

the children, but they have to take their turn at the rudder and on the towing-path, and not infrequently they are charged with such duties as seeing the owners and buying forage for horses, for it frequently happens that the wife is the best business man on the boat. To see the women in their picturesque print bonnets bustling about the boats on a bright summer day, or taking tea on the cabin top, is a pleasant sight enough; but to see them in winter time trudging along the towpath, ankle deep in mud, is to realize something of the hardships of the bargewoman's life; and in time of sickness it is easy to believe that her condition is pitiable in the extreme.

The children are generally healthy, bright little people, well cared for so far as their bodily needs are concerned, but sadly ignorant as regards the orthodox lore of childhood. In many cases they are past masters in the care of a horse and the art and mystery of barge steering long before they can read words of one syllable or write their own names. The way in which the children are allowed to grow up almost entirely without education is one of the most unsatisfactory features of canal boat life. They are supposed to attend school wherever their boats happen to be making a stay. But it is impossible to enforce such a regulation; if the school attendance officer visits a canal boat in search of children he will be told—often truly enough—that the boat is leaving that day or the next. And even when the parents themselves would like their children to attend school, the difficulties are almost insuperable so long as they live on the canal boat. Teachers do not welcome these little birds of passage, who, of course, are dunces when compared with children in regular attendance, and for the little "boaties" themselves school must be far from

attractive when they can only attend for a day or two at a time and are placed amongst children much younger than themselves, the object of remark, and perhaps of ridicule, by their schoolfellows.

For the past seven years a praiseworthy attempt has been made at Brentford to remedy this condition of educational darkness by holding a special day-school for boatmen's children. It is a queer little school, meeting in the rather inconvenient premises of the Canal Boatmen's Mission. Judged by every educational standard it is, of course, sadly inefficient; in respect to irregularity of attendance it can surely have no equal in the kingdom. Imagine a school with about five hundred children on the roll, and a daily attendance varying from none at all to fifty; a school at which three days' teaching, followed by three weeks'—or, it may be, three months'—holiday is quite the normal state of affairs. The wonder is not that results are poor, but that there are any results at all.

On the occasion of my recent visit there were about twenty children present. Their neat, clean appearance spoke well for the care of their parents, though I understand there are occasions when defects in the matter of personal cleanliness have to be remedied at the school. The ages of the children ranged from about two and a half to fourteen or fifteen years; all seemed very quiet and attentive, which is the more noteworthy as the teacher had to attend simultaneously to pupils in several stages of educational development. The teaching is necessarily very elementary. An exceptionally advanced scholar was writing from dictation a passage from a reading book; but even he had to be reminded that a new sentence begins with a capital letter. Most of the other children were still struggling with the