THE COLLEGE SETTLEMENT AS OUTSIDERS SEE IT.

College settlements have now been in existence long enough to warrant the passing of judgment upon the work which they have already accomplished and the method and motive of their labor. When the idea began to find its first practical expression on this side the water seven or eight years ago, the Christian public was in a questioning attitude, friendly in the main toward the undertaking, but needing considerable illumination as to the precise ends which settlements are designed to serve.

This questioning spirit has no doubt given way in large measure to confidence and often to hearty co-operation, as plant after plant has sprung up in one or another of our great cities. New York has today as many as seven and Boston and Chicago three, each apiece, apparently in its own sphere serving its neighborhood and helping forward that movement of brotherhood which so characteristic of the age in which we live. And the same time not a few thoughtful and influential persons among us are still asking seriously whether college settlements are worth while, whether they are managed wisely and efficiently, and whether they are appreciable factors in the working out of our social and industrial problems.

Such questions as these are brought freshly to mind by the assembling in New York this week of settlement workers from various parts of the country to confer as to methods and objects. It is the first national assemblage of the sort, and good cannot fail to come from comparing the results of experience and observation. The college settlement movement realizes the need of self-definition. It has been thus far largely a thing revolving about a few strong personalities, who have shaped it according to their individual bent, that it has lacked the solidity and potency that go with a case established on certain well-defined principles of action. It has had to encounter what is always so detrimental to a new religious or charitable movement—the patronage of those who are quick to ally themselves with the latest and the flashiest enterprise in behalf of suffering humanity and as quick to grow lukewarm in their devotion to it. It has, now and then, drawn into the ranks of the active workers, despite vigilance in selecting them, some who have proved unfaithful to the vocation, and who, perhaps, conveyed to the public a false impression of the settlement idea in operation.

But having survived its early and critical years, and having secured for itself a compact though not large body of earnest friends, the movement is now warranted in claiming a greater measure of sympathy on the ground of what it has already accomplished. It has certainly helped to bridge the gulf between the rich and the poor, and to make rich and poor alike with consideration and regard for one another. It has made the capitalist more willing to unlash his purse strings and to try to do justly by his employes. It has exercised a powerful and healthy restraint upon the labor agitator by showing him that progress is made through evolution and not through revolution. And in all our great cities, as our New York letter this week effectively shows, it has accomplished conspicuous results in the way of removing abuses, promoting good government and securing better sanitary conditions for the crowded dwellers in the congested sections.

For all this and more the settlement idea is not forgotten. And having said this much we feel at liberty and warranted in being less in regard to which, in our judgment, there is need of watchfulness. Such a conference as that at New York will doubtless consider the work in all its defects as well as in all its possibilities, and will find means to profit by whatever friendly criticism may have been made during recent years.

The Impression prevails to some extent that college settlements are too largely schools of investigation rather than centers of action. It is necessary that the society can be righted without careful study of the causes, but it would be unfortunate if settlements came to be looked upon simply as laboratories where young men and women, eager for a few years between college and active life to study humanity at close range. Under this conception, so doubt, the inhabitants of slumdom take on an interesting, almost a picturesque, aspect, but who is governed chiefly by the investigations as a place devoted to the interest in individuals in his profound but somewhat diffusive regard for Man.

We have noticed, too, in some settlements an indifference to, or a discrediting of, the agencies for social amelioration. Doubtless spirit of the old-time charitable and religious work in the lower sections of our cities is open to criticism as narrowly conceived and poorly executed. At the same time a vast amount of good is being done by these settlements by the patient city missionary and the consecrated Salvation Army lads and lasses in the days before slumming became a fashionable pastime. At any rate, college educators would do well to be convinced enough to see that the impulse to helpful usefulness fulfills itself in many ways and facilities enough to league themselves with any and all instrumentalities that make for social improvement.

It ought to be remembered, too, and we presume most college settlement workers are aware of the fact, that these undertakings are not the final form in which the desire for social living is to express itself. A college settlement is at best only an artificial household. It is in no sense a home that can serve as a model for other homes. When Mr. Buchanan in London and Prof. Graham Taylor in Chicago move their families, they do not produce a pleasant residential section into the poor districts, they are not taking the neighborhood an actual type of what a home should be, just as the missionary does who goes to the frontier or to foreign lands. But a college settlement can be little more than a living experiment, and it is on the neighborhood must therefore be cared not only by ministering to it, but so
far as it can by bringing the dwellers thereabouts into organic, and perhaps into administrative, connection with its life.

To just what extent a settlement is a religious force depends, in our judgment, altogether upon the characteristics of its leading workers. We have asked Miss Vida Scudder to give our readers the benefit of her observation and experience on this point, and her article appears elsewhere in this issue. With her large and noble outlook upon the subject we are in cordial sympathy, and yet we have sometimes feared that, in their anxiety to avoid anything that savors of proselytism, settlement workers overlook the great yearning which is deepest in the heart of Protestant, Catholic and Jew for the consolations and inspirations of religion. It is our profound conviction that only the religious motive can sustain permanently the settlement movement at the level which it has attained. A transient interest in social questions may lead this or that young man or woman to spend a year or two at the North End or down in the Bowery, but for that life and death grapple with poverty and crime going on year after year, like that of Charles L. Brace, a great faith in God, as well as in man, is essential. We are equally sure, too, that while every wise effort should be made to secure better lodgings, cleaner amusements and broader parks for the poor, any program that lays chief emphasis on the betterment of external conditions ignores human history and trifles with the truest, divinest aspirations of the human heart.