

A GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL IN WEST AFRICA.

BY THE RIGHT REV. BISHOP JOHNSON.



BISHOP JOHNSON.
(Photo by Arthur Weston.)

ONE great advantage of the conquest of Western Africa has been the gift of education. It has not been altogether an easy piece of work, but at the same time it has been of inestimable good to those who have had the advantage of passing through these Institutions.

In Sierra Leone there are some very excellent schools, and the Annie Walsh School is doing some very good work.

Many years ago I was struck by the fact that if ever we were to make a great deal of progress, from the citizenship point of

view, it would be necessary for us to give very much attention to education.

Sierra Leone is a kind of outpost, and it became a bishopric in 1852. From 1807 the colony had been a kind of depot for negroes rescued from the slave ships by the British cruisers. In the early days there was very much prosperity, and in 1822 nearly two thousand of the freed slaves, adults and children, were in the mission schools, while several thousands were attending public worship, and some thousands had become sincere Christians. The work continued to prosper but at a very great cost of human lives, and fifty-three missionaries and missionaries' wives died between 1804 and 1824. In 1842 a parliamentary committee paid some attention to the intellectual and moral improvement of the people, and from that time until now there has been very great progress.

A careful distinction should be drawn between the colony and the Protectorate of Sierra Leone. The original colony consisted of a peninsula twenty-six miles long by twelve broad, and it contained many towns and villages, Free Town, the largest, having about thirty thousand inhabitants, and boasting of a paper which is issued weekly, and which looks to English eyes a very remarkable production, but even such subjects as the "rights of women in public life" are discussed in its columns. Other districts along the coast have been added from time to time, and the result is that behind the colony there stretches away inland for some two hundred miles a tract of land over which the British Government exercises a protectorate.

The chief girls' school is known as the Annie Walsh Institution, and the Principal is Miss H. Bisset, and another English lady helps with five resident and two non-resident teachers. The school is beautifully situated on a very high eminence with very large and extensive grounds of its own, and is altogether a very beautiful spot.

Year by year there has been steady and careful progress, and the aim of the founder has been to give an education equivalent to that of the splendid High Schools of England.

The number of pupils are about one hundred and twenty, and about fifty of these are boarders. The girls who are day scholars live, of course, in the town, and very largely adopt European costume, though some of them when they get back home at night are at first inclined to revel in their native attire and in the freedom to which they have always been used.

Every year at Christmas a competitive exhibition of school work is held in Sierra Leone at which only elementary schools are asked to compete, but the secondary schools are asked to show specimens of their work, so as to present higher standards of possible attainment to the elementary institutions. At the last exhibition, testimony was borne to the good quality of the work done by the Annie Walsh girls, and the Governors publicly thanked the school for sending in exhibits. In the school examinations, a very healthy system of competition prevails, the papers are all written, and before the girls can be moved from one class to another, they must attain a certain number of marks, and it speaks well for the quality of the instructions, when over fifty per cent. attain, as last time, the marks requisite for promotion; while some of the senior pupils gained honours for the same examinations as are set in the High Schools at home by the University Higher Local Boards.

The hours of work are about the same as those of schools in the United Kingdom, but perhaps there is not quite as much freedom; the girls are given every possible opportunity for recreation, but they do not seem to be very fond of play; they require, for instance, to be taught English games, and it is very doubtful whether, when they have learnt them, they feel very much enthusiasm about them.

One distinguished lady, the daughter of Dr. Livingstone, was very much struck with the fact that when they were shown how to play English games, there was an enthusiasm lacking which was in every way disappointing to those who had given them the necessary tuition.

It has been found, however, to be good policy to always keep the children employed, either with work or with play, and the senior girls exercise a good influence over their younger companions.

The most important part of the work is, of course, the religious and the moral training; and the English head-mistress writes, "Evils that we thought crushed appear again and again; with the increase of new pupils there is generally an increase of evils of various kinds which require to be combated. We need much patience, loving-kindness, and firmness in order to check the wrong tendencies which, though small in themselves, are capable of developing into very serious offences. The toil has to be done with hands and knees quietly and patiently, perseveringly doing the same things day by day."

There is an inclination among African children to shirk that which is difficult and troublesome, and leaving it for someone else to do. This does not refer only to study, but to things in general. The girls learn a great deal in the way of domestic training, and there is now a hospital for the training of educated African ladies in nursing, and anything in the way of industrial training is valuable.

The holidays correspond very much to those that are given at home, and then of course all of the boarders go home. There is no doubt that these breaks are a disadvantage to a certain extent, but the aim of education must not be in any degree to weaken the parental tie, but rather to impress the fathers and mothers with the advantages that grow from a Christian high school education.

The work, of course, is full of difficulties, and there is a wide field growing year by year for high and secondary schools in Western Africa; it is, of course, desirable to train up native teachers, and the day has not yet come when European supervision can be withdrawn. Many of the native teachers have a Durham University degree, and there are all sorts of classes for them to attend; many of them have certificates which have been gained while attending a course of First Aid Lectures in connection with the St. John Ambulance Association. What is perhaps far more interesting is to remember that in these

girls' schools great missionary zeal is exhibited, and they are taught to have a distinct interest in those who are not so well off as themselves. Naturally enough, when the Sierra Leone church became self-supporting, the question of education had to be passed, and not only that but with the extension of the colony into a large protectorate, the question of progress and advance had to be thought of. In 1899 collections were made in the school every week for the missionary work in the Hinterland; while there were monthly contributions for the Princess Christian's Cottage Hospital, and the C.M.S. Centenary Fund; while the Band of Hope and other institutions so dear to the heart of the English boy and girl are well known.

As to what the future of such a school will be, it is impossible to say, but there can be no doubt that the educated African girl will be a very great factor in the future of her race. You find there refinement, culture, education and ambition for knowledge, and a recognition of the fact that its acquisition is of great power, for which ample scope will be found in the future, as the Civil Service and other departments of life offer increased facilities for the natives. There will be opportunities for influence that people little dream of, also for usefulness.

We have good libraries, and among our papers are to be found *THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER*; in everything that is English great interest is exhibited, and those white ladies who come out are expected to show a very high standard of Christian civilisation.

In the Yoruba country there is a girls' seminary, and here are some sixty pupils under a European mistress; in the large hall physical training is encouraged, and there are regular drilling lessons given to the whole school. Although there are only about twelve boarders, the school is making excellent progress, and they support a Christian missionary by their contributions.

There is also another school at Brass in the Niger Delta, one which I have a great deal to do with. Not very long ago there was a strike there; it was against the vernacular teaching, and both in the boys' and girls' school we had to have an English side, and although a fee was charged for instruction in that language, it was readily paid.

Africa too has its "absentee difficulties," and from the

school from which I am now writing, the constant removal of children by their owners, who make them work on out-lying farms was a real drawback. With reference to the girls some difficulty was experienced in persuading the girls to be taught; indeed they laughed at the very idea, saying that a girl was good for nothing but to fish, cut wood and marry. However, they were gathered together, and seemed to take a great deal of interest in washing, ironing, cooking and sewing, as well as in writing and reading.

The pain expended for their moral as well as for their material welfare is not in vain, for a gentleman one day remarked how different the girls were in the school from those in the town, and added, you can see it in their faces. There can be no doubt whatever that industrial schools and those in which girls are taught housework and kindred subjects have a very large attraction for many of the girls. What we undoubtedly need is, that some of the girls who have had a training in the English high schools, or who have been to one of the Women's Colleges at the Universities should make up their minds to come out to work. If they are thinking of doing so, I would say to them that they must be possessed of very great patience, and have very definite and clear convictions both sacred and secular. They will find that there is a great demand for every kind of knowledge, mathematics, languages, history, technical subjects, as well as a knowledge of medicine, and my own opinion is that none ought to think of coming out unless they acquire a certain amount of medical knowledge at first. Very few perhaps know the responsibilities of the work, and in a few years the demands will be greater than now. Naturally enough our girls have very much to learn, and the exquisite gift of sympathy lavishly bestowed will bring its own reward. The multiplication of native teachers will by no means meet the demand, because fast as our girls may become teachers and pass through the training college, faster will grow the march of civilisation, and year by year, as European expansion has brought within our reach territories that will afford ample scope for work, there is, and will be, a demand of which, perhaps, we think very little; so let me say as one who loves Africa, in our Black High Schools there is a vocation for every girl who feels inclined for work of that sort.



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