

Rev. Charles M. Sheldon **1857- 1946**

Charles Monroe Sheldon was born in Wellsville, NY in 1857. The Sheldon family was a devout Christian family. Both Sheldon's father and Uncle were ministers in Allegany County. It is said that his father established 100 churches in 10 years. The Sheldon's had daily Bible reading sessions, and it was at these that Charles grew a deep love for the faith and writing.

At age 21 he began writing professionally and selling his work to a Boston newspaper. He attended Brown University and helped pay his way through by selling his articles to the local papers and magazines. He graduated from Andover Theological Seminary and then became the minister of a church in Waterbury, Connecticut. It was there that he met Mary Merriam, the woman that later became his wife.

In 1889 he and his wife moved west to head a small church in Topeka, Kansas. In 1892 Sheldon was instrumental in establishing two kindergartens in Topeka. One was in an affluent part of the City, while the other was in Tennesseetown, a predominantly poor, black area just outside the city. It was the first kindergarten for black students west of the Mississippi. One of the most prominent students was Elisha Scott who later attended law school and became a prominent attorney in Topeka. Elisha's son, Charles Sheldon Scott was the winning lawyer in the Brown vs. The Board of Education Supreme Court case in 1954.

In the early 1890's, Sheldon began writing "sermon stories" from which he would read one chapter each week. At the end of the weekly sermon, the congregation would be left in suspense, encouraging them to come back the following week to hear the outcome. The idea worked, and from it was born what eventually became the book In His Steps. A weekly religious magazine began publishing in one chapter per week, starting in November 1896. In 1897 was published as a book and sales skyrocketed. Today experts contend that the book is in the top ten all time in sales.

Many contended that the book was too simplistic, but it seemed to capture readers. Many who read the book soon vowed to follow the teachings it employed. The theme of the book revolved around one simple question that Sheldon coined, "What Would Jesus Do" Those works were immortalized by Sheldon in his work.

Publishers Weekly called Sheldon to inform him that his book had a greater circulation than any other besides the Bible. To which Sheldon responded, "No one is more grateful than I am, as it confirms the faith I have always held that no subject is more interesting and vital to the human race than religion." Because of a mistake in copyright, the book entered the public domain. Sheldon received nothing for royalties on his work, and what little he did get, he immediately donated to various charities.

Sheldon retired from the ministry in 1919, but he continued to write and work. He became the editor-in-chief of the Christian Herald 1920.

Charles Sheldon suffered a stroke and two days later he died on February 24, 1946. It was two days before he would turn 89. As he grew near death he spoke about the expectancy of his new life to come saying, "It is not death but life I greet . . . when He who loves me calls me home."