

never have been compressed into such a comparatively small space had it been deemed by the Spirit-taught biographers of such essential importance as the reiteration in divers forms of the facts of His life, which for the most part are allowed to speak for themselves. Our Lord chose to found His Church upon a revelation of the real nature of God, and His attitude towards men as manifested in Himself. Then, having given to us, as it were, a new point of view, and laid down a very few *principles* for our guidance, He bestowed upon the Church His Holy Spirit to guide it into all truth. This is the true, the necessary, the reasonable doctrine of development, according to which the meaning of these foundation verities grows clearer and more luminous with the passing of the years. The experience of our own necessities, and of the deep-seated cravings of humanity, is teaching us to see depths of meaning in the life of Jesus Christ uncomprehended by Augustine, or Jerome, or Pascal—may we not add of John or Peter or Paul? In short, the Christ has chosen, in His Divine wisdom, to teach men, not chiefly by Logia, few or many, but by "the things which He did and suffered," of which the widening, deepening consciousness of Christendom is furnishing an ever more complete elucidation as the centuries roll on.

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ART. IV.—AN EAST END FREE LIBRARY, AND WHAT IT HAS ACCOMPLISHED.

CLOSE by Bethnal Green Station there stands a unique institution which is a veritable lighthouse to the dense population around. No one who knows the conditions of life can fail to be interested in the Bethnal Green Free Library.

Many years ago now the late Rev. W. Tyler, D.D., initiated a humble effort to provide the working masses of the locality with opportunities for reading. At first the space in London Street prevented much progress, but gradually work rallied until to-day immediate extension is called for. It is always a great problem how best to permanently benefit the huge populations that dwell in the congested centres of East London. A humane administration of the Poor Law may do much to alleviate the distress—physical and otherwise. Settlements may do more to Christianize the masses, but pure literature is needed to supplement all efforts to improve the body. The Legislature has compelled the children to go to school, even though they go breakfastless, as thousands do in Spitalfields and Bethnal Green. At the earliest possible age

the young have to make a start for themselves, and the result is that in the pursuit after bread and butter these children have little time to spare for definite instruction; and, assuming they have this, they have not the money to purchase the necessary books. The evening continuation classes do an excellent work, but if any course is to be followed up, there is need for access to the best books upon the subject, and these are often very expensive. The late Head of Oxford House, the Right Rev. A. Winnington Ingram, the present Bishop of Stepney, put in a plea for "books for the bairns" in the following language: "When there are father, mother, and five or six children all living together in one room, as I have sometimes seen them in Bethnal Green, what chance is there of a lad who wants to read doing so quietly under such surroundings as that? Why, the very idea is ridiculous." And this is the testimony of one who, by long years of practical experience, knows how deadly dull is the life of the people. Here is the home of the matchmakers—the victims of "phossy jaw," and the deadly necrosis, and close by, on last Boxing-Day, a whole family were burned to death. The social conditions are awful, and the saddest phase of life is that the green fields are so far away and elevating influences are nil. But if the bodies are starved, and the limbs tell of stunted growth—what of the mind? Shall nothing be done to compensate for the ordinary sorrow of child-life? Yes, much may be done by the ready supply of pure literature to the children. There is no prettier sight than to see the children of the adjacent Board Schools pouring into the Free Library and scouring the shelves in search of volumes that will help them in the composition of their essays and in their general work. The first library in London to attempt to supply systematically the pupils in the schools was this East End Institution, and the experiment has proved a great success. Most cheering of all is the ready co-operation of the various schoolmasters and mistresses with Mr. G. F. Hilleken, the librarian, in the matter. Professor Prout, who on one occasion distributed the prizes to the students, said: "This Institution is an oasis in the desert of houses of the poorest and most crowded district of the East End, and doubtless is the means of lifting many a boy and girl from the gutter, and starting them for a good position in life."

There are many classes, attended by hundreds of students, and in this way a taste for mere desultory reading is corrected. Languages, needlework, music, shorthand, commercial classes, science, English literature, and other subjects constitute an excellent menu which is availed of by multitudes, and with excellent results.

So poor is the large district that a rate-aided library would be a great burden, and though a poll has been taken again and again, the inhabitants have refused to adopt the Acts. Few, probably, who read this have any real idea as to the life of the people. It was of those who live close by that the late Mr. Montagu Williams said to the writer: "Truly, human flesh is cheaper than butchers' meat." The largest one-roomed population in the world live within this square mile; here, too, are miles and miles of underground cellars in which rats and cats and human beings struggle for existence; and here, too, the water-supply is deficient, and God's sunshine rarely penetrates in the so-called "homes" of these poor ones of His earth.

In some minds there is an impression that those in humble circumstances are but little drawn towards intellectual enjoyment of any kind. But the poor appreciate good literature when it is brought within their reach as much as any other class, but the difficulty has been that until recent years books worth reading have not been available for them. The librarian, Mr. G. F. Hilcken, who has held that position for near a quarter of a century, tells you plainly that no greater delusion was ever made, than to think "any old rubbish, stores' catalogues, theological treatises in Old English, shabby novels, or histories of a century ago," is what is needed. On the contrary, all good current literature is readily welcomed.

As to the work itself: for years past the library has organized a series of evening classes and lectures with very excellent results, and of late a new lending department has been opened to meet the wants of the readers in their home-life. As showing how thoroughly the books are appreciated it is mentioned that one lad, on returning a volume, remarked, while his face beamed with delight: "Yours is nice books, Guv'nor." Another at the same time held a volume he had brought back, as if sorry to part with it, and said: "It's a grand book, Boss." Such incidents might be multiplied, for the library is taken advantage of by many thousands of people in the course of the year. The number of readers registered for the last twelve months was over 55,000; of persons attending the lectures, classes, etc., over 8,000; so that over 60,000 persons are benefited during the year, bringing up the total since its opening to 800,000. Then, many thousands read the advertisement-sheets of the daily papers placed outside the library in the early morning of each week-day, and here are many pathetic scenes in the course of the year. And these East Enders were the pioneers in this very useful and humanitarian work. The one anxiety is as to the future. The work has long, long since outgrown the limits of its

accommodation, and it is once more urging upon its friends the necessity of obtaining new premises. It is hoped that a site may soon be obtained, but at least £25,000 will be wanted for building. It is often urged, "What is the good of model dwellings, if you have not model people to put in them?" An institution like this is making better citizens. Close by the London Hospital pleads for the funds necessary to heal the bodies of people; here an institution pleads for the improvement of their intellect after they have got well once more.

Long ago the value of this institution was recognised by the Queen and the Prince of Wales. Unstinted tributes of praise are given by the local bodies, and the Editor of *THE CHURCHMAN* himself spoke "of the delight it afforded him, when he was appointed to his responsible office eight years ago, to find that there was so enlightened, so useful, so altogether beneficent an institution as the Bethnal Green Free Library flourishing in the poorest part of his district. The people there would be quite unable to support a free library themselves, and it seemed to him, therefore, to have been a very happy idea to establish this voluntary institution, and to conduct it on the largest and broadest principles."

The British Museum authorities have always recognised the efforts put forth by its weaker brother, and it merits support. As an East End clergyman, the writer can emphasize the plea. The education of the street is bad enough, and it means vice, crime, pauperism and poverty. A good literary supply is the best antidote. Many of us have been dismayed at the ravages of impure literature and the "penny dreadfuls." Years ago they were numbered by the score, to-day by hundreds. One day a beneficent Legislature will stop these polluting streams of Fleet Street and its many courts. They corrupt thousands yearly; and yet, provide the *Boy's Own Paper*, the *Girl's Own Paper*, the *Young Man*, *Chatterbox*, etc., and they will be read and enjoyed. The Free Library does this. It deserves and should have unstinted support, and its secretary-librarian, Mr. Hilcken, is ever at home at the premises in London Street, close to the Bethnal Green Station, to receive visitors and also donations.

THOS. C. COLLINGS.

