

alphabet. The equipment of the school is by no means up-to-date, but it is quite as good as one might expect, for with such irregular attendance it is, of course, impossible to qualify for Government grants.

Yet this little voluntary school at Brentford represents the high-water-mark of educational provision for canal boat children, so far as it has yet gone. The various school authorities seem to have given up in despair the attempt to educate these children, and the Education Department's report for 1901-2 dismisses the matter with a simple *non possumus*: "So long as children of school age are permitted to live upon the boats, no effective means can be devised for securing their regular attendance at school." The only way in which boat people can give their children a satisfactory education is by leaving them on shore in charge of friends when they go on canal journeys, and it is encouraging to know that many are sufficiently alive to the best interests of their children to make arrangements of this sort.

Whether the best remedy for the present state of things lies in the extension and regulation by local educational authorities of the system of boarding out children with foster-parents, allowing them to return to the boats in holiday time, or whether women and children should be entirely prohibited from living on canal boats, and the men thus compelled to set up homes on shore, is a question on which there may well be differences of opinion. But that some reform of the present system is urgently needed is a proposition that hardly admits of discussion. Already, since the passing of compulsory education laws, one generation has grown up on our canals in almost total ignorance, and it will be a lasting disgrace to the new educational authorities and to Parliament if

another generation of English children should be deprived of their birthright—the right of receiving an efficient elementary education. It is painful to hear—as I have heard—a young man decline the gift of a book on the ground that he "ain't no scholard"; and when one learns that he is fighting a grim fight against habits of intemperance, one feels that the lack of intellectual resources must make the struggle doubly hard.

But not until the State takes in hand this much-needed reform, we may hope that the little private school at Brentford will continue its beneficent work. In spite of the adverse circumstances attending its work, the influence of the day-school, and perhaps still more of the Sunday-school, has already been widely felt. Mr. Owen J. Llewellyn, His Majesty's Inspector of Canal Boats, stated at a meeting not long since that he had frequently heard children in the Midlands singing hymns which they told him they had learned at the Brentford Mission School.

On Sunday evenings in the winter the schoolroom becomes a chapel, and a little service is held, which the boat people can feel is entirely their own. The same people are never seen on two consecutive Sundays, and though each gathering is necessarily small, the total number of canal people who attend the service whenever they get a chance would make up a very good congregation. When Mr. Bamber came to Brentford seven years ago there were only two of the men who ever attended a place of worship; and as these continue their association with their own churches, it cannot be said that Mr. Bamber's work is carried on at the expense of any other religious community, and the friendliness of all the local religious leaders is a testimony to the absence of anything like proselytizing. In the summer-time an