

THE BRITISH ORPHAN ASYLUM, SLOUGH.

Photo Hills and Saunders.

"His Fatherless Children."

BY PAUL PRESTON.

ST. JAMES puts the visitation of the fatherless first in his definition of "pure religion," therefore those men and women who have been instrumental in founding the great orphanages of our land have at least one of the essentials of true godliness. In fact care for helpless childhood is one of the touchstones of national as well as personal Christianity, for in the countries where the religion of the gospel is covered up with a crust of superstition, and in those where it is as yet "the white man's religion" and nothing more, the loving-kindness and tender mercy of Him, who "took them up in his arms, and put his hands upon them and blessed them," is rare, and child-care is at a discount.

Thus the best proof that Britain is at the apex of the world's civilisations, is its multitude of child charities. Yet if their histories are examined the vast majority of these institutions and missions will be found to have come into being during the last century. This certainly is true with regard to the British Orphan Asylum which is so prominent an object to passengers going through Slough Station on the Great Western line. It

originated in the generous Christian sympathy of Matthew Percy Dove, of Kingsland, who, associating with himself a number of gentlemen like minded, established this great philanthropic work for orphans whose parents had fallen from positions of prosperity into necessitous circumstances, in the year 1827.

The "barefoot boy" with his rags and coating of mother earth is a walking advertisement for every home for waifs and strays in the land, and it is well that it should be so. But the "woman who is a widow," and who was once the happy mistress of a prosperous home, will often make huge sacrifices to keep the children well dressed. Thus their need—often terribly real—is hidden from the public eye. Ah, yes, respectable poverty is often harder to bear than poverty of the sordid kind.

There are many excellent people whose sympathies are attracted by charities which provide only for the poorest and lowest classes of the population, while they seem to forget the troubles and pinching poverty of the large respectable middle-class, who may have fallen upon evil days, among whom we often



SOME OF THE "BIG GIRLS" AT THE BRITISH ORPHAN ASYLUM.
Photo by A. D. Kissack.

find many, especially the widow and the fatherless, who deserve our warm sympathy and support.

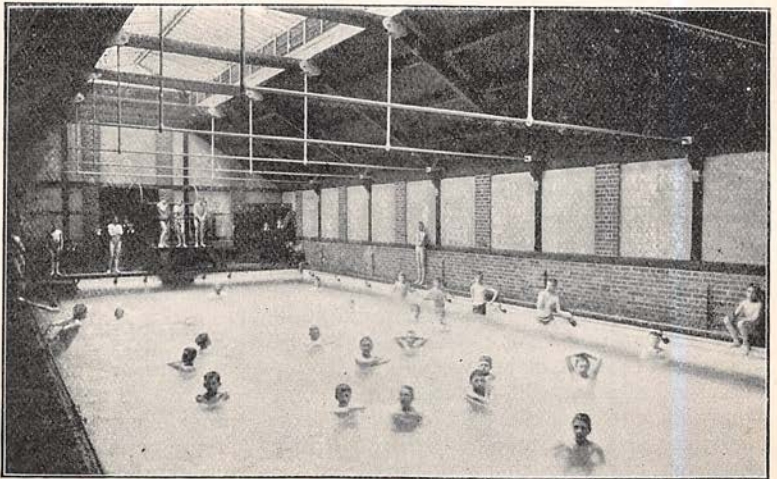
It was this fact which went to the hearts of the original founders of the British Orphan Asylum, and led them to state their design as being: "To board, clothe, and educate destitute children of either sex, who are really or virtually orphans, and are descended from parents who have moved in what are considered the middle classes of society; such as, for example, children of clergymen and of members of the legal and medical profession, naval and military officers, merchants, and other persons who, in their lifetime, were in a position to provide a liberal education for their children."

For seven years this philanthropic experiment was conducted at Kingsland Green, and was successful beyond the hopes of its projectors. The children were then removed to Clapham Rise, where there was accommodation for nineteen girls and twenty-six boys. This house was enlarged in

1844, however, so as to shelter one hundred and ten children.

But dark days came in 1854—the year of the Crimean War—and some faint-hearted supporters actually expressed misgivings as to its continued existence. Faith and works, however, again triumphed, as they always do, and in 1863 it was found that the Clapham Home was too small and a move was made to the great building at Slough.

It is a point of interest that one of the very first public acts of his Gracious Majesty the King—then, of course, the Prince of Wales—after his marriage to "the Sea-king's daughter from over the sea," was to open, on



A MERRY TIME IN THE LARGE SWIMMING BATH.
Photo by A. D. Kissack.

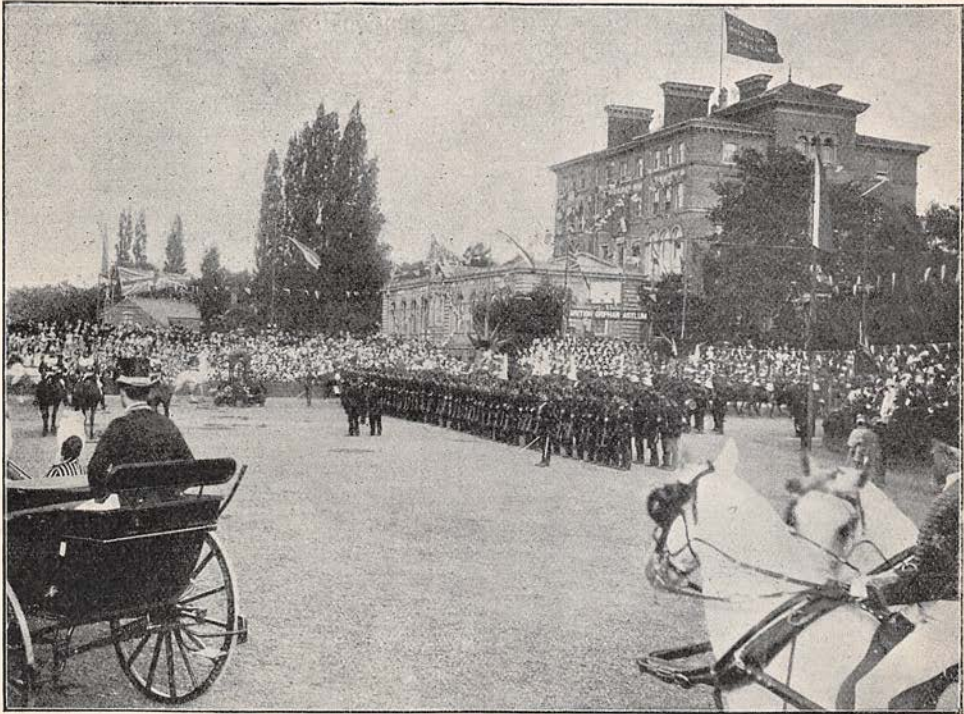
24th June, 1863, the new and commodious building, and dedicate it to the purposes of this charity. Our late lamented Queen was its patron for sixty-three years, and Edward the Seventh has graciously consented to continue the beautiful tradition.

A wonderful thing happened on this great day of inauguration, which makes it a red-letter day indeed in the history of the Institution. A short time before the arrival of their Royal Highnesses, a gentleman, hitherto unknown to the Directors, prompted by his own spontaneous beneficence, though doubtless divinely led, offered to pay for the purchase and adaptation of the Slough premises. This was the late Edward Mackenzie, Esq., of Fawley Court, then High Sheriff of Oxfordshire, who, by one munificent donation of £14,000, released the Board from all anxiety about a Building Fund Debt. Surely his name will have a place among the noble benefactors of the Widow and the Fatherless!

But even a large, commodious and healthful building, with suitable grounds, freely given by one individual, would be of little use if the means should be withheld, or only scantily supplied, of filling the House with the little ones for whom it was provided. And yet

the committee have to mourn to-day a debt of £3,000, and a sum of £5,000 has to be raised each and every year from uncertain sources. To-day there are over 200 of "His fatherless children" dependent upon the Christian charity of those who pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."

Canon Fleming spoke some wise words at the Anniversary Festival this year. He said: "Children are a gift from God to the nation, and they are given to us in order that we may make them a source of strength to their nation. *All the hope of England to-day is in its nurseries and its schools.* I remember when I was a boy at school reading in ancient history of a Spartan city that was besieged and was obliged to capitulate. The enemy said: 'Send us out five hundred children as hostages,' but the Spartans replied: 'We will send you a thousand of our old men, but not a single child.' That was a sound answer. We old ones are going away; the children have a claim to life, a claim to education. They come to us with a large share of Divine love; they are God's children as well as ours, and it rests with us that they shall become a strength to the land we love."



QUEEN VICTORIA'S VISIT TO SLOUGH DURING THE DIAMOND JUBILEE WHEN HER MAJESTY GRACIOUSLY ACCEPTED A BOUQUET FROM THE HANDS OF TWO OF THE ORPHANAGE GIRLS.

Photo Hills and Saunders.