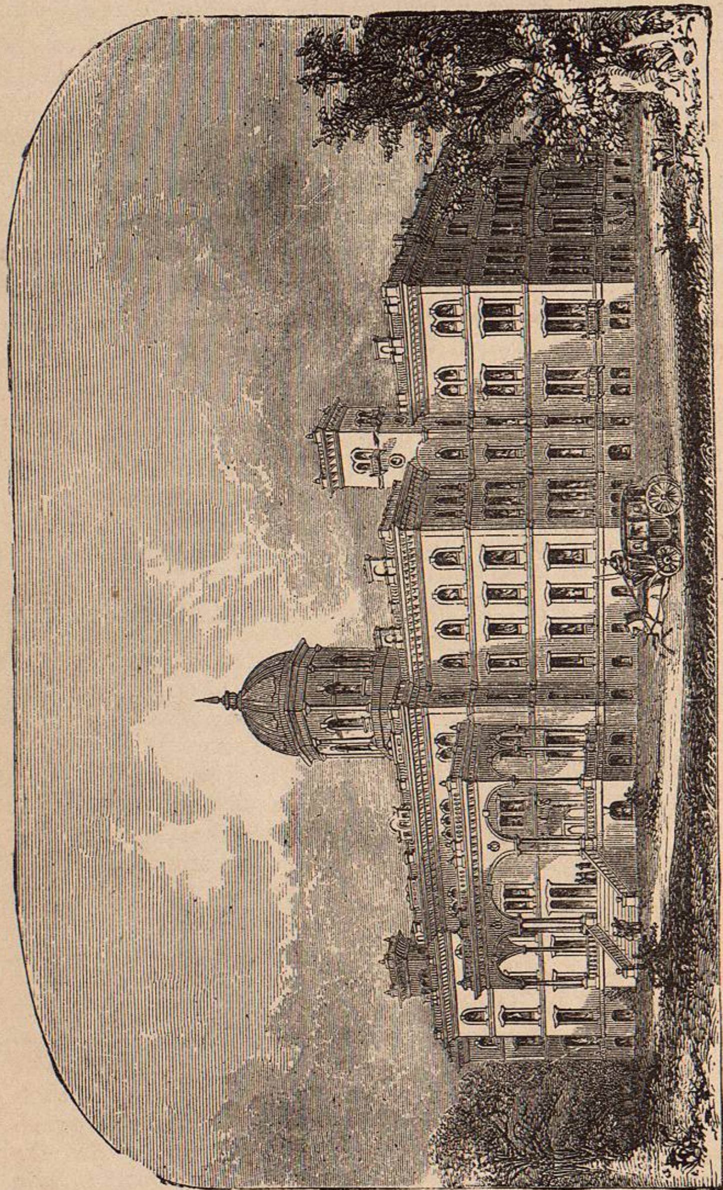

DEAF AND DUMB ASYLUM, WASHINGTON HEIGHTS, (162d Street and 12th Avenue.)

CHAPTER V.

INSTITUTIONS OF NEW YORK ISLAND AND WEST-CHESTER COUNTY.

NEW YORK INSTITUTION FOR THE INSTRUCTION OF THE DEAF AND DUMB.

(*Washington Heights, One Hundred and Sixty-second street.*)

THAT deaf-mutes have existed in the world since the early ages, is a fact clearly established by both sacred and profane history. Speechlessness appears for the most part to have been the result of deafness; articulation resulting from imitation, a matter to which the mind of the deaf is not naturally directed. For many ages it was confidently believed that these persons were inexorably shut off from all social intercourse with their race, and the idea of restoring these faculties or of repairing their loss by education seems never to have occurred to the ancients. The civil authorities in many instances appear to have openly approved of, or connived at, the practice of destroying such children as did not bid fair to be of service to the State. If allowed to live, they were deprived by statute of their inheritance, of all right to buy or sell, make a donation or will, and were classed with the insane and the idiotic. The ameliorating influences of Christianity finally intercepted the blow, and they were no longer murdered as useless incumbrances of society; yet pitiable indeed was their condition through all the medieval ages, locked up to their own untutored musings, and enduring the most cruel neglect. In the seventh century John, Bishop of Hagulstad, is said to have with much pains taught a deaf-mute to speak a few sentences, and in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries numerous private efforts were made with some success. A Spanish monk, Pedro Ponce, who died in 1584, was the first teacher of deaf-mutes. Another Spanish monk, named Juan Pablo Bonet, published about 1620 the first treatise on deaf-mute instruction, and is believed to have invented the dactylology, or one-hand alphabet, used so generally in France and America. The numerous treatises on the

education of deaf-mutes issued in various parts of Europe during this century show a general awakening on the subject among the learned. Dr. John Wallis, mathematical professor at Oxford, deserves the credit of being the first practical instructor of the deaf and dumb in England. He never had a large number of pupils, but continued it for nearly fifty years with tolerable success. The first school of this kind supported by government was established in Leipsic, in 1778, under the patronage of the Elector of Saxony, which continues to this time. Early in the present century John Braidwood, a member of a family who for sixty years had carried on a system of instruction for the deaf and dumb in England without disclosing its principles to the public, came to this country and attempted the establishment of a school. He was warmly supported by several gentlemen of wealth, but the enterprise soon failed through his habitual dissipation.

The year 1816 is memorable for the organization of a society in New York for the instruction of the deaf and dumb. Samuel L. Mitchell, LL.D., the Rev. John Stanford, and Dr. Samuel Akerly, who at a later period rendered such efficient service in founding the Institution for the Blind, were its chief promoters. The wisdom of the undertaking was by many questioned, because a similar institution was just then being opened at Hartford, one being supposed amply sufficient for the whole country. An inquiry, however, soon disclosed the fact that over sixty deaf mutes were then living in the city of New York, and subsequent investigations have proved that while one in twenty-three hundred of the general population is blind, one in about two thousand is deaf and dumb. The act of incorporation bears date of April 15, 1817, and in the following May the school was formally opened in one of the rooms of the City Hall, with four scholars. During the first eleven years of its operations the society had no building of its own, but in 1829 the school was removed to East Fiftieth street, to the grounds now occupied by Columbia college. The success of the system of instruction led to an annual increase of students, and made necessary the enlargement of the building, which was three times accomplished during the quarter of a century spent at this location. The prudent sagacity of the board of management secured the title of two entire blocks of ground, lying between Forty-eighth and Fiftieth streets, Fourth and Fifth avenues. This valuable property, purchased at different

periods for about $54,000, was afterwards disposed of at about $325,000. The rush of the rapidly expanding city now began to disturb the operations of the Institution, and the managers began to cast about in quest of more eligible quarters. Fanwood, at Washington Heights, nine miles north of the City Hall, was finally selected, and thirty-seven and one-half acres of ground purchased in 1853, at a cost of $115,000. The buildings, which are the largest and finest in the world for the instruction of the deaf and dumb, cover about two acres, are of brick, with basement, copings, and trimmings of granite, and have cost several hundred thousand dollars. A mortgage of $175,000 has just been removed by the sale of nine and one-half acres of the land for $263,000, leaving a balance to complete other needed improvements. The front walls, which are panneled, are faced with yellow Milwaukie brick, to save the expense of painting. The main edifice, which contains the apartments for the officers and teachers, the reception-rooms, offices, the library, and mineralogical cabinet, etc., is flanked by two vast and well-arranged wings, one of which is devoted to the male, and the other to the female pupils. A central building, separated in construction from the others, but united to them with covered passageways, contains in the basement kitchen and appendages, on the first floor the dining-room, and on the next the chapel. The sexes are carefully separated, and meet only for meals, instruction, and divine worship, under the oversight of their instructors. The buildings are capable of accommodating over five hundred pupils, and are about equal to the demands of the deaf and dumb of this State, which are believed to amount to about two thousand one hundred of all ages. They occupy one of the most commanding locations on the entire island, overlooking the beautiful Hudson, and have been universally admired for their beauty and exquisite arrangement.

This Institution was at first designed for a private charity, but the good sense of the public soon awoke to the fact that the State owed the means of instruction to all its children, whether blind, deaf and dumb, or possessed of all the five senses. As these unfortunates are widely scattered, and to enjoy the advantages of an institution are compelled to reside far from home in an expensive city, it becomes the duty of the State to provide for their maintenance during the period of their instruction. From these considerations it was early taken under State patronage, which has since formed its principal

support. The annual cost of the Institution amounts to about $300 per inmate, exclusive of permanent improvements. Application for admission as a State pupil must be made to the Superintendent of Public Instruction at Albany, accompanied by a certificate from the Overseer of the Poor in the town where the applicant resides, certifying that his parents or guardian are unable to pay for his board and tuition. State pupils must be between the ages of twelve and twenty-five. Pupils are admitted at the charge of counties between the ages of six and twelve. Pay pupils are also received from families of means. The regular course of instruction lasts eight years, with three years additional for those selected for good conduct and capacity for higher studies. An untaught deaf-mute is the most ignorant creature in the human family. To him all the past is a blank, all the present an inexplicable mystery, and all the future a profound uncertainty. He has no proper conceptions of the Supreme Being, which affords one of the clearest evidences of the necessity of a Divine revelation. There have been three principal systems employed in their instruction: 1. Articulation, or the theory that articulation is indispensable to the clear comprehension of thought. This system is believed to have been founded by Pedro Ponce, long practised by Wallis, Pereira, and the Braidwoods, has been for a century the common system taught in Germany, but has not been much practised in this country until quite recently. 2. Gesticulation, or the theory that every idea of which the mind is capable may be expressed by signs. This was taught by Sicard, Bebian, and others. 3. The American system, which combines the best fundamental principles of the two preceding, with practical additions. The language of gestures is clearly the only universal channel of intelligent communication in the world, and savages from all countries have in this way been able to hold some conversation. This can be learned by deaf-mutes spontaneously, and in all systems is more or less employed. At the New York Institution the beginner, when introduced into the class-room, finds placed before him cards containing the printed names of objects. Either the object or its picture is placed by the side of the card. The teacher points first to the name and next to the object, and thus the connection between names and things soon becomes familiar. They are then taught to spell with their fingers by the Manual Alphabet a few short words, and the names of familiar objects.

When about fifty words have been thus learned, embracing all the letters of the alphabet, short phrases containing an adjective and a noun are formed, which they are required to write on large stationary slates, placed all around the class-rooms, and thus they are advanced until able to transfer their knowledge of signs to the printed page. The progress made by these hitherto untaught children of silence is surprising, and those who complete the full course attain to high scholarship. The language of signs is much more definite than many suppose, and these speechless brethren are here taught to discern between the things that differ. At a recent examination, with no previous intimation, a class was called upon, in sign language, to write and explain the difference between the nearly synonymous terms of "conceal and dissemble," "antipathy and hatred," "courage and fortitude." In every instance the proper English word was instantly written on the slate by each member of the class in answer to the sign, and the nice distinctions of signification made. Several years since the more advanced students organized themselves into the "Fanwood Literary Society," which now numbers over one hundred members. The society meets every Saturday evening, and is characterized by animated discussions and lectures in the pantomime of the Institution.

The three last days of August, 1867, will long be remembered by these silent brethren as the national convention of deaf-mutes, held at the New York Institution. Four hundred of the former pupils of the Institution, and over one hundred graduates of others, assembled, and took part in the interesting exercises. Seven of these national conventions have now been held. More attention than formerly has recently been given to the matter of articulation. This, the Principal believes to be an accomplishment, and a matter of decided value in certain cases, though of little service to most congenital mutes, and a system that can never supersede the more enlarged and cultivated language of signs. To keep the Institution, as it has long been, in the forefront of this benign movement, Mr. Engelsman, a German expert in this system of instruction, has been employed, and such semi-mutes and others as by experiment exhibit talent for articulation are placed under his instruction. This class at present numbers over fifty students.

A new brick building, one hundred feet by thirty, and three stories high, has just been erected for the better accommoda-

tion of the mechanical department. In addition to a good education, the students, unless wealthy, are taught trades, so that maintenance will not be a difficult problem when they return to the outside world. Shoe-making, cabinet-making, tailoring, dress-making, printing, bookbinding, and engraving, have been taught with success, in addition to horticulture and gardening.

Less than twenty per cent. of the whole number, but nearly forty per cent. of the adult deaf mutes of the State, marry and rear offspring, not more than one in twenty of whom inherit the infirmities of their parents. The Institution is free from sectarian bigotry, the minds of the pupils being wisely directed to the Bible, without which there can be no complete culture of mind or heart. Prayer is offered by one of the teachers in the sign language every morning and evening in the chapel before the whole school. On the Sabbath a sermon suited to their capacities is delivered in the same manner.

At table, when all are seated, one tap of the drum, the vibrations of which none hear but all feel, calls the vast family to silence, after which a blessing is invoked with signs by a teacher standing in one of the aisles, and at the close of this another tap is the signal for turning plates and beginning the dinner.

The sanitary condition of the Institution is all that can be secured in our day, less sickness and fewer deaths occurring in it than among the more hardy population around it.

The library contains about two thousand volumes, three hundred of which are rare books on deaf-mute instruction. About two thousand two hundred pupils have been educated since the opening of the Institution. The professors have always ranked among the best educated men of the State. Half of those now employed are graduates of the Institution. Dr. Harvey P. Peet was called to the office of Principal in 1831, and filled this position with great ability for thirty-six years. He is the author of many of the text-books in this and other American institutions. Weary with the toil of years, he resigned his position at the close of 1867, and was succeeded by his son, Isaac Lewis Peet, A.M., who had been the Vice-Principal for fifteen years, and who bids fair to attain to the celebrity of his excellent father.

INSTITUTION FOR THE IMPROVED INSTRUCTION OF DEAF MUTES.

(*Broadway, between Forty-fourth and Forty-fifth streets.*)

DIFFERENT systems foı the instruction of deaf mutes have been adopted in different countries. The French have practised upon the sign language, while the Germans have long made a specialty of the system of articulation. Several years ago, Bernhard Engelsman, a learned German skilled in the art of teaching deaf-mutes in this latter system, came to New York, and on the organization of this Institution was appointed its Principal, and thus became the founder of this system of deaf-mute instruction in this country. The new Institution was opened March 1, 1867, with ten pupils, at No. 134 West Twenty-seventh street. The building soon became too small for the increasing number of scholars, so that in May, 1868, the school, having nineteen pupils, was removed to No. 330 East Fourteenth street. The number of students steadily increased, amounting in 1869 to about thirty—all the building could accommodate. The society was incorporated under the general act of Legislature in 1868, and on the 12th of April, 1870, the Legislature, by special act, placed it on a level with the New York Institution at Washington Heights, so that indigent students, if they prefer, may be instructed here, as at the other institution, at State expense. The sum of $10,000 was also given by the State for the establishment of the Institution, and several thousand had previously accumulated in the treasury of the society, from the donations of its friends. The demand for increased accommodations led the trustees to lease two large and eligible houses on Broadway in the summer of 1870, where the school is at present conducted.

A desire existing in many minds to obtain from the city a site on which to erect buildings, a formal application was accordingly filed in June, 1870, with the Commissioners of the Sinking Fund of the city of New York, asking a grant of land for the purpose above named; and accordingly, on or about August 1st, 1870, the president had the gratification of receiving the deed of a grant of land, situated on the westerly side of Lexington avenue, and extending from Sixty-seventh