

Links of Empire.

There is no greater bond of union between absent friends than a frequent interchange of letters; thereby keeping alive sympathy and mutual interests; and there are few people in this world to whom a letter is not welcome. Children especially delight in writing and receiving letters; they have the added joy and feeling of adventure in writing to friends in distant lands, which they hope some day to visit.

It was through an understanding of this very natural instinct that the League of the Empire originated in 1901 a scheme for bringing children in different parts of the Empire into touch with each other for mutual correspondence. They were able to utilize their immense knowledge of educational matters and interest in schools of every grade, both in Great Britain and in the Colonies, in the furtherance of the scheme. Some slight idea of the expansion which has come from quite small beginnings may be gathered from the fact that over 17,000 children are now members of the Comrades' Correspondence section of the League, and are in direct communication with each other. The number increases at the rate of nearly 200 a month, and includes many pupil teachers. The ages range from nine to nineteen, but the most active correspondents are those between twelve and seventeen, who have reached the age when the world outside their own circle begins to interest them, and to wonder what it is like on the other side of the globe.

Each child signs a form giving its age, sex, parentage and address, and stating what are its interests, and in what country it wishes to have a comrade. These forms are sent to the offices of the League where they are quickly compared with those already received, and the child put in touch with another of the same age, sex, position in life and interests, in the country chosen. So the correspondence begins and leads frequently to steady friendships, and in every case awakens interest and fellow-feeling among children in all corners of our great Empire. There is occasionally a little difficulty in meeting the desire (not unconnected with stamp and postcard collecting) for a comrade in some very out of the way corner of the world; such as Nyasaland or Old Calabar,

but if impossible, another equally attractive spot is chosen.

Naturally a large amount of the correspondence is encouraged by the teachers and passes through their hands, and to assist the scheme a system of school-linking was established in 1902, which has won the approval of the education authorities all over the colonies. A school in the British Isles is linked with one of the same grade in Canada, Australia, South Africa, or whatever place is chosen; and an added interest is imparted when the names of the places coincide, such as Swansea in Wales, with Swansea in Tasmania. The children in these linked schools take the keenest interest in forming natural history collections, arranging botanical specimens, and in everything connected with nature study, which they exchange with their friendly rivals. They compete in essays on historical subjects, also Empire Day essays and in many cases present each other with flags for use on the 24th May. The Blackley Municipal School, linked to one in Australia, has a particularly interesting collection of colonial objects, and an extract from the head master's letter will show how much the school appreciates its opportunities. "On Saturday last the Scholars' Flower Show was held in the schoolroom and as a side show we had a Colonial Correspondence room, in which was displayed the Commonwealth flag, postcards, letters, drawings, pictures, magazines and newspapers from Australia. By one mail we received 116 picture postcards, 40 letters, numerous magazines and school papers." The head master in Adelaide replies with: "The Union Jack is a very fine one and attracted a great deal of attention. I exhibited it on visiting day when several hundred parents and friends were at the school. Our Correspondence Scheme has roused extraordinary interest, and I have received a number of letters from strangers since reports of the scheme appeared in the newspapers."

But subjects taught in the school are not the only ones about which the children correspond; some have very definite ideas of their own. For instance, a New Zealand boy of nine wants as comrade a South African boy of nine, interested in diamonds. A New Zealand girl of thirteen asks for a comrade in Quetta, Baluchistan, India, in order to learn about army work at the Khyber Pass. A New Zealand boy of eleven wants to write to a boy in