

those who would manifest to the world the Master Who fed the hungry, Who healed the sick, Who consoled the mourner; Who even now in the assize court of your own consciences calls you to witness whether, in the person of His "brethren" the poor, the sick, and the prisoner, the Lord Himself has had of your services. No man who has consciously laid hold of the promises of God and felt their sustaining power will ever do his brethren in the world the injustice of supposing that a Gospel of sanitation, education, and recreation can supply all their needs. But he will remember their nature. He will work "as well for the body as the soul." Shall he not with each New Year seek more fully to enter into the possibilities of his testimony in this aspect? In so doing, patiently watchful over his own members, and in the happy service of man, he will, indeed, offer the sacrifice of his body to Him Who one day "shall change" that "vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself" (Phil. iii. 21).

A. R. BUCKLAND.



ART. VI.—AMONG THE WATER-GIPSIES.

THE 1st of June, 1801, was a red-letter day for the inhabitants of the pretty little suburb of Paddington. Flags hung from nearly every house, the church bells were rung, and at intervals guns were fired. From Cornhill and Cheapside came City merchants in their private carriages or lumbering hackney-coaches, and hundreds of less wealthy people arrived on foot.

The cause of this excitement was the opening of the Paddington Canal, an event of very great importance in the eyes of business men. But it was not only business men who rejoiced. The Londoner who yearned to travel saw in the new canal a comparatively cheap way to gratify his desire, for on this day the first pleasure-barge arrived at Paddington Basin. It was crowded with passengers from Uxbridge, who spoke so enthusiastically of their pleasant journey that many Londoners there and then vowed to make a barge-trip at the first opportunity.

A hundred years have, however, made a great change in Paddington Basin and its neighbourhood. The fields which once surrounded it have long since disappeared, and big, unlovely factories and other business premises now hide it so completely from the public view that there are thousands of people who have lived for many years within the compass of

a furlong without having seen it. The passenger-barges did not survive the introduction of railways; the solitary barge which now runs on Sunday mornings and afternoons, to give the Harrow Road loafers an opportunity to qualify as travellers at public-houses a few miles further down the canal, is a very different kind of boat.

The canal-boat people are little known to Londoners. Sometimes a tanned-face woman, wearing a lilac or white sun-bonnet, white apron, short skirt, and heavy hobnailed boots, is seen purchasing provisions at a stall in Edgware Road or Harrow Road. She is picturesque and attracts attention, but of her life, beyond that she lives in a barge, the average person knows little and cares less.

Fortunately, there are some people who take a kindly interest in these water-gipsies, and foremost among them are the special missionaries of the London City Mission. It was in 1877 that the Society appointed Mr. Woodall to be its first missionary to canal-boat men. Mr. Woodall began work by going down to the towpath and jumping aboard the first barge that came along. The steersman naturally inquired somewhat sharply the nature of his business, and was considerably surprised when Mr. Woodall explained who he was. After chatting with the man for some time, the missionary asked permission to go into the cabin and speak to his wife. This was readily given, and in the course of his conversation with her he discovered, to his surprise, that neither she nor her husband could read or write. Having made his first friends among the canal-boat people, Mr. Woodall sprang on to a barge proceeding in the opposite direction. This work he continued day after day, week after week, reading the Bible and preaching and praying whenever he found an opportunity, and from his habit of jumping from barge to barge the boat-people named him "Spring-heeled Jack." On one occasion he slipped and fell into the water. Being unable to swim, he would have been drowned had not the bargemen fished him out with their boathooks. After this misadventure Mr. Woodall found time to learn swimming.

In 1879 the London City Mission saw that the work was too much for one man to cope with, and appointed a second missionary, Mr. Bamber. For sixteen years Mr. Bamber laboured in the east of London among the sailing-barges which come from the coasts of Kent and Essex, but on Mr. Woodall's retirement he was transferred to West London.

It was in Mr. Bamber's company that I recently visited the canal-boat people. We started at Paddington Basin, where we found some forty or fifty monkey-boats—narrow canal-barges—some of which were waiting for the fog to clear away

before beginning their journey. It was a cold day, and many of the barge people were in their cabins making themselves comfortable in front of their fires. Here and there was a lad swabbing the deck, and a woman, wearing her black winter-bonnet—similar in shape to her white summer one—peeling potatoes. Many little children were playing about on the deck of their floating homes. Nearly everyone would have been improved by a good wash, but there was some excuse for their grimy condition. Paddington Basin is a decidedly dirty place. It is there that "slops," or street mud, as well as the contents of dustbins, are deposited by the borough authorities preparatory to being carried away by the barges. The slops-cart tilts its contents into a shoot, down which the slosh rushes into a big wooden erection somewhat resembling a stockade. When the water has oozed through into the canal the mud becomes "stiffened," and is then wheeled aboard the barges and carried off to Greenford and other places, to be used by the farmers for manure. These barges leave Paddington in the middle of the night. The cinders and dust, after having been carefully screened, are carried away to West Drayton and Slough, where they are utilized for brickmaking; the dust is mixed with the clay and the cinders are used to burn the bricks. The barges which have taken down the cinders and dust return to Paddington loaded with bricks. There are, of course, many things of a cleanly nature sent by barge from the Paddington wharves to the Midlands, and it is the street and house refuse alone which accounts for the dirty condition of the majority of the chubby-faced barge children. In spite of their dirty faces, the youngsters looked the picture of robust health, and a pleasing contrast to the pale-faced, town-bred children playing in the streets not a hundred yards away. Barge children undoubtedly run great risks, while playing about on the deck of their floating home, of falling into the canal and being drowned, but one woman told me that she was very thankful that her flock did not have to play in the London streets and live in danger of being run over by carts and cabs.

Having inspected the wharves and talked with many of the people working on them, Mr. Bamber and I went aboard the barges. Mr. Bamber is evidently very popular with the canal-boat people; men, women, and children greeted him smilingly, and raised no objection when they were told that he wanted to go down into their cabins and have a chat with them. Indeed, they appeared very pleased to show us their travelling home. And what a tiny home it is! In a little, low-roofed cabin, about eight feet by six, live in some cases the bargeman, his wife, and several children. Where the

youngsters sleep I do not know, for being a guest I did not care to ask.

In the barge-cabin space is economized on the amusing plan which we sometimes see advertised of turning a bedroom into a sitting-room. The cabin-bed is really a panel of the wall, which is pulled down when required. When not in use, a stranger, entering a cabin for the first time, would have a difficulty in discovering the bed. The table is worked on the same principle. Near the door is the stove, and facing it the box-seat on which three people can sit comfortably. The walls are painted in bright colours, green and red predominating, and on the panels is usually depicted a castle or some other stately scene, the artist apparently belonging to the school to which we owe the gorgeous painting on gipsy caravans, costers' carts, and ice-cream barrows. The jugs, mugs, and basin—the latter is used both for washing and making puddings—are painted in the same style. Nearly every bargeman possesses a dog, and some keep birds. In one small cabin our party consisted of the bargewoman, her three children, the missionary, myself, a dog, and two birds. In most of the cabins we found two or three people, but occasionally there was only one. After a few minutes' chat about their daily work Mr. Bamber would turn the conversation to things spiritual, using incidents from their daily life to illustrate his meaning. One old man showed his approval of the missionary's discourse by exclaiming every now and again, "That's so," and "That's right enough," but usually the people maintained perfect silence while he spoke to them or prayed. Sometimes he would tell a young fellow that he had heard of his being drunk, and, with his hand on his shoulder, would urge him to pull himself together before it was too late.

Drunkenness is not quite so prevalent among the canal-boat people as it is among our town poor, but the children of drunken barge folk must suffer more than land children, for they cannot get away from their parents' foul language and blows. Town children have learnt from experience that when their parents are intoxicated the best thing they can do is to go out of the house, but the barge children have no such means of escape. Many barge children learn, only too soon, what drunkenness means, and on one occasion as Mr. Bamber was passing from barge to barge a small child of six called out to him, "Daddy's getting drunk."

To find that a large proportion of these sturdy barge people could neither read nor write was very saddening. That the elder ones should be ignorant is, perhaps, not surprising, but it is surely a disgrace to our country that while millions of pounds are being spent annually on free education for the poor

there are hundreds of hard-working men and women below middle age, as well as a host of children, who do not even know the alphabet. Their wandering life is, of course, the cause of their lamentable ignorance. One man, fifty-eight years of age, told me that he was born on a barge, and that until he was over twenty-one he had only slept in a house five times. Sometimes a bargewoman, who has had a slight education, makes an effort to teach her children, but her opportunities for doing so are few, for she has to work as hard, if not harder, than her husband. She not only takes her turn at steering the boat and driving the horse—it is a common thing to see a bargewoman tramping along the towpath with a child at her breast—but cooks the meals, does the washing, keeps the cabin clean, and looks after the children.

When a bargeman or bargewoman who cannot read receives a letter, it is straightway taken to Mr. Bamber, who makes known its contents, and, if desired, replies to it. He reads and writes for them, not only letters on business and family affairs, but even love-letters. Some of the letters penned by barge folk, who consider that they can write, are wonderful things, and it is highly creditable to the Post Office authorities that so many of these strangely-addressed letters reach their destination. When I was at Brentford Locks—through which 250 to 300 boats, besides other barges with simply a steerer, pass weekly—there was only one letter stuck up in the barge-owners' office window, but it was a good specimen. It bore the Tipton postmark, and there is no doubt that it was written by a bargeman. Straggling over the envelope, in thick characters, which looked as if they had been drawn with an inky skewer, was this address:

“fellelloes Morton
Office New branforde
Middle sex fore
Aline Harason boat
Poley.”

The interpretation is: “For Alan Harrison, Boat *Polly*, Fellows and Morton's Office, New Brentford, Middlesex.” A few days previously, a letter, addressed “The young man wot knows Mary Jones,” was received at Brentford Locks, and reached the bargeman for whom it was intended.

In their conversation the canal-boat people frequently come to grief over long words. One woman informed the missionary that a “portmanteau examination” was to be held on her dead husband's body, and another declared that her child died from “appycollection fits.”

Canal-boat men are very good to any of their comrades who happen to be in distress, and when a doctor tells a man that he must cease work for a time and “tie up,” the other barge-

men, as they pass by, drop a shilling on the "tied up" barge for its invalid master.

A few years ago Parliament ordained that barge children old enough to go to school should be provided with pass-books, and wherever the barge remained for a day the children aboard it should attend the nearest school, and the master or mistress enter in the pass-book every attendance. But this arrangement was not successful. The children had a strong dislike to going to schools with land youngsters, who were almost as strange to them as if they were foreigners, and the teachers were not at all enthusiastic about these young birds of passage. Indeed, it is said that many of them simply gave the barge children a slate and pencil, set them apart from the other pupils, and let them amuse themselves as best they could.

There is, however, one school which the barge children love to attend—the Canal-Boat Mission Hall and Day School, held in the London City Mission Hall, near Brentford Locks. This school, which was opened in March, 1896, by Miss Evelyn A. Bevan, and has for its mistress Miss Bamber, a daughter of the missionary, is certainly one of the most remarkable in existence. None but canal-boat children are allowed to attend it, and the teacher never knows how many pupils she will have. The average number of scholars is fourteen a day. One day there may be forty or fifty; the following day there may be only one. Sometimes the school is empty throughout the morning and crowded in the afternoon. As the barges rarely take more than two days to unload and load again, the children scarcely ever attend school more than two days at a time, but when they return to Brentford they again become pupils. And what a strange gathering of boys and girls is to be seen at this school! In age they range from three to fifteen. Some are neat and clean, others are untidy and dirty. Many of the boys have neither coats nor waistcoats, and their hands and faces have the appearance of not having been washed for a month. The unwashed are not, however, sent home to make themselves presentable; they are told to go into the adjoining room, where water, soap and towels are provided, and have a good wash. Many of the little girls bring a toddling baby brother or sister, which naturally adds to the difficulties of the teacher. The children are of various grades of intelligence; some learn quickly, but others are painfully dense, and take a year or two to master the alphabet. Quite recently a youth of seventeen attended the school for a day and a half, but he had only learnt the first seven letters of the alphabet when he had to start off again to Staffordshire.

Sunday-school is held in the morning and afternoon. In the same building there is a maternity-room, which barge-women can occupy for 2s. 6d. a week, making their own

arrangements for doctor and nurse. Remembering the very limited space of the cabins, and that the barges are frequently far away from medical aid, it can be understood that the maternity-room is a great boon.

The Canal-Boat Mission Hall and Day School is doing excellent work, but it is believed that with larger accommodation its usefulness could be vastly increased. Therefore the missionary and his friends are making an earnest effort to build at Brentford a small institute which shall contain, in addition to a large schoolroom and better maternity accommodation, a wash-house and a reading-room. Evening classes for young bargemen and women will be held, and coffee, tea, and other refreshments sold. The Grand Junction Canal Company has offered an excellent site, close to the locks and near to the spot where on Sunday evenings, during the summer, Mr. Bamber holds an open-air service. The cost of building and furnishing the institute is estimated at £800, and £260 has already been received. The institute will do much to better the condition of the canal-boat people, and therefore it is to be hoped that the required £540 will soon be forthcoming.

HENRY CHARLES MOORE.

The Month.

THE announcement that the Bishop of London had fixed a subject for the second Round Table Conference, had chosen its members, and arranged the time of meeting, was received with respectful but not very acute interest. This time the Conference is to consider "Confession and Absolution," topics which, it will be agreed, are very much in the minds of English Churchmen just now. The members of the Conference, who will see the Old Year out and the New Year in at Fulham, are here, for purposes of comparison, set side by side with the list of Bishop Creighton's gathering :

1901-1902.	1900.
The Dean of Christ Church.	Dr. Barlow (now Dean of Peterborough).
Professor Swete.	The Rev. Prebendary Bevan.
Professor Moberly.	The Rev. Dr. Bigg.
Professor Mason.	The Rev. N. Dimock.
The Rev. Dr. Wace.	Canon Gore.
The Rev. Dr. Gee.	Professor Moule (now Bishop of Durham).
The Rev. T. W. Drury.	Canon Newbolt.
Canon Aitkin.	The Rev. Dr. Robertson.
Canon Body.	Canon Armitage Robinson.
Canon the Hon. E. Lyttelton.	Professor Sanday.
Canon Childe.	The Rev. Prebendary Wace.
The Rev. E. M. Benson.	The Earl of Stamford.
The Rev. V. S. S. Coles.	Lord Halifax.
Lord Halifax.	Chancellor P. V. Smith.
Chancellor P. V. Smith.	Mr. W. J. Birkbeck.