




Chester Blue Coat Hospital.

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“ LONG day's work remains to be done about us in the way of Education, Heaven knows! but great improvements and facilities towards the attainment of a good one, have been furnished, of late years, to those who can afford to pay for it.”

Thus wrote Dickens in his Preface to *Nicholas Nickleby* in 1848, with his strong pen, ever battling against abuses.

It never seems to have struck him, however, that there ought to be facilities for the children of the poor to obtain an education for which their parents could not afford to pay!

Long years, nay centuries, before his time, to the Founders of the College of Our Lady of Eton (for the sons of Noble Poverty), Christ's Hospital, London, and to other benefactors, this matter came so very much home that the institutions founded by them are flourishing to-day.

It is also a striking fact that about the end of the seventeenth century others set to work to follow their example in regard to the sons of the very poor, and not a few of our towns, notably Manchester, Chester, Liverpool, and others, saw “Blue Coat Hospitals” established. Good Bishop Nicholas Stratford was the pioneer at Chester.

In October, 1700, he enlisted the sympathies of a number of leading citizens and called a meeting at his Palace, when it was resolved to establish a Blue Coat School for thirty-six Boarders and seventy Day Boys. Based on Religion, the Bible and Prayer Book being thoroughly taught, these lads

were to receive a complete education, to be boarded, lodged, and clothed, and as far as possible equipped for life. Employment was also to be found for them on leaving school at fourteen, nine being the age of admission.

The enterprise was taken up with vigour. Funds came in freely, and with the consent of the Mayor and Corporation, who were then Trustees of the ancient Hospital of St. John Baptist, Without the Northgate, founded A.D. 1200 by De Blundeville, seventh Earl of Chester, a piece of ground fronting on Northgate Street, contiguous to the Hospital Church of "Little St. John," was granted, upon which to erect the Blue Coat premises.

Some £3,000 being raised by subscription, the present substantial and convenient buildings were erected, it being agreed that the Governors pay a nominal yearly rental to the Trustees of St. John's Hospital, as acknowledgment of ownership. The Institution has been very fortunate in its long list of Governors, leading men in the life of the City ; and no less so in the Head Masters, who have so nobly done their duty.

If the proof of a pudding is the eating, no man of good will can speak too highly of the moral success of the good Prelate's foundation. Between 3,000 and 4,000 lads have passed through the doors of the Institution, and so benefited that a fair number have attained to positions of importance, notably one who became a King's Counsel.

It is also a matter for gratification that of all who have received an excellent education as Blue Coat Boys, not one has by crime brought disgrace upon the Foundation.

The lads have also turned out patriots. In 1914, no less than 100 "Old Blue Coats" went at once to enlist in the Army, and of these, twelve gave their lives for King and Country. Their names are annually read out at the Founders' Day Service in October, as citizens who deserve well of their country.

It was laid down in the constitution of the school that the lads were to attend at the Cathedral every Sunday morning, and at one of the City Parish Churches in rotation

every Sunday afternoon, and this continued to be the custom for long over a century.

Each Parish Church used to give the School one Sunday's collections, and the Cathedral collection on Mayor's Sunday was also given, as it is still. The last Annual Report which I could obtain is dated 1842, which records--

Blue Boys	...	...	...	...	28
Green Cap (Day) Boys	...	...	...	...	64
					<u>92</u>

Collections at Cathedral and 10 City

Churches £75 3 4

In 1900 the Blue Coat Institution was reduced in number by sending off the Green Caps to other schools. Thus material for the School Band was cut off, and that body of excellent juvenile musicians, after a while, came to an end, and with it an excellent weekly (and very striking) advertisement, when they perambulated the City Walls on the Saturday half-holiday.

There is a creditable list of benefactors, and a small one of annual subscribers, but a number of these have been removed by death and there has not been, for some years, an addition of names of new subscribers to compensate for the loss.

As the band no longer plays, and the boys are not seen in public as they used to be, save at the Mayoral Procession in November, public attention is seldom directed to them, and consequently adequate financial support is not forthcoming.

Moreover, in a day of universal State Education, and one in which materialism looms large, there is a tendency in many minds to doubt the present-day necessity for such an Institution. It is sometimes argued "Why keep a dog and bark yourself?" or, in other words, "Why should we pay school rates, and *also* subscribe for a school, when we could force the State to educate these boys?" And these arguments have a certain plausibility. The answer, however, is not far to seek. Education, if it be *only* book-

learning, for eighteen to twenty-four boys would certainly be dear at £600 a year, but it is not only book-learning that these boys receive. They are fed (and *well* fed), clothed, shod, taught to swim, to sing, to box, to cultivate their garden allotments, to carpenter, to behave as gentlemen, to love God and serve their country, and ever "to play the game." As a social experiment alone, in a day when every sort of scheme is projected for the people's betterment, this Blue Coat School is decidedly a success, and has been proving its usefulness as year followed year in all these couple of centuries and more.

Its foundation, constitution, dress, etc., have been the models for younger institutions of which their citizens are justly proud. I refer to Liverpool Blue Coat Hospital and Chetham's Hospital at Manchester.

It would be well if Chester folk were to revive the keen interest their fathers used to take in their ancient foundation. The Board of Governors to-day consists of the Mayor and a body of leading citizens, who are ever on the look-out for the best interests of the lads.

They are fortunate in having an excellent Master and Matron in Mr. and Mrs. Collins, and the recent revival of interest in the "Old Boys' Association" is most encouraging.

An "Old Boy," a leading citizen of Melbourne, Australia, has founded a £5 Prize for the best Essay by a Chester Blue Coat boy on the subject of "Imperial Federation." This is competed for annually, as is a similar prize offered to a public school in Australia. The successful essays are directed to be exchanged. The English essay goes out to the Commonwealth, while the Australian essay comes to the Mother Country.

A scholarship was founded by the late Dr. Thackeray, of Chester, in 1854, Samuel Anderson, the present holder, being the twenty-second scholar.

Sir Owen Philipps, M.P., has given a silver cup for the Chester and District Life Saving Competition. This was

carried off by the Blue Coat Hospital in 1919, together with eight Life Saving Competition Certificates.

I am convinced of one thing, which is that the majority of thinking people to-day are becoming very sceptical about the position that by a State-directed system of education it is possible to turn out "educated" children by the million, the vast majority of whom will inevitably develop into good citizens—*ipso facto*—because they have been taught the "Syllabus."

Men are beginning to realize that something more, the inculcation of "character," is needed.

Surely we shall advance the true education of Britain's bonnie lads and lassies best if we in every way foster the Public Elementary Schools and, at the same time, enlist the sympathy of Institutions like our ancient Chester Foundation, in which we have ever before us the evident fact that

MANNERS MAKE THE MAN.

Floreat Opus.

