to visit the kids, you know. He would talk to us and play with us, come shake hands with us. He was very generous, he was, a kind and generous man. Everybody loved him, everybody. If everybody in the world was like him, why, it would be a good world."³⁷

The Library

Once Union Hall had been rented and the kindergarten established, it occurred to someone that the classroom space could be used in the evening as a library. The young people, especially the college students, of Central Church were enthusiastic about the idea and agreed to volunteer to staff the library. About the only need was for books so Sheldon announced that a social would be held, the admission price to which would be a book. The social was

thronged, and the books thus collected, along with others donated by the city library, enabled the library to open soon after the kindergarten did in 1893.³⁸ The book social became an annual affair, and the library's holdings eventually numbered in the thousands of volumes.

At first B. C. Duke, a member of the Tennesseetown Congregational Church, was put in charge of the library; but from the outset he had trouble riding herd over the clientele, and the library quickly became a hangout for rowdies—of which Tennesseetown still had plenty. Finally one night he called the police and had six boys arrested for disturbing the peace. The publicity following that incident was disastrous, and, as Leroy Halbert reported, "the parents kept their children from the Library and it soon closed."³⁹

Sheldon, however, never said die. In October 1894, the library opened again, this time with volunteer attendants from Central Church. A small social, with apples and donuts, was held for the boys who were the library's main patrons, and Sheldon gave them a pep talk, explaining why libraries had to be orderly places. Halbert dryly reported that Sheldon's earnest pleading, plus the memory of the arrests, kept the boys "to an endurable standard of order for a while." However, at least on the nights when lenient caretakers were in charge, "sometimes the Hall resembled a circus about as much as a reading room."⁴⁰

When the lease from Andrew Jordan ran out in the fall of 1895, the library moved with the kindergarten to the Tennesseetown Congregational Church. Discipline problems continued. So far was the library from being a typical reading room that Minus Gentry remembered the library evenings as "game nights" where not-so-sedate activities, such as playing caroms, were the rule.⁴¹ Halbert said that one volunteer staffer "needed a bottle of Paine's Celery Compound to restore his nerves after each experience in the Library." Apparently the youngsters continued, throughout the history of the library, to expand their minds mainly by throwing paperwads, pieces of coal and books, and by blowing out the lights and rattling the blinds. Periodic Sheldon lectures on order may have helped, but the level of decorum was never high. Nevertheless, Halbert, like Sheldon, was optimistic about the library's usefulness: "It is the refractory boys who attract the most attention, but there has always been an element of well behaved and studious patrons of the Library," some of whom read many books. Moreover, if they had not been in the library, what mischief might they have

35. *Ibid.*, September 9, 1906.

36. *Ibid.*

37. Interview with Minus Gentry, July 22, 1981.

38. Halbert, *Across the Way*, 6, 9. See also, Cox, *Blacks in Topeka*, 147.

39. Halbert, *Across the Way*, 9.

40. *Ibid.*

41. Interview with Minus Gentry, July 22, 1981.

been causing elsewhere?⁴² The library was, in fact, well patronized, and during two winters in the late nineties, Henry Burt, at that time the Washburn student hired to head the library, actually enticed a number of the young patrons to join a literary society featuring debates and recitations.⁴³ The library apparently lasted for many years; William H. Guild in 1981 recalled that he had surely worked in the library as late as 1909 and possibly as late as 1913, earning fifty cents a night for his efforts.⁴⁴

Other Educational and Cultural Projects

Yet another use made of Union Hall was that of sewing classes for the schoolgirls of Tennesseetown. Ten women from Central Church, and one from a nearby Presbyterian church, supervised the project and furnished materials for the Saturday afternoon classes. By the fall of 1896 the project had become a substantial one, and Mrs. F. E. Sherman was hired to take charge of it. By the fall of 1897 attendance was up to sixty, including virtually every girl in the neighborhood.⁴⁵

In the meantime, the boys were not neglected. Basket-weaving classes were instituted for them. The boys could buy the necessary materials for about five cents, and had no trouble selling the baskets they made for fifteen. The dime profit was a powerful motivator, and the basket-weaving classes led to the establishment of a manual training department at the public Buchanan School in Tennesseetown, with some of the classes conducted at the Tennesseetown church.⁴⁶ In November 1894, a "Boys' Brigade" was founded, featuring military marching and drilling, but discipline problems quickly did it in.⁴⁷

Vocational education did not triumph in Tennesseetown at the expense of culture. Special musical and other programs were regular parts of the program for the uplift of the ghetto. Some of the programs involved nationally known ensembles, as in 1913 when the Fisk University Jubilee Singers gave a series of concerts to integrated audiences.⁴⁸

Nor was the spiritual life of the settlement neglected. When Central Church was organized in 1888, some of the members were already helping with the Sunday school at the Tennesseetown church. Halbert wrote that "the first thing Mr. Sheldon ever did for Tennesseetown was to sing tenor in a quartet for the Sunday school." By the end of 1891, attendance was averaging fifty at the Sunday school;

by 1899, it had topped one hundred, helped in part by a series of interclass attendance competitions. Gradually some black leadership emerged, joining the white Central members in running the program. And members of the Sunday school began to raise part of their own support. Halbert told a touching story in that regard: "One poor boy may be seen from week to week going around picking up old iron, rubber, etc. These he sells to the junk dealer to get money for the Sunday school. Some times he spends considerable time in this way so as to get at least two pennies to bring to his class on Sunday.... An example of sacrifice like this furnishes inspiration enough to overbalance a great many discouragements." Meanwhile, services were held at the church itself, as distinct from the Sunday school, sometimes with the help of a black resident minister but more often with preaching supplied from Central or other churches. Also, a Christian Endeavor Society was started in August 1899, letting thirty or so Tennesseetown children become a part of that enormous nationwide youth movement.⁴⁹

Social Services for Tennesseetown

Even as the various educational and cultural programs were being instituted, Sheldon saw the necessity for direct social services to the destitute residents of the settlement. Many such services eventually emerged. Some of them were offered on an organized basis—for example, several physicians provided free medical care, a lawyer gave free legal help, and E. B. Merriam, Sheldon's father-in-law and a prominent banker, made small interest-free loans to individuals in need.⁵⁰ Sheldon and a group of Central Church men organized a successful effort to find jobs for the men of the settlement,⁵¹ and Sheldon's assistant pastor Leroy Halbert helped to found a Monday-morning nursery, freeing the mothers to do their laundry in peace.⁵²

But many examples of such assistance cannot be enumerated fully for it was given by individuals, acting privately. Many, for example, took to making regular Sunday afternoon calls on the elderly and ill of the settlement, sometimes staying for hours. Distribution of food and clothing took place frequently as well. Special efforts were made to check up on persons in need during the winter. A few reports of such home visitation have survived. One is Mrs. F. E. Sherman's account of her trip to

42. Halbert, *Across the Way*, 10-14.

43. *Ibid.*, 14-5.

44. Letter, William H. Guild to Timothy Miller, November 7, 1981.

45. Halbert, *Across the Way*, 15-6.

46. *Ibid.*, 19-20.

47. *Ibid.*, 36.

48. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka*, 151-52.

49. Halbert, *Across the Way*, 21-36.

50. Peggy Greene, "Dr. Sheldon and Tennesseetown," *Shawnee County Historical Society Bulletin*, no. 58 (November 1981): 119.

51. Emma Crabb, untitled manuscript notes, Sheldon Memorial Room.

52. Charles M. Sheldon, "My Most Unusual Layman," *Christian Herald* 64 (December 1941): 42.



This undated photograph shows a Tennesseetown mothers' meeting. First known as the Sheldon League of American Mothers and later as the Sheldon Congress of Mothers, this organization held monthly meetings and in 1900 had a membership of forty-three.

distribute Christmas presents which had been gathered by Central members:

One place I found a very old lady, nearly blind, to whom I carried a Thanksgiving dinner and read to her from the Bible. Another place I found a woman and two little children living in one small room without a window. The only light she had was from leaving the door open or lighting a lamp. I gave her clothing for the baby and food for herself and the other little one. She was doing the best she could with what she had. Another place I found an old lady nearly 100 years old, very destitute. I supplied her with warm underclothing and shoes. She was very cheerful; she showed me the only dress she had, a calico wrapper all worn to pieces. She said, 'Can you get me a dress?' I told her I would. She was grateful for all the help she had. Another place an old man was very sick, a woman also sick and two little children. They were lacking almost anything to make life happy. With money received from the Ladies' Society, the whole house was cleaned, washing done and they were made more comfortable. The Christmas presents from Central Church

made many hearts happy, filled many wants and were gratefully received.⁵³

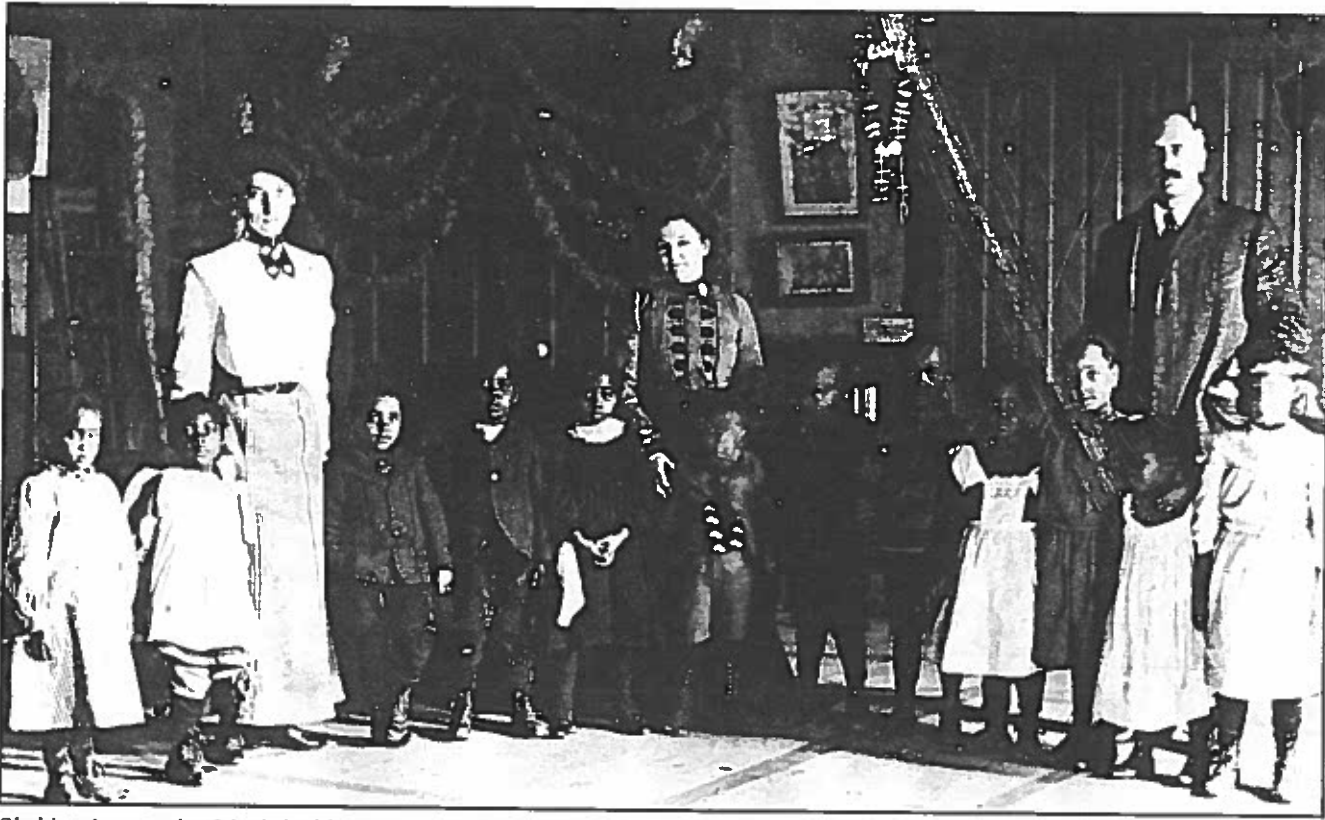
Sheldon personally, without fanfare, did as much as any member of his congregation to help where he could. His aversion to personal publicity undoubtedly caused many altruistic acts to go unnoticed, but sometimes word of them got out, as in the case of a Tennesseetown woman who was run down by a streetcar and had her leg amputated. Sheldon sent her a wooden prosthesis, one early biographical article reported.⁵⁴ The works of mercy were manifold, and they were gratefully received by people very much in need of help—and of concern.

The Village Improvement Society

One project which was relatively late in inception, but which had a major impact on the settlement, was the formation of the Village Improvement Society. Despite several years of a kindergarten, other educational projects, social services, and cultural and religious programs,

53. Halbert, *Across the Way*, 37.

54. "Rev. Charles M. Sheldon: His Life, Labors and Aims," in Charles M. Sheldon, et al., *The First Christian Daily Paper and Other Sketches* (New York: Street and Smith, 1900), 116.



Sheldon frequently visited the kindergarten, taking a special interest in the students and their classroom activities.

Tennesseetown remained physically quite unattractive with shabby houses and yards which were "for the most part, covered with tin cans, dead cats and rubbish."⁵⁵ A. B. Whiting, Sheldon's loyal energetic deacon, stepped into that breach in January 1898 with the suggestion to Sheldon that prizes be offered to Tennesseetown residents to encourage them to improve their property. Sheldon responded by calling a meeting at the Tennesseetown church the next month to discuss Whiting's ideas which had been refined into a fairly clear plan of action. The church was nearly full. Most of the ministers and other leaders of the settlement were there. Sheldon and Whiting described the physical problems of Tennesseetown and then suggested their plan to attack them.

At first the reaction was mixed, although it is difficult to imagine that by 1898 Tennesseetown would have rejected any Sheldon plan. Some rose to say that they were already working on problems relating to houses and yards and did not need any special program. There was some resentment, naturally, toward the idea of whites coming into the settlement once again, this time telling the

residents how to live. Halbert said that "one woman spoke saying that she was as clean and neat as anybody and she did not need to be told to improve her place." She also worried that the do-gooders would want the people to quit keeping hogs, an important part of their winter food supply. But many others argued for the plan, and on a vote it was adopted.⁵⁶

On March 7 another meeting was held, and prizes were set up in such categories as gardening, beautification of premises, building repair, and housekeeping. In all, twenty-seven different individuals entered the nine competitions, many entering more than one. Garden seeds were provided for contestants in the gardening divisions, as well as for other Tennesseetown gardeners. The contestants took to their work with real spirit, and on October 18 a meeting was held to award the prizes. Thirty-five dollars in cash and that much or more in merchandise had been raised from local merchants, and there was a general call for another competition in 1899, so successful had been the first one.⁵⁷ Houses had been painted; yards had been sodded; alleys had been cleaned of trash; and the spirit of the settlement was much improved.

55. Charles M. Sheldon, "Doctor Sheldon Says Victory Garden Movement Began in Tennesseetown Years Ago," Topeka newspaper clipping (n.d., early 1940s), Sheldon Memorial Room.

56. Halbert, *Across the Way*, 33.

57. *Ibid.*, 34.

The competition was indeed repeated in 1899, and for several years thereafter. Many new categories of improvements were added, including some for food preservation. Several categories were also created especially for children. The *Topeka Daily Capital*, reporting on the fall festival at which the 1899 awards were given, counted eighteen categories of competition, covering gardening, neat premises, improvement of buildings and fences, interior house cleaning, flower gardening, and fresh and preserved garden produce for adults, and gardening, sewing, baking, and oratory for children. The second awards ceremony played to an overflow crowd which sat amid exhibitions of embroidery, quilts, fresh garden produce, preserves, handicrafts, and other such things. The boys between twelve and eighteen gave their orations; the winner in that competition receiving one dollar. Typical first prizes ran from one to four dollars in cash or such other things as six silverplated forks, a rocking chair, a pair of shoes, an umbrella, and a one-year subscription to the *Daily Capital*,⁵⁸ Halbert, describing the evening, wrote:

the place looked like a county fair in miniature. . . . The whole exhibition was a credit to the community. In the evening a meeting was held at the church, where the declaimers competed and all the prizes were awarded. The church was packed with people and the enthusiasm ran high. About \$50 in money was given out and a considerable amount of merchandise. After the prizes were given out, the woman who had spoken against the project the first year came around and said, 'How is this? I entered for three things but I didn't get but two prizes.' . . . The results of the plan in the improvement of the town are plainly visible.⁵⁹

Two years later, in 1901, at the spring meeting of the Village Improvement Society, Sheldon delivered a speech in which he suggested that the leadership of the society, mainly whites from Central Church, be turned over to blacks living in Tennesseetown. The transfer of power was quickly completed, although Central members remained active in their support of society projects.⁶⁰

The End of the Projects

No single date marked the end of the Tennesseetown projects. Some of them faded away as local interests and needs changed. More of them never vanished at all, but were taken over by governmental bodies as permanent public responsibilities. The kindergarten and various vocational training projects serve as good examples for after the legislature, in 1907, authorized public kinder-

gartens, the Topeka Board of Education took over the Sheldon original. It thus may be said to be very much alive today, minus his name. Eventually the Tennesseetown Congregational Church, which had never been especially strong, came to be seen as less and less necessary in light of the development of several other strong churches, notably Shiloh Baptist, in the settlement. Finally the mission church building was sold in 1911.⁶¹

What the Work Accomplished

At the obvious level, the success of most of the Tennesseetown projects is the measure of the worth of the effort poured into the settlement. The kindergarten was a pioneering, triumphant success story in that it served hundreds of families and ushered kindergartens into the Kansas public schools. The Village Improvement Society certainly contributed to the physical beautification of the neighborhood. The library undoubtedly made a notice-

61. Untitled manuscript, Sheldon Memorial Room.



Charles M. Sheldon, at about the time his social reform programs were a major force in the Tennesseetown community, providing opportunities for "uplift" not previously available to its residents.

58. *Topeka Daily Capital*, October 14, 1899.

59. Halbert, *Across the Way*, 35.

60. *Topeka Daily Capital*, March 27, 1901.

able contribution to literacy and the appreciation of good books. The sewing and manual training classes helped young persons earn some money and trained them for jobs which were desperately needed. On that level alone one must conclude that it was all very much worthwhile.

Much of white Topeka was most impressed with the effects of the Village Improvement Society's clean-up program. In 1903 a Topeka newspaper beamed, "Tennesseetown has a prosperous look. Where formerly weeds grew in luxuriance, there are cane patches or cornfields or gardens. Where a few years ago there were a few old boards nailed together to represent a house, there is now a respectable little cottage. Where there was once a bare lawn of weeds, there is now often a lawn of blue-grass with park in front. There is a general look of enterprise instead of delapidation."⁶² Another booster a year later noted that even though Tennesseetown's streets were not paved and there was no sewer in the neighborhood (the taxes for such things would, after all, "be a virtual confiscation of the property assessed"), "the little district has more of a thriving look and is fast losing its tumbledown appearance."⁶³ A 1906 visitor took delight in the fact that an active interracial baseball game was in progress near Huntoon and Lincoln streets, where a dozen years earlier one could have expected to see only crap games on the sidewalk.⁶⁴

But there were other results as well, less obvious ones. Although statistics for the period are hard to come by, several sources report that the crime rate in Tennesseetown dropped substantially during the 1890s—a result in which

Sheldon took great pride.⁶⁵ And given that other white churches eventually came to see the merit of the projects and joined in working on them, it can be fairly said that Tennesseetown provided an early, practical demonstration of social reform through ecumenical outreach. Churches proved that they could work together on worthwhile projects, and the Topeka congregations involved—at one time or another representing most of the major Protestant denominations—did the social gospel at the grassroots level.

There was always a small undercurrent of resentment towards the whites who would enter a black neighborhood in a potentially condescending manner, but on the whole Tennesseetown welcomed its benefactors. Sheldon himself was nearly deified by those who were lifted up from destitution to mere poverty. One of them once paid Sheldon the ultimate compliment: "Brother Sheldon, your face may be white, but your heart is just as black as mine!"⁶⁶

To the twentieth-century historian, one who has the benefit of having observed a century of social change programs, Sheldon's uplift of Tennesseetown stands as a good, intelligent, balanced approach to community betterment. It did not just provide gifts, but took self-help seriously. It was not just a palliative program, but an integrated mix of relief and educational endeavors with a strong emphasis on helping people get jobs in a time and situation when they were hard to come by. The program certainly had its naive moments and some relative weaknesses, but on the whole it was more coherent and did much more good than a great many more costly and elaborate programs do today. KH

62. October 8, 1903, clipping from unspecified Topeka newspaper, Sheldon Memorial Room.

63. L. C. Hodge, "Problems of Self-Help," *Civic Pride* 1 (May 1904).

64. *Topeka Daily Capital*, September 9, 1906.

65. For example, see Cox, *Blacks in Topeka*, 147.

66. Clark, *The Man Who Walked in His Steps*, 9.

NYLE H. MILLER **JAMES C. MALIN** **FOREST R. BLACKBURN**
Managing Editor *Associate Editor* *Assistant Editor*

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THE COVER

A scene from the lantern slide photoplay adaptation of the
 Rev. Mr. Charles M. Sheldon's famous novel, *In His Steps*. Here,
 the owner-editor (left) with a warning that the paper is headed
 for bankruptcy if he continues to publish it as a Christian daily,
 The background printing is a portion of p. 4 of Sheldon's
 actual Christian daily edition of the *Topeka Daily Capital* of
 March 15, 1910, an experiment that was inspired by the fictional
 Raymond *Daily News*. Several authorities believe that the
 150-slide series illustrating *In His Steps*, made in 1900, and
 owned by John W. Ripley, author of the feature article beginning
 on p. 1, represents the first photoplay adaptation of a best seller.

**THE KAN
 HISTORICAL QUARTERLY**

Volume XXXI Spring, 1965

Another Look at the Rev. Mr.
 Christian Daily News

JOHN W. RIPLEY

DURING the afternoon of November
 newsworthy events took place in T
 same time and place. The date mark
 celebration for the famous 20th Kansas
 active service in the Philippine insurrect
 early in the afternoon with the 20th Ka
 up Kansas avenue, turning right on N
 the short distance to the south side
 where it passed in review before its co
 erick Funston, and other dignitaries. F
 bers of the regiment joined the crowd
 well-wishers assembled on the south a
 pleted state capitol.

On tap was a bountiful supply of w
 was to be climaxed by the presentatio
 wondrous ceremonial sword, heavily or
 and real diamonds. It had cost the str
 entire amount raised by popular subsc
 of pennies from school children, from al
 the idea of the gift sword had first bee
Daily Capital, which also headed the
 came as no surprise when the official r
 the *Capital's* founder and editor, Gen.
 Hudson, veteran of both the Civil and
 the honor of presenting the sword to Gen

John W. Ripley, president of the Kansas State H
 been a business executive and civic leader in Tope
Business Week and has contributed articles and ill
 other publications, and to National Educational Telev
 libed is an extension of his presidential address bel
 Historical Society on October 20, 1964.
 1. Topeka *Daily Capital*, October 28, November

Seated in the reviewing stand and awaiting his big moment, Editor Hudson had no way of knowing then that immediately across West 10th street, which borders the statehouse grounds, a most unusual presentation was also taking place that afternoon: one that was destined to affect his own career as well as that of Topeka's only morning newspaper which he had helped to found some 20 years before.

The principal owner and virtual publisher of the *Capital* was Frederick O. Popenoe, aged 37, a prominent Topeka citizen whose many and varied business activities included his recently acquired controlling interest in the *Daily Capital*. He had invited a few friends that afternoon to watch the 20th Kansas review and reception from the vantage point of the home of his mother-in-law, Mrs. Eliza Bowman, at 221 West 10th street. One of the guests was the Rev. Charles M. Sheldon, 41-year-old minister of Topeka's Central Congregational church. The talk was lively and eventually drifted to newspapers and editing, including so-called yellow journalism, on which Sheldon held strong views.

The conversation on Mrs. Bowman's front porch between Popenoe and Sheldon on the subject of a truly moral and Christian daily newspaper went something like this:

"Sheldon, how would you like to edit such a paper?"

"I had never thought of myself as an editor of such a paper."

"Well, Sheldon, if we should tender you the *Capital* to make the experiment, would you take it?"

The proposition was so unlooked for that Mr. Sheldon did not know how to answer for a few seconds. Then he said, "Do you really mean it?"

"I do," said Mr. Popenoe. In a very short time matters were brought to a concrete form, and before the two men had separated that afternoon Mr. Sheldon had practically given his promise to take the *Capital* for one week at least, providing he was left absolutely unhampered in its management.²

Here was Sheldon's chance to realize one of his most cherished ambitions: to demonstrate to the public in general and to the skeptical American press in particular the practicability of publishing a simon-pure daily as he thought Jesus would. The result was a paper that has come to be known variously as the Sheldon edition, the Christian daily, and Sheldon's Ideal paper.

2. *Chicago Times-Herald*, March 11, 1900. The story was written by Auguste C. Babize, a *Times-Herald* reporter who was also serving as a press agent for the Sheldon edition. Though the account contains several misstatements it is confirmed in general by Sheldon in his autobiography, *Charles M. Sheldon—His Life Story* (George H. Doran Co., New York, 1925). Here it should be pointed out that Babize gives full credit for originating the idea to Fred Popenoe, whom he described as "an intensely earnest Christian, an irreconcilable opponent of the saloon, and a leader in business and financial circles in Topeka."

A few years earlier, due to a stint of international fame had sudden who had by that time written several novels. His most recent book, *Jesus Do?*, had been purchased by a congregational journal published in Chicago by the publisher, the copyright was as the news got around in the hands of publishers, in this country and a free copies of *In His Steps*, more than hundreds of thousands, then by the novel had zoomed to the top of the list.

The ill wind that voided the copy for the author as one of the most popular businessmen managers, and heads of organizations eagerly sought Mr. Sheldon's novels enjoyed increased sales as a result of their serialization in newspapers. In his management to get in some strong lines the establishment of a truly Christian daily newspaper he had developed. Regardless of the novel's lack of plot, one of its dramatic episode tribulations of one man's attempt probably did more for the cause than ever before been accomplished.

The overall plot of *In His Steps* called members of the Church of Christ to live his daily life for one year as to live up to his pledge, Owner Raymond *Daily News*, without a paper, surprises them with the annals and business ends of the paper within a few months as though Jesus were the stories; no crime news; no report of sporting events. Advertisers of trucks and every item of a questionable

3. Alice Payne Hackett, *Sixty Years of 1 Bowker, 1956*, places *In His Steps* at the top of the list. However, the late Frank Luther Mott *Bowker, 1960*, devotes an entire chapter to an estimate of six million copies in world-wide circulation in the United States.

after the end of their contracts their patronage was not desired. The big profitable Sunday edition was to be discontinued. The result was that in no time at all readers switched from the insufferably dull *News* to the secular opposition paper. Advertising fell off sharply. Within a month a dejected Edward Norman appeared at a meeting of those pledged to live as Jesus would. When called upon to give a progress report he sadly admitted that things were going badly, and that he did not have enough money to continue operating his paper as a Christian daily. It would require about one-half million dollars, he estimated, to weather the storm. Eventually the good people of Raymond could be educated to appreciate and support the Christianized *Daily News*, but where was he to find such a huge sum of money?

By a strange coincidence one member present at the meeting, the young, beautiful, and very wealthy Miss Virginia Page, had been looking for some worthy cause she could assist to the tune of \$500,000. In the nick of time the *Daily News* was rescued from bankruptcy. In the final chapter of *In His Steps* author Sheldon has the Raymond *Daily News* in sound financial condition. Its success as a Christian daily is about to inspire the founding of other similar papers across the nation.

Little wonder that around newspaper offices for years after the name of Virginia Page was synonymous with Santa Claus.

It was agreed between Sheldon and Popenoe that Sheldon's week would begin Tuesday, March 13, and run through the following Saturday, March 17, 1900. An eight-page paper was to be issued each morning, plus an extra issue Saturday afternoon as a substitute for the regular Sunday paper.

Fortunately, for history's sake, most events leading up to Sheldon week were recorded by reputable newsmen representing Topeka and Kansas City papers. The eve of the first issue of the Sheldon edition found 19 visiting correspondents in Topeka, representing major dailies from San Francisco to Boston.⁴ An examination of the reports of these veteran newsmen places the journalistic dem-

4. The following newspapers were in Topeka before or during Sheldon week: James O'Donnell Bennett, *Chicago Journal*; Fred Nye, *New York World*; J. V. Lynch, *New York Evening Journal*; and San Francisco Examiner; R. E. Turpin, *New York Journal* (probably Sunday supplement); E. L. Bertrand, *Chicago Tribune*; Elison White, *Christian Herald*; A. C. Babitz, *Chicago Times-Herald*; R. M. Rugles, *Kansas City World* (and Scripps-Mohr papers); Late Young, *Des Moines Capital*; James L. King, *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*; D. O. McCray, *St. Louis Republic*; Charles Blakely and T. L. Vandergriff, *Kansas City Star*; John F. Raftery, *Chicago Record*; Alice H. Johnson, *Chicago Inter Ocean*; Walter F. Wyzman, *Boston Journal*; Charles Sessions, *Kansas City Journal*; William Allen White, *Emporia Gazette*; J. Ware Butterfield, *New York Tribune*.

onstrator in a somewhat different Sheldon in his autobiography.⁵

Except for Sheldon's expression uninvited newspaper correspondent in all" and their reports "also tre: laughable,"⁶ his own "Story of a pression that his ideal newspaper and light; that it was welcomed will big happy *Daily Capital* family, an daily's final issue everybody lived nately, that was not the case.

From the moment Fred Popenoe lous editor-in-chief, J. K. Hudson Keizer, that he had just agreed to paper for one week to Mr. Sheldon in the newspaper business, the onc Popenoe and his two top staffers For weeks their differences were h at a most embarrassing time: dur: was being published "as Jesus woi

In Mr. Sheldon's autobiography staff squabble brought on by his ex the cause of the severance of the o of friendship. The name of the on daily experiment possible, Fred Pol sense; he is identified only as "th Sheldon was known as a kindly so extremes to avoid hurting anyone.

Mr. Sheldon's invitation to publis who until four months earlier, had lishing field. Reputedly a person c

5. In his autobiography Sheldon devoted version of the Sheldon edition, the strongest successful enterprises in the history of journals a *Christian Daily*," raises almost as many quest deciding which facts to set down and which to censorship-of-news policy which had drawn some daily 25 years before. He was also guilty of se several miles from the stables ground, late

The late Heitch Pearson (Walker & Co.,) explained in *Doctor Dornan* (Walker & Co.,) approach all biographies with a certain degree biographies are readable, and the majority of a readable autobiography, Charles M. Sheldon— Mr. Sheldon's autobiography, Charles M. Sheldon—

6. Charles M. Sheldon—*His Life Story*, pp.

formed a small corporation in July, 1899, for the express purpose of buying Topeka's only morning paper from the Bank of Topeka. Five years earlier the bank had acquired the property, unwillingly, from its founder, J. K. Hudson, who in the wake of the Kansas "boom," found himself considerably overextended in real estate developments. The *Capital* was sold to Popence and associates (The Capital Publishing Co.) for \$50,000, of which only \$5,000 was paid in cash.⁷

At the insistence of banker David Mulvane, a Republican wheelhorse, the new owners agreed to install as their editor-in-chief J. K. Hudson, a life-long Republican, with full power to dictate the editorial policies of the paper. Thus Mulvane was assured that the *Capital* would continue to support the Grand Old Party, particularly the pro-Mulvane faction of the state organization, and continue to oppose Cy Leland's efforts to control the party. The return of Hudson to the *Capital* necessitated the demotion of Harold T. Chase, editor during the bank's ownership with Dave Mulvane as publisher, to the position of associate editor.

Hudson had no financial interest in the newly formed Capital Publishing Co. Of its capital stock, 51% was owned by Popence, 20% by Dell Keizer, 17% by Harold T. Chase, and the balance was divided among several of Popence's associates in other Popence-controlled corporations. Popence's majority holding gave him power to elect directors of his choice. There was never a question as to who controlled the board of directors.

As strongly as they were opposed to the Christian daily experiment, neither Hudson nor Keizer ever questioned the sincerity of purpose of their close friend, Mr. Sheldon. Visiting press correspondents who had fully expected to encounter a notoriety seeker in the person of the preacher-turned-editor, informed their papers that Mr. Sheldon was actually publicity-shy and obviously overawed by all the excitement he had started. In their dispatches several reporters expressed amazement at the universal respect and admiration held by all Topekans, regardless of religious leanings, for the pastor of the Central Congregational church.

The concept of a Christian daily newspaper was not original with Mr. Sheldon. Forty years earlier, in 1860, the New York *World* was established as a strictly Christian daily. Following the Christian editorial policy brought commendations to the owners but no profits. After several years of operations in which deficits kept

increasing, the stockholders voted to convert the paper into a secular one.

Until 1908, when the *Christian Science* was published as a weekly in 1840, but 20 continuing on that basis successfully. Mr. Sheldon and other advocates point with pride to the success strikingly demonstrated by the thoroughly Christianized that not only from purveyors of liquor, tobacco and professional sports, but even refused to publish a story about the *Witness*, the way—and more. The account made forth the main reason for the paper's to be the only strongly pro-English, predominantly French Catholic counterpart of the English, Protestant owner, John Dougall, attempted to lines in New York City, he was to die of the two cities were decidedly different, but poorer by \$50,000, such as *York Witness* as a daily, though he more years as a weekly.

In order to appreciate Mr. Sheldon's toward secular newspapers one has lengthy, two-part article he contributed five years before his momentous work "A Plea for a Christian Daily," which *dom*, Minneapolis, Minn., June 28 tary on the Topeka *Daily Capital* Keizer. Except for one of his *Capital* a few months earlier,⁸ the *Capital* represents Mr. Sheldon's first print work in the United States. I asked the business intimate personal friend of mine, to tell me could truthfully be called Christian. *Witness*, No. For a Western business man is lacking in anything is contrary to his

7. Topeka *State Journal*, March 27, 1901. The *Journal* was the *Capital's* only local opposition in the daily newspaper field; its reputation for reliability and accurate reporting was highly regarded in Topeka and by the Kansas press generally.

8. Topeka *Daily Capital*, April 23, 1895, Sheldon.

. . . . It means that in all this nominal Christian country there is not a single daily newspaper which could possibly claim to be conducted on Christian principles. . . .

My friend, the business manager . . . after his admission concerning the non-Christian character of his paper, feeling that he had made a large admission, was somewhat piqued. . . . One morning, a few days after his reply to my question, he brought me a copy of the paper and a blue pencil, and asked me to mark out everything that was not Christian. I read the paper through and it certainly contained nothing glaringly objectionable, from a moral point of view. But the entire front page was given up to the glorification of the Republican party which had just held a convention in the city and had failed to say a word about the shameful neglect of the governor to enforce the prohibitory law of the state. I drew the pencil across the whole front page of the paper on that account. . . . Then I turned over the pages and found advertisements of chewing tobacco and slang reports of baseball games and several accounts of criminal trials and columns of society doing which could not possibly be allowed so much space in a Christian daily. And about the only things . . . untouched by the blue pencil, were the market reports and the weather bulletins, and I had some misgivings about letting these stand, as two-thirds of the time they were misleading and so untrue and so unchristian.⁹

With sales of *In His Steps* racking up new highs month after month, interest in Christian journalism was never dormant, but in July, 1899, Mr. Sheldon was to give the idea a big shot in the arm, with headlines galore. The much-sought-after Sheldon accepted an invitation to make several speeches during the international convention of Christian Endeavor Societies at Detroit. In two of his speeches he made impassioned pleas for the establishment of an Endeavor-sponsored Christian daily newspaper—not a local affair, but one to serve the whole nation.

An idea of Sheldon's popularity then, with teen-aged delegates to the convention, can be had from the following which appeared in the *Topeka State Journal*, credited only to "a Detroit correspondent for a Chicago paper":

Rev. Chas. M. Sheldon carried the Christian Endeavor convention off its feet and then led it captive from the beginning to the end. The delegates followed him in droves and almost fought to get into his meetings. They denied themselves street cars [on] Sunday and walked from meeting to meeting, some of them covering twenty miles during the day because Mr. Sheldon told them he would walk to all of his assignments that day. [Mr. Sheldon held that riding street cars on the Sabbath was wrong.] They bought his books; they almost set him above Endeavor.¹⁰

Ed W. Howe in his *Atchison Globe*, sarcastically commenting on the report that Sheldon walked to his appointments on Sunday because he thought it wicked to ride street cars on that day, said:

9. *The Kingdom*, Minneapolis, Minn., June 28, 1895.

10. *Topeka State Journal*, July 26, 1899.

"People generally learn that it is goodness."¹¹

Another famed Kansas editor, W. concerned about Mr. Sheldon's mo did have a suggestion that was p funds for a Christian daily. "The t wrote Editor White in his *Emporia* readers and the newspaper will esta outside."¹²

What intrigued headline writers a Christian daily newspaper. D: period that followed one of Mr. St meeting of 400 clergymen attendi quired from the floor:

"How much will it take?"

"A million dollars," (said Sheldon A correspondent for the Chicago

the first proposal was greeted with laug Mr. Sheldon was abashed for an instant "Why not? Why not, my friends? The c the time ripe for someone to advance a r kind?" To an audience in the evening he would give a million dollars for the Christ in a great city, Chicago, to be furnished to be published as Christ would publish it

The million dollar price tag wa humorists to work over. Several sp Virginia Page's youth and beauty th of a newspaper for a mere \$500,00 at Detroit was double that figure.

In his speeches at Detroit, Mr. SI paper along the lines of Edward . would be a reality within a few ye every utterance, Endeavorers eger when they would be allowed to ad such a newspaper. In six months tl announcement on January 22, 190 Christian daily.

The announcement of the Sheldon cated Press by Auguste Babize,

11. *Atchison Globe*, July 10, 1899.

12. *Emporia Gazette*, July 12, 1899.

13. Official transcript of convention.

14. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 8, 1899.

Sheldon edition while representing the Chicago *Times-Herald*, on Sunday evening, January 21, 1900. It was timed for the morning papers which, Babize hoped, would be news-hungry on that particular Monday. Luck was with him. There was a paucity of national and international news. The announcement of the Sheldon edition made the front pages of many Western and Midwestern dailies. All but a few Eastern papers carried the full AP story on inside pages. Many papers wired for more details.

By the time the afternoon papers were out, people who knew the plot of *In His Steps*—and who didn't?—were speculating on how Mr. Sheldon would stack up as an actual editor against his fictional creation, Edward Norman. They wondered just how Mr. Sheldon would handle a rejection of his paper by readers and advertisers, if it came. Did he have another Virginia Page standing by, just in case? By Monday evening the proposed Sheldon edition was a topic of conversation in every sizable community in the nation—with one notable exception. Nobody, it seems, had told the old home town, Topeka, what was going on.

The incredible blackout of news about the Sheldon edition in Topeka was due to two unrelated circumstances. Since the *Capital* in those days was not published on Mondays, Press Agent Babize, intent upon nationwide publicity, reasoned that he could afford to give the afternoon *State Journal* a clear beat over the *Capital* with the announcement on the chance that the news would be given a big play by Monday morning papers across the nation. But, oddly enough, the *Journal's* publisher, Frank MacLennan, the personification of independence, refused to print a single line about the Sheldon edition in the Monday evening issue.

The next evening, after the Tuesday morning *Capital* had splashed the news of the Sheldon edition across its front page, the *State Journal* printed not just one, but two stories about Charles M. Sheldon. On page one, under the headline: "Mr. Sheldon Branches Out," readers found an example of MacLennan's wry sense of humor. It was a bit of news that normally would have rated no more than a stick of type on an inside page. One Charles M. Sheldon, editor of the *Missouri Valley Farmer*, Kansas City, Mo., had not suspended publication as rumored, but had changed from a weekly to a monthly paper with the purchase of another journal, the *Rural Home*. Inside, well-buried at the bottom of page six, was a single paragraph announcing the Sheldon edition of the *Capital*.¹⁵

15. Topeka *State Journal*, January 23, 1900.

If the announcement of the Sheldon surprise to the *Capital's* readers, the must have given them another jolt. paper on Tuesday morning, January 23, 1900. Babize had not just one, but two stories about Charles M. Sheldon. On page one, under the headline: "Mr. Sheldon Branches Out," readers found an example of MacLennan's wry sense of humor. It was a bit of news that normally would have rated no more than a stick of type on an inside page. One Charles M. Sheldon, editor of the *Missouri Valley Farmer*, Kansas City, Mo., had not suspended publication as rumored, but had changed from a weekly to a monthly paper with the purchase of another journal, the *Rural Home*. Inside, well-buried at the bottom of page six, was a single paragraph announcing the Sheldon edition of the *Capital*.¹⁵

The top half of the front page v equal-size line cuts. On the left v from Dell Keizer, president of the Mr. Sheldon to take over the man week. In the center, a picture of a facsimile of Sheldon's handwritten arresting makeup of the front portrait of Bishop John S. Vincent of Episcopal church, together with his Press Agent Babize hadn't miss issue. It had been carefully planning to break the news to Kansas subscribers about Mr. Sheldon's plans, the Tuesday morning paper were throughout the United States—and newspapers, educators. Each received a letter signed by Editor J. special issue of the *Capital* coming express your views in advance as this plan, and upon its completion, . . . The *Capital* will reprint it of the leading men of the State, so From clergymen the reaction w the secular press, mostly skeptical. brickbats and bouquets for the outside, to enliven the *Capital's* edit weeks.

When the first issue of the Sheldon 13, one innovation noted by all w picture section. In addition to carry, as is customary, Mr. Sheldon added the *Capital's* organization down to t notable exceptions. Missing from t Fred Popenoe, owner and *ipso facto* protegee, Auguste C. Babize, sub-10 edition.

10. Form letter addressed to the Rev. Wilbur C. Babize, Topeka, Kansas, January 23, 1900.—Sheldon Memorial Collection, C.

Babize and Popenoe were old friends who had become acquainted when as youths both were enrolled in the preparatory course at Washburn College, Topeka. At the age of six Babize with his parents emigrated from France to Sterling, Kan. After completing the prep course at Washburn, Babize entered Williams College, Williamstown, Mass., graduating in 1885. He immediately entered newspaper work, first as a reporter on the Springfield (Mass.) *Republican*, then to the *Chicago Tribune* for several years, and later with the *Chicago Times-Herald* where, as one of that paper's top reporters, he rated a byline.¹⁷

Through the intervening years Fred Popenoe had kept in touch with Babize. Soon after that day in November when Mr. Sheldon had agreed to publish the *Capital* for one week, Popenoe went to Chicago to seek expert advice from his old prep school chum. Before the conference was over Babize had agreed to handle all publicity for the Sheldon edition, including the all-important announcement of the event. Whether or not Babize's employer was aware of this arrangement is not known. In addition to whatever compensation was agreed upon for Babize's services as a press agent, he was also promised an undisclosed amount of stock in the *Capital Publishing Co.* Then, or sometime prior to the actual publication of the Sheldon edition, Popenoe offered Babize the permanent position (to be created) of managing editor.¹⁸

In view of an incident that occurred in the *Capital's* newsroom during Sheldon week, it is possible that in order to persuade Babize to consider a permanent connection with the *Capital*, Popenoe had revealed to him his aspiration for a Christian daily of more than a temporary nature—a permanent *Christian Daily Capital*.

During the Chicago conference, Babize suggested the name of Herbert S. Houston, formerly of Larned, Kan., as the ideal manager of foreign (nonlocal) advertising for the Sheldon edition, if he could be engaged. Babize had known Houston when both were reporters on the *Chicago Tribune*. In the meantime, Houston had switched to advertising and was then making a name for himself as advertising manager of *Outing Magazine* in New York City. So Popenoe traveled on to New York where he met and offered Houston the juiciest plum of the Sheldon edition enterprise—the exclusive agency for its foreign advertising.¹⁹

After he had arranged with his employer for a leave of absence,

17. *Fifty Years After: The Class of 1885—Williams College*, compiled for the class of 1885 by Auguste C. Babize (privately printed, 1935), pp. 71-73.

18. *Chicago Times-Herald*, March 11, 1900.
19. *Ibid.*

Houston agreed not only to handle additionally to team up with his launching a nationwide subscription paper. Before the two could get credit as a salesman was put to a of the Sheldon edition. Mr. Popenoe Mr. Sheldon that the Christiana a home talent show. When Babize their drums, Mr. Sheldon, accordingly walk out on the whole affair. The interview with Houston, a resident

Mr. Houston went to Topeka Mr. Sheldon to undertake the enterprising preacher was decidedly averse to the necessarily attract. He was finally persuaded to do good. his [Houston's] next step was to give For the benefit of those who think such a be stated here that Mr. Houston worked elaborate scheme for obtaining publicity lating was required to set things going pulled the wires."²⁰

If Houston told the *Eagle* reporter Babize had a hand in generating the story.

Full credit for establishing the first used newspaper in America, temporary two ex-Kansans, Babize and Houston the scenes and at times employing them with Christian journalism, their circulation record that may never be

According to the *American News Capital's* average circulation for weeks 12,298. During Sheldon week the issues zoomed to the phenomenal figure

	Printed Topeka
March 13	1275
March 14	1264
March 15	1253
March 16	1297
March 17	1278
March 17 (for Sunday)	150,000

20. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 19, 1900. Sheldon had already accepted Popenoe's offer.

21. Topeka *Daily Capital*, March 25, 1900. sented prepaid subscriptions including those of were foreign subscriptions, according to the circulation stand sales. Following are the daily press n

times the pre-Sheldon average. That figure was verified by Dell Keizer and confirmed by Mr. Sheldon in their report to advertisers. How Babize and Houston managed to boost the *Capital's* circulation to that fantastic figure is a success story touched upon only briefly in Mr. Sheldon's autobiography.

Yet to be heard from was a report from Great Britain where it was said that Mr. Sheldon's following was even greater than in this country. Now, 64 years later, Great Britain is still to be heard from. This much is known: following a cable inquiry received at the *Capital* from Sir George Newnes, London, publisher of several large circulation magazines as well as a daily newspaper, the *Westminster Gazette*,²² a Chicago lawyer, Frederick W. Pringle, formerly of Topeka, was sent to London to negotiate a contract. On March 24, 1900, the *Westminster Gazette* announced that the first issue of the *Rev. C. M. Sheldon's Ideal Newspaper* would go on sale March 27 in London; Dundee, Scotland; Belfast and Dublin, Ireland. Price, twopence.

No copies of the Sheldon edition are to be found in the fabulous newspaper section of the British Museum. The appearance of the London-printed Sheldon edition did not rate a single line in either the *London Times* or the *Manchester Guardian*. A short cable dispatch was printed in the *Daily Capital* under the headline, "RUDOLPH HEARDED ON SHELDON EDITION BY BRITISH PRESS":

London, March 31. . . . The comment by the [London] Globe on the enterprise is a fair specimen: "The journal is very like an ordinary American paper, only duller. It will be an evil day when the hysterical rubbish which poses as religion in America and to a lesser degree in England, ever has a large following."²³

Regardless of Mr. Sheldon's reported popularity in Great Britain, without the services of the two gifted ballyhoo artists, Babize and Houston, the *Ideal Newspaper* scored something less than a resounding success abroad.

The smoldering controversy between Popence on one hand, and Editor Hudson and Business Manager Keizer on the other, flared up when Mr. Sheldon's ultimatum regarding what he termed "objectionable" advertising was first published.²⁴ The list of categories of merchandise and services for which space would be unavailable in the Christian daily, was long and, to most readers, amusing. In Keizer's opinion, the *Capital's* old and valued advertising accounts, regardless of their products, were to be coddled and not cold-

²² In Sheldon's autobiography the *Gazette* is incorrectly identified as the *Westminster Review*.

²³ *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 1, 1900.

²⁴ *Topeka State Journal*, March 13, 1900; *Printer's Ink*, New York, March 14, 1900, p. 28.

shouldered. He pointed out to Popce contracted for specific space and tiring fishing Co. if their ads were refused they could be expected to switch the *State Journal*. Doubtlessly, Keizer that his generosity in granting exclusivity to Houston could very well result in S. C. Beckwith Agency, New York, foreign advertising representative hired *Capital's* masthead.

Whether because of the ominous vision, or perhaps upon the advice of Popce just engaged as advertising manager Popence sought legal counsel. Here into the story, Attorney Sam Garden practice in Topeka some 10 years earlier copyright law in New York City. Recommended by Lawyer Gardenshire to Co. from damage suits arising from simple and strictly within the law, would have resorted to such a legal gesture that an agreement be drawn properties of the Capital Publishing Associated Press franchise, would Sheldon for a period of one week, for considerations. Then if anyone were preacher.²⁵

Always indifferent toward business Sheldon probably signed the lease purpose. He was a man who trusted matter of the lease is not mentioned. With the legal obstacles cleared, a nationwide subscription campaign estant religious groups but particularly Christian Endeavor with its 55,000 It be another organization like the Christian It was then the recognized youth Protestant denominations. In 190 membership, world-wide, of more than In order to cash in on the Endeavor don's proposal during their conventi

²⁵ *Chicago Times-Herald*, March 11, 1900

the subscription campaign hit upon a scheme that succeeded far beyond their fondest hopes. Immediately after the Christian daily was announced, Houston, then in Topeka, hopped a train for Boston. There he fast-talked the publisher of the *Christian Endeavor World* into donating the entire back page of the February 8, 1900, issue, which was ready to go to press, for an announcement of special interest to local C. E. societies everywhere.²⁰ The back page advertisement which had already been sold, was pulled, and in its place appeared a Houston-designed layout that, with a few minor changes, was later to be found in numerous religious and temperance publications. A feature of each advertisement was a facsimile of a letter from either the magazine's editor or an officer of the sponsoring organization. In the *C. E. World* the letter was addressed to "All Christian Endeavor Societies of the World," and was signed by William Shaw, treasurer of the United Society of Christian Endeavor. The potent section of the letter read:

SPECIAL OFFER THAT WILL ENLARGE ENDEAVOR FUNDS

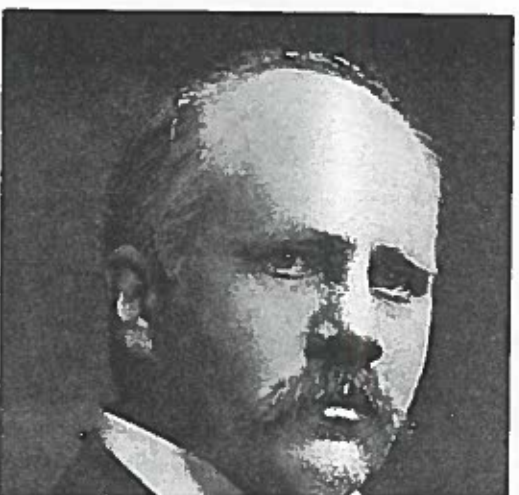
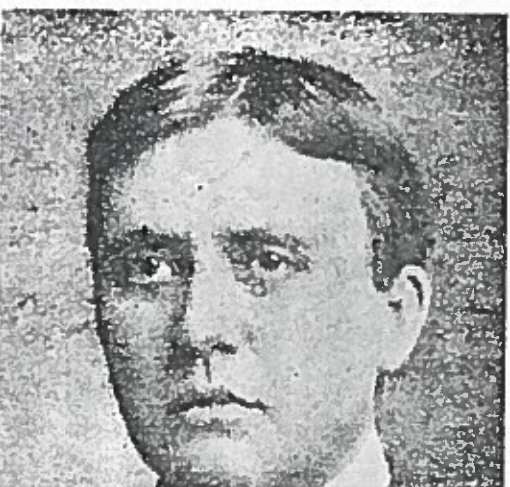
With the approval of Mr. Sheldon, I have the authority to make the following offer
On every subscription of 25 cents secured for The Sheldon Edition by a Christian Endeavor society, 10 cents may be retained by the society for its own uses. [Then came instructions for preparing mailing lists and forwarding money] Let us push the Sheldon Christian Daily to a million copies. Faithfully yours.

On Tuesday, March 13, 1900, the *Brooklyn Eagle* reported:

One after another, the great religious organizations, the Christian Endavorers, the Young Men's Christian Association, the Epworth League, the Baptist Young People's Union, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, were set in motion as divisions of a great army of canvassers to solicit subscriptions. In every city, town and village throughout the nation where one or more of these organizations is represented solicitors have been at work taking in quarters for the Sheldon edition and retaining 10 cents for local church purposes. Arrangements were also made with the news companies so that wherever a newsdealer can be found there will be the Sheldon edition all this week.

Although their subscription campaign produced results far beyond expectations, Babize and Houston were surprised to discover that top honors were captured by a publication that completely bypassed their recommended procedures. The leading religious journal of the time, *The Christian Herald*, with a circulation of 268,000, ignored the idea of promoting the Sheldon edition through its advertising columns. Yet the *Christian Herald* forwarded to the *Capital* a list of 16,000 subscribers, more than twice the number

20. Herbert S. Houston, "Truth Drive Begun in Early Days," in *Editor and Publisher*, New York, June 27, 1930, pp. 15, 16.



"RULES AND REGULATIONS."

Instructions Mr. Sheldon Gives to His

Reporters.

Mr. Sheldon did not formally open his conference with Capital reporters with prayer when he gave them their general instructions today. It has been generally surmised that he would do so, but he did not. He simply said, "Here we are, and started in.

The instructions embody in a great measure Mr. Sheldon's idea of what ought to be published in a Christian daily newspaper, and what ought to be suppressed. They show his idea of how Jesus would conduct a newspaper were He an editor today. They settle the point concerning which there has been the greatest surmise and the most discussion in the press of the country during the past few weeks—what is Mr. Sheldon's conception of a Christian daily newspaper.

The instructions are as follows:

1. Avoid the use of slang in writing reports, both words and phrases.
2. Submit all interviews to the persons interviewed.
3. If a reporter is assigned to interview a person and the person does not wish to talk, do not insist upon it. Do not quote a man unwillingly.
4. No theatrical news of any kind is wanted.
5. Sporting news—only clean sports are wanted. Athletic sports and clean sporting events will be covered.
6. In reporting crime go into the causes, but avoid the horrible details; do not let it linger or something else caused the criminal act.
7. Political stories must be non-partisan. Scandals—Avoid them, waste no time on them. They will not be printed.
8. Sporting news—only clean sports are wanted. Athletic sports and clean sporting events will be covered.
9. In reporting crime go into the causes, but avoid the horrible details; do not let it linger or something else caused the criminal act.
10. Political stories must be non-partisan. Scandals—Avoid them, waste no time on them. They will not be printed.

For tomorrow morning's Capital the reporters were told to simply cover their usual assignments, as the advance copy which Mr. Sheldon has been working on will fill much of the local space. The reporters will write up their stories, turn them in to the city editor, who will lay them before Mr. Sheldon. A number of assignments have been given out, concerning special matters which will appear in the paper during the week.

The reporters were given to understand that they must not use the word "pop" in referring to a member of a certain political party. Mr. Sheldon will occupy Gen. Hudson's room.

The request was made of reporters that they come to Mr. Popenoe's office at various intervals for information, proofs, etc., and that they keep aloof from the editorial rooms of the Capital.

Mr. Sheldon will run no patent medicine advertisements or tobacco advertisements. It is understood too that he will accept no amusement advertising and will not permit any dramatic criticism of any kind, good, bad or indifferent.

The Sheldon "Rules and Regulations" a State Journal, March 12, 1900. Right, ma during Sheldon week, March 13-17, 1900.



Gen. Joseph K. Hudson, regular editor of the Capital who was shoved aside during Sheldon week.



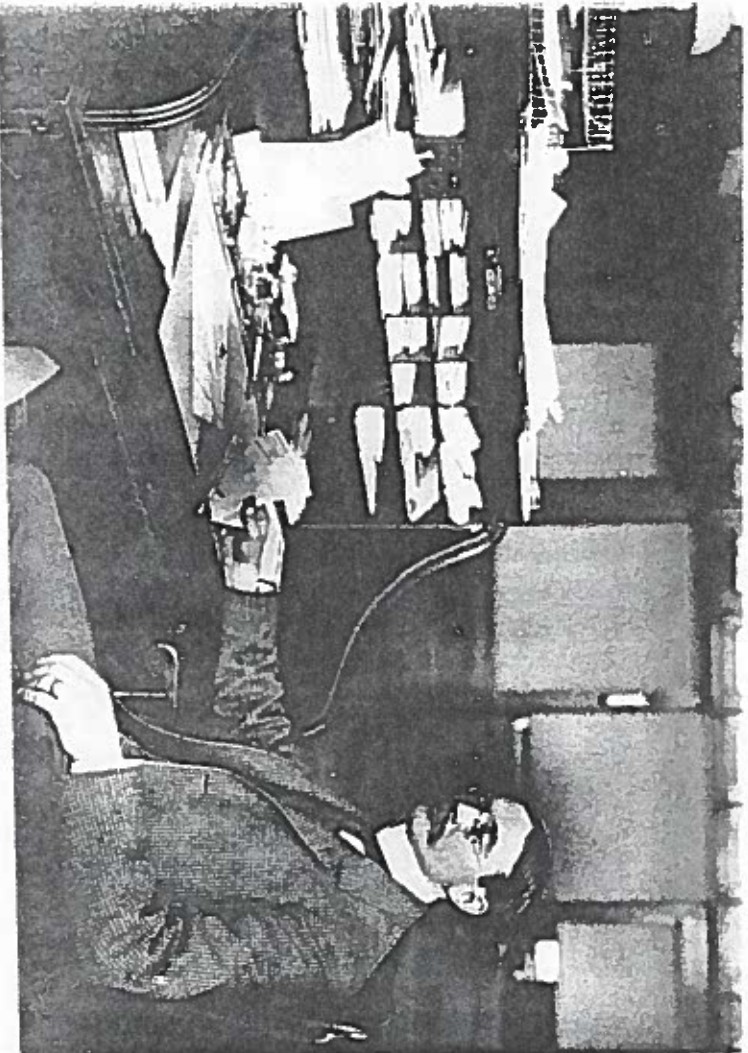
Dell Keizer, although opposed to the experiment, continued as the Capital's business manager.



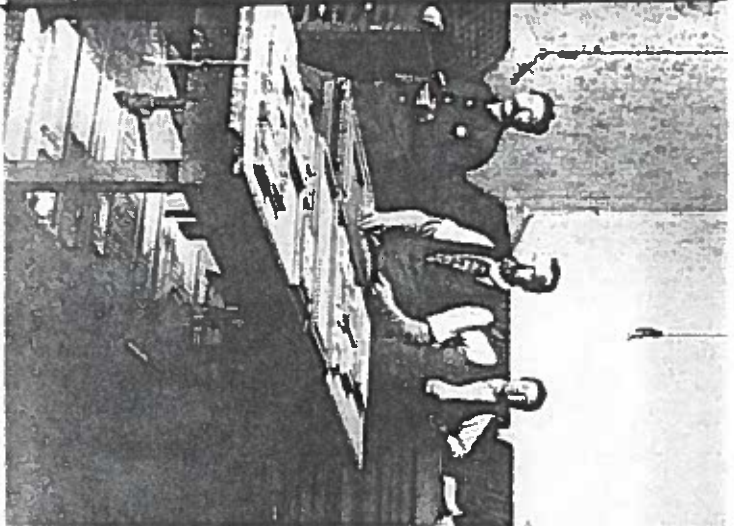
Herbert S. Houston, a former Kansan, was hired as publicist and manager of foreign advertising.



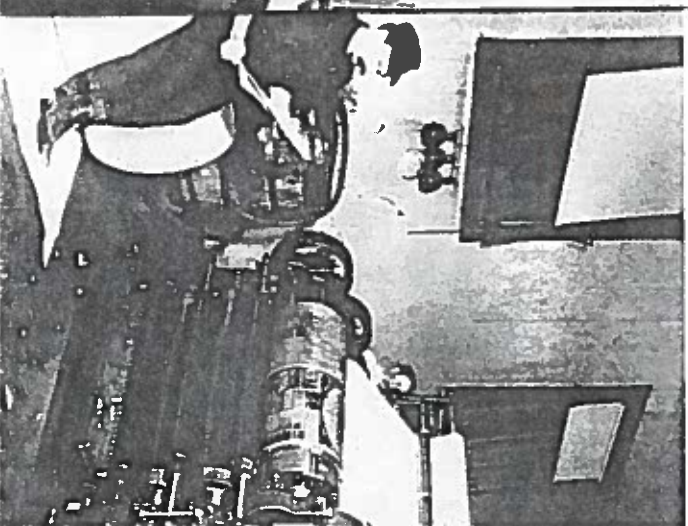
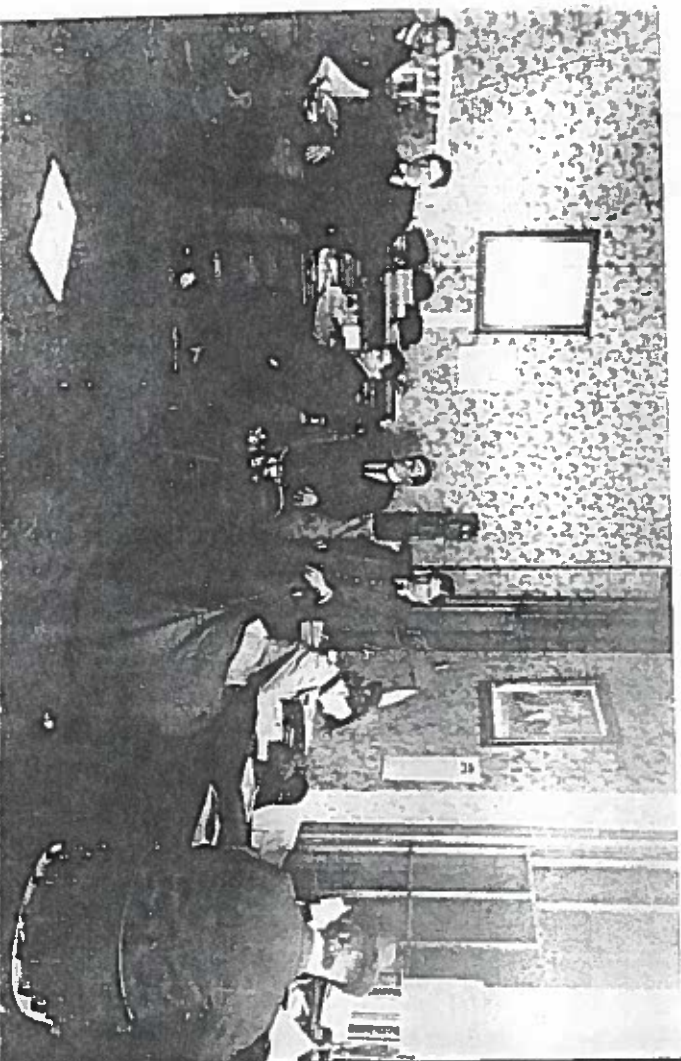
Edgar Watson Howe, Atchison editor who said Sheldon should stay in his pulpit and stop meddling.

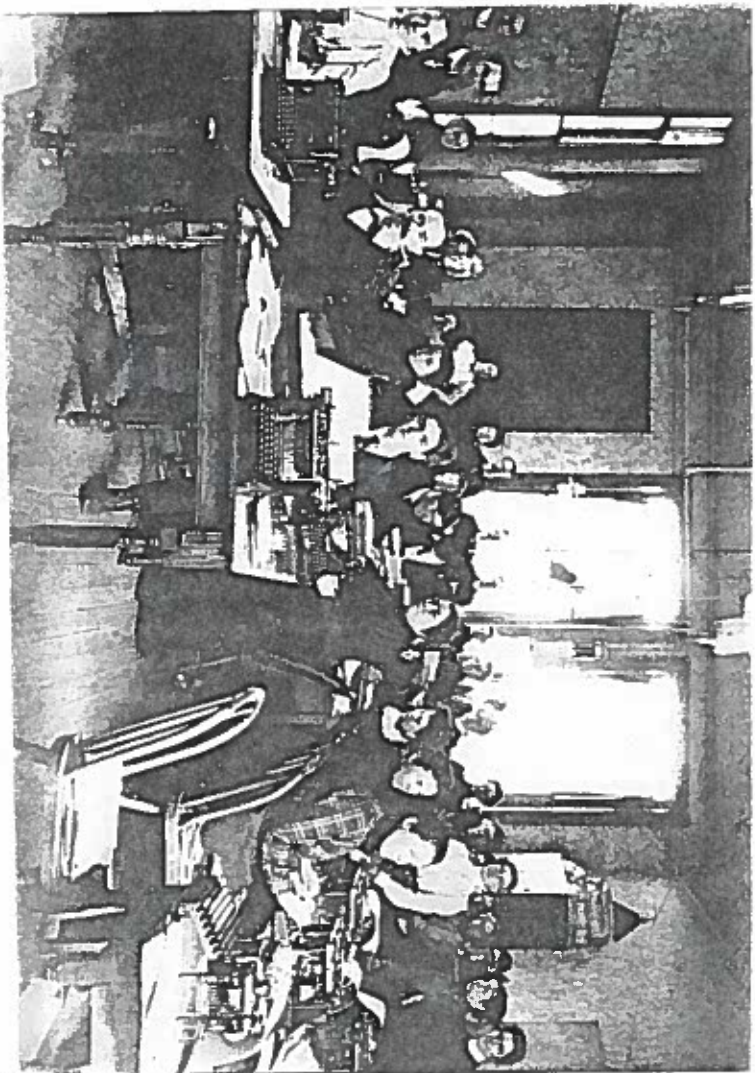


Frederick O. Popenoe, majority stockholder of the Capital Publishing Co., who invited Sheldon to conduct the journalistic experiment. This and the following photographs were taken in the early months of 1900. Below, the newsroom. The woman probably was Miss Jessie Garwood, society editor.

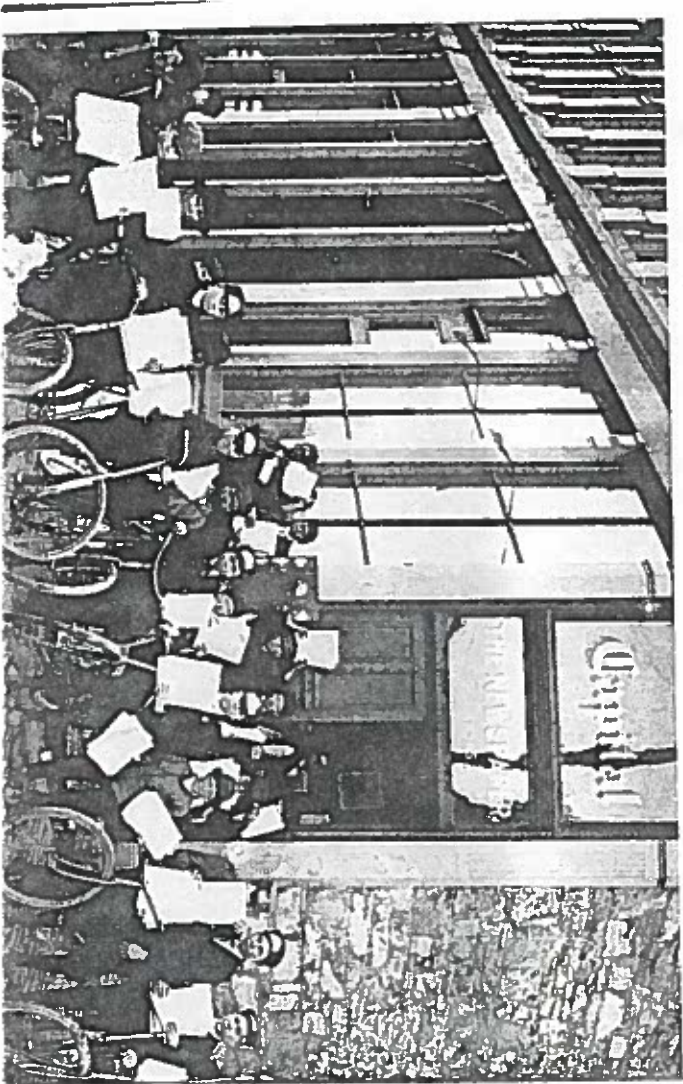


Corner of the Capital composing room. B pressroom superintendent Robert

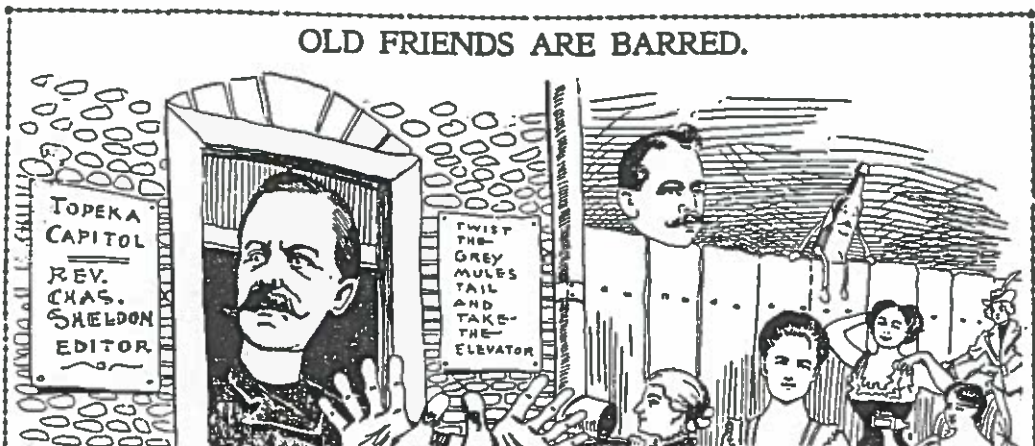


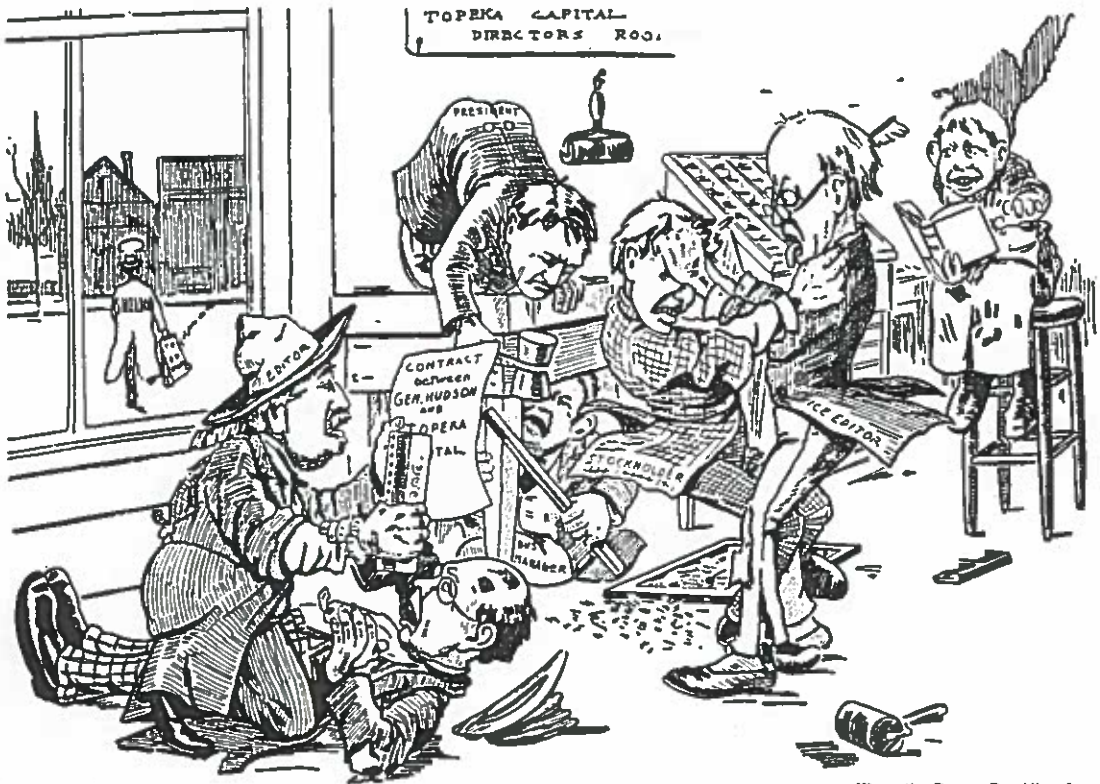


Part of the subscription department where mailing labels were prepared for the six Sheldon issues. Below, newsboys who distributed the Capital in Topeka.



OLD FRIENDS ARE BARRED.





[From the Denver Republican.]

The meeting to decide whether the paper shall go on as a Christian daily, or be run as Hudson would run it.

The Rev. Mr. Charles M. Sheldon leaves with his editorial portfolio and halo, while the regular newspapermen resume their discussions. First published in the *Denver Republican*, the cartoon was recaptioned and reprinted in the *Topeka State Journal*, March 22, 1900.

SHELDON'S N

from any other religious journal, a shipment of pre-addressed mailing experiment, the *Christian Herald* writer, Gilson Willetts, to Topeka, in journalism. As a footnote to ea that readers could support the Ch subscribing to Mr. Sheldon's forth above, 16,000 took the hint.

Ostensibly, the ten-cent commi authorized by Mr. Sheldon" was c religiously oriented associations. F Sheldon edition as a premium wi *Moines News*, in front-page annoi consecutive issues, offered the Shu scribers to the *News*. Five thousa resulted. As a good will demonstra and *Enquirer* (morning and eveni agement) accepted 17,000 subscrip commissions to two local Christian

Despite Mr. Sheldon's refusal to press (he made an exception for V which, incidentally, had been allott inches—than any other advertiser), feed visiting correspondents and th items to keep Topeka and the *Capita* weeks of preparation for the big eve ment of the upcoming Christian da Union. Another day it was a conde lie priest in Detroit. Slippery Rock somehow managed to send in 1,500 a single subscription received from ; Mr. Sheldon, from Oom Paul Kruegei which was then at war with the Bri that a candidate for congress had d form which he thought Jesus woul the owner-editor of a small town Sheldon, editorially, how, in his of delinquent subscriber?

Commenting upon the press age

Sheldon edition, the *Brooklyn Eagle*, after interviewing Houston, printed the following:

Nearly all its fish that comes to the press agent's net; criticism is more valuable than fulsome praise, for attack inspires counter attack, all of which keeps the subject of the controversy before the public. Consequently, when E. W. Howe, the far-famed editor of the *Atchison Globe*, upon being duly incensed by figurative red rags [waved] by some of Mr. Houston's journalistic matadors, took his vitriolic pen in hand to baste Mr. Sheldon to a finish in his wild Western way, Mr. Houston could have wept tears of joy, so to speak.²⁷

Although Houston was halfway across the continent from Babize, his collaborator-in-publicity, he took full credit for needling Edgar Watson Howe into action. The free-thinking, free-swinging editor of the *Atchison Globe* had months before indicated his antipathy toward Sheldon and the Christian daily idea in no uncertain terms. Following the official announcement of the *Sheldon Capital*, Ed Howe, too, had a statement for the Associated Press. The *State Journal* gave it position on page one.

Parson Sheldon's desire to publish a newspaper for a week, is evidence that he does not believe that a sufficient amount of religion is injected into the columns of the newspapers.

Neither is there enough common sense . . . in the average sermon but editors are not making the experiment of turning preacher for a week. It would be only fair exchange if J. K. Hudson became pastor of the Central Congregational church . . . for a week. It would be a nice little vacation for him.

In case J. K. Hudson does not care for the assignment, the editor of The *Globe* would be glad to write a sermon to be read [by Ed Howe] in Sheldon's pulpit during the week he is busy pointing out the mistakes of editors. . . . Or, if Topeka people object to the editor of The *Globe* in the pulpit, his sermon in reply to Sheldon will be printed in the *Topeka Journal*.

If we fail to make out as much of a case against preachers as Sheldon makes out against newspapers, we will buy a Bible, and join the church.²⁸

Evidently members of Mr. Sheldon's church decided that they could get along nicely without the services of an editor-turned-preacher, so Ed Howe, true to his promise, wrote not just one lay sermon for the *State Journal* (and, of course, his own paper), but four additional sermons, one for each day of the Christian daily. The sermons were copyrighted and offered for syndication. A few days before the first installment appeared in print, Howe boasted that through syndication his lay sermons would enjoy a circulation of 600,000 or three times as much as the most recent circulation figure reported for the Sheldon edition.²⁹

27. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 13, 1900.

28. *Topeka State Journal*, January 27, 1900.

29. *Ibid.*, March 10, 1900. "The *Topeka Daily Capital*, March 8, was speaking in terms of a circulation of "over 200,000."

The apparent ease with which Ed. . . on the contrails of the Sheldon editic man, the owner and editor of the *on pion*, to attempt to get his paper in Editor H. H. Brookes announced that Right Rev. Sheldon and the Left Rev to run the *Champion* for one week a announcement drew widespread com. Probably the most appropriate rema the shoulder of William Allen White h— of a paper for some time and the material change."³¹ It was William Sheldon edition was announced, ta scheme that ever struck Kansas." Th not test Sheldon's theory. A year's t by which a Christian daily paper sho

Few if any advertising salesmen ha restrictions as Herbert Houston. To : he could *not* offer. He could not of of the six issues, nor could he tell th their ad would appear. He could pr would not be placed next to editoria of each issue would be filled solidly ' five pages solid editorial matter. I quote a rate per inch until the circr Houston managed to sell every inch advertisements, about one half of t could have filled the advertising colu

Blacklisted by Mr. Sheldon were all forms, patent medicines (whose a to 90 percent of the nation's newsj Cure for Drunkenness (to Sheldon al a disease), bargain sales (because verify values), consets (unhealthy be eries), and illustrations of ladies' hrtive). Also barred were ads for thea press had lots of fun with Sheldon' ever, small town papers cheered or

30. *Atchison Champion*, March 9, 1900.

31. *Emporia Gazette*, February 28, 1900.

32. *Ibid.*, January 25, 1900.

33. *Charles N. Sheldon—His Life Story*, p. 1

A friend of the small shopkeeper, Sheldon refused to accept any advertising from the big department stores in nearby Kansas City.³⁴

To refresh his memory about the business end of the venture, Mr. Sheldon, in writing his autobiography, asked Dell Keizer to set down his recollections of, among other things, the Christian daily's advertising policy. In part, Keizer stated: "Not one line of copy was permitted to reach the advertising columns of the paper unless it would stand the closest scrutiny [by Mr. Sheldon], and was without question from the standpoint of morality, integrity and thorough honesty in both spirit and letter."³⁵ Evidently both Sheldon and Keizer had forgotten several embarrassing incidents, two of which were acknowledged by Mr. Sheldon in the columns of the *Capital*.

The *Wichita Eagle*, March 16, suggested that had Mr. Sheldon consulted his wife before accepting an ad for a washing machine that "makes washing a pleasure" he would have learned that the claim was entirely misleading.

Advertising men had a good laugh over Mr. Sheldon's naivete in printing an anonymous contribution headed "Open Letter" which was patently a professionally prepared reader-ad. Addressed to the editor of the *Topeka Capital*, the writer felt compelled to spread the good news about a wonderful new magazine he had just discovered. "It is called the New York Times Saturday Review of Books and Art. . . . It is astounding to think that so excellent a journal can be sent, with postage prepaid, to any address in the United States, for \$1 per year. . . . I am told that sample copies will be sent free to any address, upon application. [Signed]

A BOOK LOVER."³⁶

The New York *Daily Tribune* which had shown continued and sympathetic interest in the Sheldon edition from the start, indulged in a display of righteous indignation over a certain ad that Mr. Sheldon admitted had got by him. To the embarrassment of Sheldon and the *Capital*, the editorial was reprinted widely:

SANCTIFIED SACRILEGE

The Rev. Mr. Sheldon, who has been running a newspaper in Kansas "as Christ would do it," thus with admirable humility of spirit, posing as the journalistic peer of the Almighty, is understood to have extended his divine authority to all departments of the establishment. . . . It is fair to assume, then, that the advertisements . . . admitted to the columns of the paper were such as, in the Rev. Mr. Sheldon's opinion, Christ would approve. With

34. *Greenville* (Ill.) *Advocate*, March 15, 1900.

35. *Charles M. Sheldon—His Life Story*, pp. 121, 122.

36. *Topeka Daily Capital*, March 13, 1900.

that assurance in view we feel emboldened
. . . .
"Stir the Subso

"To let in the rains that refresh the er
moisture graciously sent by our Heavenly F
the surface.

"_____ is Subsoil Plow accor
would please jesus, who said let nothing l

"Also, _____'s improved Potato D
in unfavorable conditions of soil, which i
words, by which we desire to honor jesus

Such is, we are to assume, the Rev. Mr.
"as Christ would write it." Blank's ploug
Blank's potato digger digs potatoes as Cim
presently have corn plasters for curing cor
sanitary plumbing such as "would please j

To every man of healthful, decent mind
the objurgations of an angry truck driver n
side of the revolting, studied sacrilege para
by this "Rev." Mr. Sheldon. . . . It re
spiritual civet to sweeten the imagination.³⁷

Unprintable, perhaps, were the r
J. W. Ripley, Sr., on discovering he
long-time customer of the family-r
had meddled with the first line of cc
had been accepted for the first issu
line, as submitted, read: "Strictly J
Mr. Sheldon had prefixed three little
Christian daily it read: "Claims to dc
Early in the subscription campaign

letters, with quarters enclosed, accu
indicated plainly that a portion of
edition would have to be farmed out.
by running continuously, could prin
page papers daily.³⁸ Before March 1
the *Chicago Journal* to print, wrap, e
dealers a minimum of 100,000 cop;
scribers living between the Allegheni
print and distribute the Sheldon edit
German language *Staats Zeitung* in

³⁷ *New York Daily Tribune*, March 21, 1900

³⁸ The ad of the *Topeka Lumber* (now R
on March 16, 1900.

³⁹ *Topeka Daily Capital*, March 25, 1900.

The *Capital's* press room handled the papers for the rest of the nation.⁴⁰

Each day during Sheldon week four sets of matrices were made by *Capital* stereotypers. One set was sent to Chicago, where the Sheldon edition appeared one day late; another went to New York City, where the paper was printed two days later than in Topeka. The fourth set was dispatched to London.

Although only one third of the total press run was to be handled through the Topeka post office, the postmaster, well in advance of the first issue, notified his superiors that local facilities would be inadequate for the unprecedented volume during Sheldon week. To avoid a probable tie-up, the superintendent of railway mail service for Kansas, an obliging and personable young fellow by the name of Clyde Reed, later U. S. senator from Kansas, ordered two large mail cars to Topeka, and came along himself to supervise operations of the temporary post offices for handling Mr. Sheldon's newspaper.⁴¹

The first issue of the Sheldon edition dated Tuesday, March 13, 1900, was late in reaching Topeka subscribers that morning due to mechanical troubles, plus the fact that all carriers had to serve a substantial number of one-week-only additional subscribers. The general reaction of local subscribers, old and new, to the first issue was described in the *Chicago Tribune* by its special correspondent, E. L. Bertrand:

Topeka, Kas., March 13, 1900 [Special]—No guns were fired at sunrise this morning. The newspaper created by the Rev. Charles M. Sheldon on the lines suggested in "In His Steps," proved a disappointment, even to townspeople, who love him for himself and revere him for the genius which they consider he possesses.

Those of Mr. Sheldon's Topeka admirers who looked for news in the first issue . . . had hard work finding it, and those who hoped to find homilies and sermons and lessons were rather annoyed because matter of that kind set before them had already been read by them in religious publications of uncertain and remote dates.

It was the general comment that the finished product did not come up to the prospectus.⁴²

A somewhat more detailed critique of the first issue—the pattern of the next four issues—was written by Frank MacLennan of the *Topeka State Journal* in his capacity as special correspondent for the *New York Herald*:

. . . A careful survey of the first page of the *Capital's* first issue under Sheldon shows an entire absence of important news of the day. Not a line about bubonic plague at San Francisco, the dreadful tenement house fire at

40. Charles M. Sheldon—*His Life Story*, pp. 118-120.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

42. *Chicago Tribune*, March 14, 1900.

Newark, N. J., the wounding of eight American the advance of [General] Roberts on the Or Italian boxer Caydo, who died as the result in a fistie contest. None of those important least, not on the front page. What a chance by exploiting the death of this poor Italian, fi of the pugilistic champion. . . .

Two columns on the first page are devoted covered by interviews from prominent people. published before, and as news are somewhat: these two columns could have been clipped from '93 and '94.

The most prominent item on the first page and refers to the Famine in India.⁴³ Another consumpives who flock to Colorado. This is tury of a Y. M. C. A. of that state and looks l sumptive Home in Denver," which is referred no doubt the article is one for which the C article prominent on the first page is a com signed by the founder of the "Prohibition Un cle closes with the remarkable sentence, "In t penter, the liquor traffic ought to die."⁴⁴

The best description of the editoria tion, according to the exchange editor in line of duty had read or skimmed, the paper, was written by a staffer of

Innumerable newspaper writers have des edition of the *Topeka Capital*, but the most us, is a fortunate genius who contributes it following remarks:

"No doubt every journalist of experience, he was meeting an old friend, though he source of resemblance. The writer was very a while the explanation came. Mr. SHELD given to the public, is closely akin to a an office when a sudden strike has taken pl cannot write anything of value; the fresh n have to be put aside because they cannot b with 'standing matter,' gentle and harmless lating for weeks, awaiting the order to be 'k yesterday's issue of an esteemed contempor suggested every man who has worked on a will recognize the likeness."

To this the *New York Times* added: "

43. The famine had been in the news for man form of an appeal for donations, and according t See Charles M. Sheldon—*His Life Story*, pp. 126-127

44. Dispatch to the *New York Herald*, reprint 13, 1900.

From the otherwise complete file of bound volumes of *Harper's Weekly* at the Topeka Public Library, the issue in which the above quoted article was printed is missing. A possible explanation: Mr. Sheldon and Mr. Popenoe were both members of the library's board of trustees at that time.

Meanwhile, back in Atchison, Ed Howe, whose fame rested largely on his singular ability to dish out criticism of conventional and often hallowed institutions, found himself on the receiving end of a torrent of editorial wrath from every direction. The American press, which had been overly generous in publicizing the announcement of Howe's lay sermons, fully expected him to come to the defense of secular journalism in his syndicated articles. Instead, his lay sermons were long, tedious diatribes, supercharged with bitter and unjustified attacks on Christianity in general. Nowhere in the sermons, each four columns in length, could be found evidence of the sparkling satire which had been the delight of exchange editors everywhere. Later, Howe told Frank MacLennan, whose *State Journal* had, despite petitions of protest, printed all five lay sermons, that his essays had suffered because he had been rushed in their preparation. On the other hand, MacLennan, in a front page editorial, half-apologized to his readers, saying the lay sermons were not what he had expected, and that half of the text should have been cut out.

Four newspapers, in addition to the *Atchison Globe* and *Topeka State Journal*, had announced with some pride that they would print Howe's lay sermons in answer to Sheldon's Christian daily. All four—the *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Herald*, *St. Louis Republic*, and *Indianapolis Press*—suspended publication of the series after printing the first.

After reading Howe's first lay sermon, the editorialist on the *Denver Republican* held his fire. But he admitted that sermon No. 2 was just too much. In it Ed Howe had committed an unpardonable offense. He had taken a verbal slap at Santa Claus. "With apologies to Kansas [the *Denver Republican* stated] we quote from Mr. Howe: 'I go so far as to say I have never been able to understand the Santa Claus story. If parents give their children gifts and please them, why give the credit to a mythical saint?'"

Without attempting to answer the question, the *Denver editor* expressed his opinion of the man who asked it: "The unhappiest man in the world is he who has no illusions."⁴⁷ This editorialist could not have known that 41 years later Gene Howe would write a

biographical sketch of his father, with the title: "My Father Was Man I Ever Knew."⁴⁸

From the *Wichita Eagle*, March

Hon:

But for all Mr. Howe's avowed first [lay] sermon is infidelistic and decanted to the core. . . . So far as the Christ and His religion, Howe's sermons paper, run as Jesus would, can possibly do

The rules Mr. Sheldon laid down nothing else, unique: no smoking; in news stories; no partisan political editorialist to ask, what other kit used at all, were to be brief wit porter citing how the crime might news was barred, as was all ne "brutal" sporting events. Permissi tournament at the Y. M. C. A. *Tribune*, Mr. Sheldon's policy director of the *New York Sun*, Char whatever divine providence per proud to report.⁴⁹

For a realistic view of the Topeka researchers and historians should look of the Sheldon edition, just as the picture of the fictional city of Ray. But in the *Sheldon Capital* there true story written by the society sent a detailed estimate of the street, U. S. A., in the year 1900 during the week in which social gave her the assignment of covered in Topeka on social frivolity

A full week in society might in party, two card parties, two dances, according to Miss Garwc the cost of each function. Total for theater admissions, \$1,000, or a or not Mr. Sheldon was impresses

48. *Saturday Evening Post*, Philadelphia, 1949.
49. *Christian Herald*, March 21, 1900, quoting Dana. *Topeka State Journal*, March

comparison more accurate; never, to be rashly venturesome, was one more striking."⁴⁵

One good pun deserves another. In London, when the first issue of the Sheldon edition was being hawked by newsboys, their shouting of "Top'eka" sounded something like "tapioca." Which tempted the *Newspaper Owner & Modern Printer*, London, April 1, 1900, to observe: "The Westminster Gazette of the Topeka Daily Capital is a capital topical production. (We have never done it before, and promise never to do it again)."

Generally speaking, Protestant religious journals endorsed the idea of a Christian daily to the extent of urging subscribers to send in their quarters without delay. After publication, however, the editors of the same journals found themselves in the embarrassing position of critics. Many dodged the main issue: was the Christian daily a success? Instead readers were advised that the time was too short for a fair trial, that Mr. Sheldon was to be congratulated for his noble effort, and similar hedgings with faint praise.

It remained for the editor of the leading journal of Mr. Sheldon's own denomination to administer the unkindest cut of all. Considering the fact that Mr. Sheldon had been a frequent contributor to *The Congregationalist*, Boston, its severe criticism of his journalistic demonstration came as something of a surprise to its readers. A portion of the two-column editorial states:

While Mr. Sheldon's venture in journalism was merely a project we refrained from criticism. He is a Congregational minister of excellent repute, and his sincerity, modesty, humility and devotion to the truth as he sees it have never been questioned. Moreover, he has acquired no small influence as an exponent of practical Christianity. . . . What, then, is the outcome of Mr. Sheldon's experiment? *The Topeka Daily Capital* during his six days' management of it passed from the category of daily newspapers to that of religious pamphlets. . . . He defines news as anything that the public ought to know for its development and power in a life of righteousness. Starting with that principle, he was likely to make a product which resembles the periodical issued by reform organizations rather than the conventional daily newspapers. . . . Indeed some of the religious news which Mr. Sheldon printed and headed up as such, was lamentably stale. . . . The main criticism, then, to be passed is that Mr. Sheldon has failed in producing a sheet which could be laid alongside our best papers. . . .

The editorial concludes with this summation:

We have no space to comment at length upon other aspects of this venture, for which Mr. Sheldon is not to be held responsible. But the sensational advertising of it, the implied reflection upon modern daily journalism, the seeming

⁴⁵ Rochester (N. Y.) *Post-Express*, quoted in the *New York Times*, Paris edition, March 24, 1900.

assumption of superiority in motive and method flavor which has tainted the entire enterprise the standard of Christ in the eyes of the world.

We hesitate to dogmatize upon what Jesuit's place, yet it is our reverent opinion that Mr. Sheldon's place, would never have entered the list had he not made such a poor

The leading Roman Catholic publication on the Sheldon edition, regarded it as a matter. Here and there statements appeared in the daily papers but without any far the most widely quoted theologian, on Mr. Sheldon's newspaper venture. Fictional Catholic priest whose paragon English-speaking world. Father Kell celebrated, irreverent humorist, Finley consultant on all matters pertaining to the Sheldon edition, brought up for discussion by Dunne's better known as plain Mr. Dooley by which regularly printed his devastating scene delivered in Irish dialect, he de issue of April 28, 1900, to an essay "On As usual, Mr. Dooley directed his re vocation a bartender, and Mr. Dooley

The editor [Sheldon] thin address I find that th wurruk ye've been accustomed th' morality an' debase th' home life iv Topeka methropolises iv Valencin, Wyanamak, Su Th' newspaper, instand iv bein' a pow'ful e has become something that they want to r-r-r he says, I'll stay here an' write th' paper me thing that'll prepare thin fr' death. . . .

Father Kelly was talkin' it over with m news in bein' good. Ye might write the doin on th' back iv a postage stamp, an' have rool iv a newspaper all th' murderers, an' suic an' famine, he says, ye wuddent hav r-readin' while he rode ar-round th' block on news is sin, an' sin is news. A religious new want to know what's goin' on among th' r read it, he says.

I did, says I.

What did ye think iv it? says he.

I know, says I, why more people don't go to

⁴⁶ *The Congregationalist*, Boston, March 28, 1900, in "No" and this journal called for a lower case "n" in "No" and

in giving two club dances, is not known. Miss Garwood's survey recalls the title of a song made popular by Bert Williams, "Bring Back Those Wonderful Days." It was further stated that

the dancing clubs afford no small item in the expense account of entertainment, the Imperial parties which have been given the past season costing \$65 apiece, which included the hall rent, music, refreshments, engraved invitations and embossed programs. Some of the other clubs, however, have no expense save the music and the hall rent, so a party of that kind can be given as cheaply as \$36.00.⁵⁰

During Sheldon week the *State Journal* racked up its highest circulation figure to date. The main reason for the *Journal's* spectacular 40% increase in circulation was, of course, the paucity of both local and national news carried in Mr. Sheldon's *Capital*. In addition, Topeka was treated to a journalistic duel of sorts. For each local story of importance to break in Sheldon's *Capital*, the *Journal* demonstrated how the same story would be handled by a secular paper.

When Editor Sheldon ran a story condemning rich Topekans (unnamed) as tax dodgers, citing the case of an anonymous Santa Fe railroad baggage clerk who paid more personal property taxes than an anonymous official of that great railroad, the *Journal* countered with what must have been regarded as one of the best local news stories of the year. Under the headline "ГРЕАТЪА ТОПЕКА," the *Journal* printed on its front page a two-column list of personal property assessments of 359 firms and individuals whose assessments were in excess of \$1,000. "ПЕКАРКАБЛЕ ШОУИНГ," the headline continued, "The Men Whose Personal Property Raises the Funds To Run the Machinery of Local and State Government."⁵¹ *Journal* readers could determine for themselves who was doing the tax dodging.

To match Sheldon's story of the launching of an anti-cigarette campaign directed at the youth of Topeka, the *Journal* came up with a survey which reported the number of cigarette addicts in each of Topeka's public schools.⁵²

Late Wednesday, March 14, the *Capital* received from the Associated Press news of the suicide in Kansas City, Mo., of J. Sherman Peffer, Topeka, son of former U. S. Sen. W. A. Peffer, also of Topeka. Adhering to his policy of playing down sensational news, Sheldon gave *Capital* readers one paragraph on an inside page which contained nothing more than "who," "when," and "where," plus a mes-

50. Topeka Daily Capital, March 14, 1900.
51. Topeka State Journal, March 19, 1900.

52. Topeka Daily Capital and Topeka State Journal, March 19, 1900.

sage of sympathy to the parents.⁵³ by the lack of facts in the Christian c by the *Journal*. Young Peffer, a Lin ing for the *Capital* and had set mi advance, for the Christian daily. On week, he was discharged. He spei City, then ended it all with morph Dependancy over the loss of his jo suicide. To the *Journal's* credit, it Sheldon with the tragedy as did m New York Herald's headline: "sucrd Intemperate Printer Discharged fo Editor, Kills Himself."⁵⁴

Late Friday night, on the eve of Fred Popenoe appeared in the *Cap* announcement that came as a shock correspondents who had not yet lef Popenoe, was to be continued indef

There is complete unanimity of sentim We now believe in Rev. Mr. Sheldon's id Christian daily, and we will make one out the *Capital* will probably not strictly fo Sheldon this week. For instance, the ma somewhat and there will be more news However, in a general and material wa Sheldon's idea of a religious paper.⁵⁵

Mr. Popenoe added a few more f would join the staff as managing ed officially approved by the board of day, and he fully expected to be al the more than 350,000 subscribers to The succession of events that fol nouncement provided the *State Jou* front page story for Saturday. It api line nine decks deep:

A BIC ROW IS ON.—Capital to Be Conti ners Manager Keizer Says It Shall Not B a Majority of the Stock in His Name.— the Plan.—GEN. HUNSON MAY QUIT.— Secular Daily — Must Be Partisan Republic

53. Topeka Daily Capital, March 15, 1900.
54. New York Herald, March 15, 1900.

55. Topeka State Journal, March 17, 1900.

56. Kansas City (Mo.) Journal, March 17, 19

57. Topeka State Journal, March 17, 1900.

A correspondent for the *Kansas City World* reported that the "bitter" row began at 1:00 A. M. Saturday with a scene between Hudson and Popenoe in which the former charged the principal owner of the *Capital* with high-handed tactics in announcing such a drastic change in policy without consulting the directors or stockholders. "An Associated Press man was getting ready to put Popenoe's announcement on the wire when Keizer had it suppressed until the board of directors had acted on the plan."⁵⁸

Dell Keizer, quoted in the *Chicago Inter Ocean*, said that the Christian daily scheme was all right for a week, and had proved to be a money-maker, but that it would be an utter impossibility because of existing advertising contracts, to convert the *Capital* into a religious daily. The *Inter Ocean* also reported that Harold T. Chase, director and associate editor, opposed the continuation of the Christian policy, but that he had gone along with the Sheldon edition out of friendship for Mr. Sheldon.⁵⁹

With directors Keizer and Chase opposed to the plan, Mr. Popenoe still was assured of a majority of the five-man directorate. Yet on Monday his proposal for establishing a national Christian daily was not approved by the directors. No details of the meeting were ever revealed but it is entirely possible that the matter never came up for discussion. A clue to the abandonment of the plan may be found in the *State Journal* under the subhead, "MR. SHELDON IS SILENT."

Rev. Charles M. Sheldon completed his editorial labors early this morning [Saturday] but when he walked into Mr. Popenoe's office shortly before noon, a blue pencil still protruded from his vest pocket. Mr. Sheldon was closeted with Mr. Popenoe and other stockholders of the *Topick Capital* for some time, but when he came out refused to say anything about the conference. . . .

[Reporter:] "Naturally you would like to see the movement continued." . . . Mr. Sheldon smiled. "Really, I don't care to say anything for publication."⁶⁰

It was quite apparent to all who had been following Mr. Popenoe's plan for Christianizing the *Capital*, that he had failed not only to obtain an endorsement from the man who had been leading the crusade for just such a Christian daily, but of equal importance, had failed to obtain from Editor Sheldon as much as a single line of publicity about the publication in the Sheldon edition. Nor was

58. *Kansas City (Mo.) World*, March 17, 1900.

59. *Chicago Inter Ocean*, March 18, 1900.

60. *Topick State Journal*, March 17, 1900. The only hint that Mr. Sheldon was aware of the difference of opinion among *Capital* staff members regarding not only his Christian daily but also Popenoe's announced plans for the future may be found in his autobiography, in a tribute to the tremendous amount of work accomplished by his friend Dell Keizer. "He acted in . . . as if . . . there was not a shadow of doubt in his mind that whatever was done in connection with the Sheldon edition was all right even when I am sometimes constrained to review, he fell back in his mind that it was all wrong. I am Charles M. Sheldon—His Life Story, pp. 136, 137."

the affair ever mentioned in the *Capital* as a secular paper except for an announcement formerly of the *Chicago Times-Herald* as an associate editor—not as announced by Popenoe.

Speculation regarding the net profit been very much in the news ever since on March 8 that more than 200,000 printed, and the end was not yet in sight in the business end of newspaperdom: 200,000 times 25 cents—that's \$50,000 they didn't know that about half of 15 cents each, 10 cents going for circulation, they added advertising revenue got lost. Local advertisers, those for Sheldon edition, were charged the same inch. Each eight-page issue carried local ads and 10 of foreign. Apparently,vised that the rate per inch for foreign determined until total circulation figured, newspapers erroneously stating rate had been hiked to the sky. \$36.00.⁶¹ These figures were not even released to the press, the rate for likely place.

The editor of *The Church Standard*, Protestant Episcopal Church, publishes in an editorial about the proposed Sheldon

The managing editor who arranged with ment is certainly "no slouch." He has no ordinary week's subscription to his newspaper week the price is advanced to twenty-five cents the following is not lacking in interest.

There followed a sales letter, signed forming prospective advertisers that in this country were making it their business for Mr. Sheldon, that every line of it closely read. An advertisement would hand but also his head. The advertisement

61. Rates \$28.00 per inch, *Ottawa Republican Journal*, March 26, 1900; \$30.00 inch, *Brooklyn Ex-*

of a cent per agate line per insertion on each one thousand actual circulation.⁶²

The hand of lawyer Sam Gardenshire surely guided the pen of adman Herbert Houston when he composed the sales letter reprinted in *The Church Standard*. Conspicuously absent is the name of the Topeka *Daily Capital*. Houston was soliciting advertising for a paper called *The Christian Daily*, a title that appears twice in the body of the letter, italicized. In his signature, Houston did not indicate his official capacity. His New York office address was given at 171 Broadway.

Seven days after the final issue of the Sheldon edition, Dell Keizer announced the average daily circulation figure of 362,684, which furnished the basis for the average foreign advertising rate of \$16.92 an inch.⁶³ (Circulation varied from a high of 384,000 for the first issue to a low of 351,300 for the final issue.)

During Sheldon week the *Mail & Breeze*, then owned by Arthur Capper and Tom McNeal, quoted Fred Popenoe's estimate: that the *Capital's* earnings on the venture would reach \$30,000. Auguste Babize, then a stockholder, sent a dispatch to the Chicago *Times-Herald* in which he predicted the stockholders would have a \$45,000 melon to divide.⁶⁴

A breakdown of the Sheldon-*Capital's* income and expenses printed in the Topeka *State Journal*, March 26, 1900, indicated a net profit of only \$15,000. But the *Journal's* estimator committed a whopping \$15,000 error in computing the income from foreign advertising. He used the rate of \$1.33 per inch instead of \$16.92. Adjusted, the *Journal's* estimated profit for the Sheldon *Capital* would be \$30,000, a figure that tallied with Mr. Popenoe's own estimate.

With admirable restraint, Ed Howe in the *Atchison Globe*, March 19, stated that "women and children" (when he yearned to say "widows and orphans") contributed largely to the \$65,000 profit. The Chicago *Tribune* of March 13 called Ed Howe's estimate and raised it to \$70,000. Then the Kansas City *World* on March 19 upped the pot to \$95,000, whereupon the Council Bluffs (Iowa) *Nonpareil*, March 14, gave the kitty a hefty boost to \$150,000. But a gentleman from Tipton, Nev., made pikers out of the Midwesterners. The editor of the Tipton *Gazette* disqualified the *Capital*, and on March 8 awarded the entire profit of at least a quarter of a million dollars to the Rev. Mr. Charles M. Sheldon.

62. *The Church Standard*, Philadelphia, March 10, 1900, p. 617. The rate formula was confirmed in the March 14, 1900, issue of *Printer's Ink*, p. 26.

63. Topeka *Daily Capital*, March 25, 1900.

64. Topeka *Mail and Breeze*, March 10, 1900; Chicago *Times-Herald*, March 10, 1900.

The actual profit from the Sheldon to the mysterious falling-out of the on Popenoe. It is a matter of record that no financial compensation for his services would be placed at his disposal educational donations. Correspondent to the St. Louis *Republic*, March 13, will not receive a cent . . . but 1 50% of the profits will be turned over That was the percentage also quoted b that "\$20,000 . . . profit is regarded

Possibly the only reporter to obtain a Sheldon, Gilson Willels, representing that Sheldon accepted Popenoe's offer "profits" which he would designate for

Now, if Mr. Popenoe was quoted in New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, February in New Orleans soon after the Sh Mr. Sheldon was to get better than a To the *Picayune* reporter's question, the disposition of surplus money mad Popenoe answered, "Certainly—we ha all of the surplus over the cost of th benevolent institutions." Remember, Popenoe's own estimate of profits at \$30

Eventually, the sum of \$5,000 was which he distributed to local institutio appears an enigmatic statement. Rath the preceding paragraph is quoted:

One of the commonest reports that nearly effect that the whole affair was a piece of t cause I was receiving between \$10,000 and t profits.⁶⁵ This story was published like a t scores of papers, and I suppose thousands o hewed it then and if any of them are living t paper," they say. "It must be so."

It is true that near the end of that week house a roll of bills amounting to \$1,000, b the same messenger who had brought them o

65. *Christian Herald*, March 14, 1900, p. 212.

66. Of more than 1,000 available press reports in which such a charge was made.

67. *Charles M. Sheldon—His Life Story*, p. 123.

Why was the money sent to Sheldon's home? Why was the payment made in currency? Why did Sheldon mention the matter at all? Assuming the Sheldon *Capital* made X number of dollars, who got the money? Babize said it would be split among the stockholders. The *State Journal* and a few other papers predicted any profit would be applied on a \$45,000 note held by the Bank of Topeka.

Dell Keizer, the business manager, had nothing to say on this matter. He had other worries. Rumors which had been circulating in newspaper circles that the *Capital's* advertising department was in for a rough time were confirmed in this dispatch to the Chicago *Times-Herald*, March 16, 1900, written by Popenoe's unsuccessful candidate for managing editor, Auguste Babize:

ADVERTISERS ARE PROTESTING

Advertisers whose "ads" Mr. Sheldon either drew out altogether or printed in a different part of the paper than that stipulated in the contract, are up in arms. Numerous letters of protest have been received by Dell Keizer, the business manager. The writers say a breach of contract has been committed and they order the discontinuance in the future of their "ads." General J. K. Hudson, the *Capital's* editor in chief, believes that ultimately a peace will be patched up again.

On the day following the first issue of the Christian daily, the city editor of the *State Journal*, L. L. Kiene, filled two columns of the front page with opinions of leading citizens on the Sheldon edition. Among the printed interviews was one with the new pastor of the First Congregational Church, Dr. Daniel Moss Fisk. Dr. Fisk commended Mr. Sheldon's experiment, saying he hoped it would show the metropolitan press that there was another side to newspaperdom than the counting house. Then, as an afterthought, the pastor of the church to which the Popenoe family belonged, ventured an opinion that had an ominous ring:

. . . . But there is another side: When Mr. Sheldon's reign of a week is over who must bear the violation of canceled advertising contracts. The business office can, perhaps, best answer that. It will take them at least a year, I should judge, to square themselves.⁶⁸

On March 12, 1901, just one year to the day from the evening Mr. Sheldon took over J. K. Hudson's private office, to prepare the first issue of the Christian daily, the *State Journal* confirmed certain rumors that had been going around town:

CAPPER TO GET IT — Deal on by Which He Will Own the Capital — Paper Is Again Held by Bank of Topeka — IS ANXIOUS TO SELL — Bargain Will Probably be Closed This Week — F. O. Popenoe No Longer in Control of the Paper.

[The text, in part:] Mr. Popenoe virtually relinquished his interest [in the paper] a month or more ago. . . . Mr. Popenoe bought the paper over a

68. *Topeka State Journal*, March 14, 1900.

year ago and for a time J. K. Hudson's edition and the dissenting action of manager who both resigned. . . . manager⁶⁹ but the paper steadily lost a heroic effort to put the publication on Rica looking after his [gold] mining I will return. . . . Mr. Capper is an years city editor of the *Capital* when I

It was now apparent that Mr. . . . the real life dramatization of the Act III when the town banker thr on the newspaper, there was no Y for her cue to step forward with paper and, in so doing, provide Sheldon's novels.

Instead, as if the script had been paper went to a former printer ar Capper, whose thorough training J. K. Hudson is so admirably de excellent and readable biography .

Just two weeks after the announcement the *Capital* and Capper was abo another front page story that really were in a two-column headline th

POPENOE AFFAIRS INVOLVED. — Their Them Out. — Owes About \$50,000 to 1 Was Paid to Him on Account of Money Mr. Popenoe Left. — NOW IN CC Adjusted. — Hopes To Get Money Spc Lost \$20,000 in Booming the *Capital*. Transferred.

In recounting Mr. Popenoe's brick the *Journal* stated:

Mr. Popenoe [then president of the a new domain. He wished to shine in paper which was then laboring under a nity. . . . He paid only \$5,000 [c the balance, \$45,000.]

This was one of the great mistakes i entirely ignorant of the details of the ne

69. The resignations of Hudson and Keizer after the Sheldon week squabble, as a result At that time Babize acquired the title of mana 70. Homer E. Sociology, *Arthur Capp* (Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 1962).

Then came the Sheldon edition with its phenomenal notoriety and circulation. The name of Popenoe was leached from one end of the country to the other. . . . Mr. Popenoe thought that he would continue to conduct the paper along the same lines as were laid down by Rev. Mr. Sheldon, and would thereby hold a large portion of the subscribers. . . . General Hudson now came to the front and said that as long as he was connected with the paper Mr. Popenoe's plans would not be followed. The quarrel which ensued extended over a period of several weeks, and was ended by the retirement of General Hudson and his son-in-law, Dell Keizer, from the management of the Capital. Mr. Keizer was business manager and owned stock in the paper, for which Mr. Popenoe paid him \$10,000.

GIVES PERSONAL ATTENTION TO HIS PAPER

Then Popenoe assumed direct control of the paper. Much foreign advertising had been lost. . . . Mr. Popenoe set about to win back what had been lost. . . . The profits of the Sheldon edition, which were more than \$20,000, were available, and the young financier saw a bright future ahead in his newspaper career. . . . Expensive men were imported to boom the advertising and help in the editorial department. . . . The Sunday paper was enlarged from 16 pages to 32 and even 40 pages, and the issues were distributed free, scattered broadcast over the city and state. The young manager evidently did not know how expensive such proceedings and policies were, but he soon learned. . . . As the year was drawing to a close it became evident that Mr. Popenoe's newspaper venture was not bearing fruit. . . . a policy of retrenchment was started, but it was too late. He had spent \$20,000 more than the receipts in booming the Capital in the brief period of eight months.

Money was collected for clients in the Accounting Trust Company, which did not find its way to the . . . clients. It may have been used to help make up the newspaper deficits or for something else—at any rate it was gone, and these people began to clamor for settlement. . . .⁷¹

Mr. Popenoe was no more successful with his mining investments than with newspaper publishing. After disposing of his gold-mining property in Costa Rica, he established a nursery for subtropical fruits in southern California. Horticulture had always been his hobby. His contributions to the economy of California are noteworthy. They consist in part of the introduction of one of the leading varieties of avacadoes, the Fuerte, and also of the famous Deglet Noor dates.⁷²

How much money Herbert Houston made in advertising commissions from the Sheldon edition is not known. Circumstantial evidence indicates that he didn't do so badly. Before the end of that year, 1900, he had purchased a substantial interest in the publishing house of Doubleday, Page & Co., and was elected its vice-president, an office he held until his retirement 20 years later.

71. Topeka State Journal, March 27, 1901.

72. Yearbook of California Avocado Association, 1934, reprinted as *Memorial Frederick O. Popenoe*, no date.

Thirty-six years after Houston's brief the Sheldon edition, his recollect *Editor and Publisher*.⁷³ The advertisement celebrating the silver jubilee of it in the *Early Days*, and below:

Past President of A[vertising] F[ederatio] Sheldon Experiment When the Topeka C Have Done It." By Herbert S. Houston, 1 tion of America and General Manager of Capital.⁷⁴

In 1957 the Advertising Federatio posthumously, by electing him to citing him as "an early and militant f In view of that distinction, the final the Sheldon edition is of interest:

It is not for those who were part of the credit for the Truth Movement in Advert any. But this much is true—some of the now fixed firmly in the practice of adverti ten years before the Boston convention of 1

All but lost in the barrage of ac greeted Mr. Sheldon's newspaper from the noted editor of the Empori Until called upon to pronounce fin: don's noble experiment, Mr. White severest critics. The headline over to the Chicago *Inter Ocean* could n was entirely misleading:

NOT IN SHELDON'S LINE — What's-the-1 Parson Failed — LOST BIG CHANCE — Will Sure of Himself — Journalistic Education in Medical or Legal Lines — Wm. Allen V

Had space permitted, the *Inter O* quoted Mr. White's statement that stated that a Christian daily will ; experiment been continued the pag ruptky. But what the headline writ White's brief summation of Mr. She It has set the people to thinking; it l

73. June 27, 1936.

74. Dell Keizer, as quoted in Sheldon's art was "Representative of the 'Foreign' Advertising rders to Houston as "the Eastern manager." A that Houston bestowed upon himself.

newspapers. In that it has been of inestimable benefit to the world."⁷⁶ Unfortunately, such a positive assertion in a headline would have sold fewer papers on the street.

As might be expected, at the conclusion of his journalistic experiment Mr. Sheldon was approached by numerous editors of newspapers and magazines hoping to publish his own evaluation of the Christian daily.

To all but one request, Mr. Sheldon replied that his newspaper would have to speak for itself. What would have been a clear beat over the entire American press was announced by the editor of *The Christian Endeavor World* just two weeks following the conclusion of the Christian daily experiment.

We have received from Rev. Charles M. Sheldon the following word, which we are most happy to forward to Christian Endeavorers of the world. Next week, in a very forcible article, Mr. Sheldon will reply to his critics through our pages. The honored author of "In His Steps" writes as follows: ". . . It has not seemed best for me to write at this time, of my week's newspaper experience. This much, however, I wish to say concerning it. I have never had any misgivings over the matter, nor for one moment have I felt like apologizing for the paper. If I had it to do over again, I should probably do many things differently, and, I hope, better."⁷⁶

The "forcible article" never appeared in the *Christian Endeavor World*, nor, for that matter, in any other publication as far as can be learned.

To the editor of *The Congregationalist*, who had been highly critical of Sheldon's experiment, Mr. Sheldon wrote, ". . . If my paper was dull, or stupid, or lacking in what the newspaper men call 'news,' it was, at least, perfectly *clean* from Tuesday morning till Saturday night. . . . So far as I could make it the paper had not one line in it that could not be read aloud in the family circle, or in a church prayer meeting."⁷⁷

Following the Topeka experiment, Mr. Sheldon refused offers from several newspapers to edit weekly pages devoted to church and religious matters. He insisted that he would never again enter newspaper work of any nature. However, in 1920, one year after he had resigned his pastorate in Topeka to devote more time to writing and lecture tours, he accepted the position of editor-in-chief of one of the great religious journals of this nation, *The Christian Herald*.⁷⁸ Because of ill health he was obliged to resign from that

position after four years, but continued contributing editor. Mr. Sheldon died age of 89.

One year after Dell Keizer and J. the former established a new afternoon *Herald*, with Hudson as editor. The s life span was comparatively short: Jul The one remaining principal partici to be accounted for is Auguste Babize, and finally managing editor of the *Ca* and associates purchased the *Capital* e to Chicago. There, while working as i classes at Illinois College of Law, ev Babize did not practice law. In 191 Services Co., publishers of financial per which he headed for some 20 years.

In 1895, to commemorate the 50th graduated from Williams College in 18 and published a book containing, princ of his classmates. In the five pages colorful career, he recalled his year wil beginning with the Sheldon edition. have elapsed since the publication in biography, at least ten articles dealing experiment have appeared in print. the authors have leaned heavily if not incomplete and occasionally erroneous "The Story of a Christian Daily." Bu brevity and originality, no account of t match Auguste Babize's revised version retrospective short success story of hi Babize completely ignored certain fact *Times-Herald* 35 years before. That credited his old prep school chum, Fr only originator of the famous Sheldon e Late in 1899 a friend of mine having pur Topeka *Capital* introduced me to Rev. Charle Steps." That book was the sensation of the me that it might be a good newspaper adve for one week, the Topeka *Capital* "as Chri *Capital* was placed at our disposition. Th

75. *Chicago Inter Ocean*, March 18, 1900.

76. *Christian Endeavor World*, Boston, March 29, 1900.

77. *The Congregationalist*, March 29, 1900.

78. *Charles M. Sheldon—His Life Story*, pp. 1x-xi.

