

AMERICAN ETHICAL UNION

(SOCIETIES FOR ETHICAL CULTURE)

STATISTICS

The data given for 1926 represent 6 active societies of the American Ethical Union, all reported as being in urban territory. The total membership was 3,801, comprising 1,813 males and 1,988 females. The classification of membership by sex and by age was reported by all of the 6 societies, none of which reported any members under 13 years of age.

Membership in the Ethical Societies is conferred upon those who express a sympathy with the purpose of the societies and a desire to affiliate with others in advancing the aims and purposes of the Ethical Movement.

Comparative data, 1890-1926.—Table 1 presents, in convenient form for comparison, a summary of the available statistics of this organization for the censuses of 1926, 1916, 1906, and 1890.

TABLE 1.—COMPARATIVE SUMMARY OF STATISTICS, 1890 TO 1926: AMERICAN ETHICAL UNION

ITEM	1926	1916	1906	1890
Societies (local organizations)	6	5	5	4
Increase over preceding census:				
Number.....	1		1	
Per cent ¹				
Members	3,801	2,850	2,040	1,064
Increase over preceding census:				
Number.....	951	810	976	
Per cent.....	33.4	39.7	91.7	
Average membership per society.....	634	570	408	266
Society buildings:				
Number.....	5			
Value—Societies reporting.....	5			
Amount reported.....	\$1,157,821			
Average per society.....	\$231,564			
Debt—Societies reporting.....	2			
Amount reported.....	\$212,000			
Expenditures during year:				
Societies reporting.....	6	5		
Amount reported.....	\$256,141	\$80,661		
Current expenses and improvements.....	\$152,902	\$65,900		
Benevolences, missions, etc.....	\$103,239	\$6,193		
Not classified.....		\$8,568		
Average expenditure per society.....	\$42,690	\$16,132		
Sunday schools:				
Societies reporting.....	5	4	5	
Officers and teachers.....	47	45	64	
Scholars.....	416	436	466	

¹ Per cent not shown where base is less than 100.

State tables.—Tables 2 and 3 present the statistics for the American Ethical Union by States. Table 2 gives, for 1926, the number and membership of the societies and the classification of membership by sex, and also gives the data for Sunday schools. Table 3 gives for each State the number and membership of the societies for the three censuses from 1906 to 1926.

TABLE 2.—NUMBER AND MEMBERSHIP OF SOCIETIES, TOTAL MEMBERSHIP BY SEX, AND SUNDAY SCHOOLS, BY STATES, 1926: AMERICAN ETHICAL UNION

GEOGRAPHIC DIVISION AND STATE	Number of societies	Number of members	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP BY SEX			SUNDAY SCHOOLS		
			Male	Female	Males per 100 females	Societies reporting	Officers and teachers	Scholars
United States.....	6	3,801	1,813	1,988	91.2	5	47	416
New England:								
Massachusetts.....	1	209	93	116	80.2	1	2	15
Middle Atlantic:								
New York.....	2	1,893	997	896	111.3	2	15	172
Pennsylvania.....	1	721	308	413	74.6	1	10	79
East North Central:								
Illinois.....	1	550	242	308	78.6			
West North Central:								
Missouri.....	1	428	173	255	67.8	1	20	150

TABLE 3.—NUMBER AND MEMBERSHIP OF SOCIETIES, BY STATES, 1906 TO 1926: AMERICAN ETHICAL UNION

STATE	NUMBER OF SOCIETIES			NUMBER OF MEMBERS		
	1926	1916	1906	1926	1916	1906
United States.....	6	5	5	3,801	2,850	2,040
Massachusetts.....	1			209		
New York.....	2	2	2	1,893	1,450	1,265
Pennsylvania.....	1	1	1	721	504	198
Illinois.....	1	1	1	550	329	217
Missouri.....	1	1	1	428	567	360

HISTORY, DOCTRINE, AND ORGANIZATION¹

HISTORY

The Ethical Movement was inaugurated by the founding of the New York Society for Ethical Culture by Dr. Felix Adler in 1876. Ethical Societies have since been formed in Chicago, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Brooklyn, and Boston, and the movement has extended also to other countries, including England, Germany, France, Austria, Switzerland, and Japan. Two federations have been formed—the American Ethical Union, organized in 1886, and the International Ethical Union, organized in 1896.

DOCTRINE AND ORGANIZATION

The societies have no formal expression of doctrine. Their purpose, as expressed by the constitution of the American Ethical Union, is “to assert the supreme importance of the ethical factor in all the relations of life.” While they have no formal rites or ceremonies, the meetings are regarded by most of the members as religious meetings. The interest aroused in trying to pattern personal and social life on the ideal of human perfection, it is held, takes the place of formal creeds; and this very striving for the moral life becomes itself devotion. Sunday meetings are held at which addresses are given by the leaders of the

¹ This statement, which is substantially the same as that published in Part II of the Report on Religious Bodies, 1916, has been revised by a committee of the American Ethical Union and approved by Mr. James Gutmann, associate leader, Society for Ethical Culture in the City of New York, in its present form.

societies and others who are in sympathy with the work. The leaders, who take the place of ministers in other organizations, are nevertheless not regarded as clergymen, but as teachers and directors of the work and policies of the societies. These leaders, however, officiate at funerals of members of the societies, offer counsel in moral difficulty, name children, and perform marriages under the laws of the States, and in the case of New York and Brooklyn by special act of the legislature.

The American Ethical Union, composed of the six American societies listed, holds an Annual Assembly to which the several societies send delegates in proportion to their numbers. In the interval between assemblies the business of the Union is conducted by an executive committee. However, each society is autonomous in government.

WORK

The numerous activities, educational, philanthropic, and social, are carried on by a variety of subsidiary or else loosely connected organizations. These include Sunday schools for the moral instruction of children, study and fellowship groups for young people and adults, neighborhood houses for work among the poor, day schools for advanced experimental work in elementary and high school education, women's groups devoted to cultural activity and social service, and the like. The New York Society has as many as 40 different kinds of group activities. This society is to be credited with the inception of settlement-house work in this country, the introduction of the free kindergarten into the New York schools, the visiting nurse movement (also started by the Henry Street Settlement), the tenement-house reform movement in New York, the child-study movement, and the movement for the abolition of child labor. Neighborhood houses initiated by the societies are in operation in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and St. Louis. The Chicago Society started the first public legal aid bureau and led to the spread of this kind of institution. The largest undertaking immediately identified with the movement is the Ethical Culture School in New York, which has to-day a staff of more than 100 teachers and assistants and about 900 pupils, of whom over 40 per cent are on a free scholarship basis. The school plant at Central Park West represents an investment of \$700,000. To this is now being added an experimental preprofessional department of the school, to be known as the Fieldston School, at Riverdale, in New York City, the erection of which involves an expenditure of more than a million dollars, subscribed by members and friends of the society. The Ethical Culture School of the Brooklyn Society, at Prospect Park West, provides for about 200 children, also in large measure on a scholarship basis. These schools rank among the foremost as laboratories in education and are visited by educators from all parts of the world. Systematic ethical instruction is a special feature of both schools. No attempt is made, however, either in the schools or in the settlement houses, to proselytize for the Ethical Movement; most of the cultural activities of the societies are open to all who wish to take part, irrespective of their religious affiliations.