

CHAPTER VIII.

INSTITUTIONS OF RANDALL'S ISLAND.

THE NEW YORK NURSERIES.

(Randall's Island.)

RANDALL'S ISLAND takes its name from Jonathan Randall, who purchased it in 1784, and made it his home for nearly fifty years. Beginning opposite One Hundred and Fifteenth street, and extending northward to near the Westchester line, it forms the last of that group of beautiful islands that adorns the East river, and from the uses to which they have been appropriated, form a sort of moral rampart to the great metropolis. Originally, like all its sister islands, it appeared like one of nature's failures, its surface being so largely covered with malarious swamps, and surmounted with hills of granite. It was transferred to the city of New York, in 1835, for the sum of \$50,000. The sites for the present buildings, with their handsomely arranged grounds and charming gardens, have been prepared at the unavoidable outlay of vast sums. About thirty acres of the southern portion are under the control of the "Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents," and occupied by the House of Refuge, while the northern, and much larger portion, is controlled exclusively by the "Commissioners of Charities and Corrections," who have here located what they denominate the "Nurseries." These form the juvenile branch of the Almshouse department, the adults, except such as assist in taking care of the children, being provided for and retained on Blackwell's Island.

The Nurseries consist of three departments, viz.: The buildings for the healthy children, the Infant Hospital, and the Idiot Asylum. There are six large buildings for the healthy children, several hundred feet apart, grouped together, though arranged on no special plan, near the centre of the island. They are constructed of brick, three stories high, some of which are furnished with outside corridors, are well arranged

and kept in a very tidy and inviting condition. An assistant matron is placed in charge of each of these buildings, the whole being presided over by a warden and matron. A separate building contains the machinery for the washing, drying, etc. The inmates of these buildings are children over four years of age, abandoned by their parents, and taken by the police from the public streets, and children whose parents for the time are unable to support them. On arriving at the island they are placed in quarantine for several days, to guard against the spread of contagious diseases, where they are examined daily by a physician. If diseased they are sent to the hospital; if not they are distributed according to their age and sex among the other buildings. It is the aim of the Commissioners to make the Nurseries places of but temporary sojourn, and to cause their distribution among families as early as practicable. To this end parents are notified that no child may claim to be retained longer than three months unless its board be paid. If not reclaimed by their friends at the expiration of that time, the Superintendent of Outdoor Poor may apprentice such as are of proper age, or, if too young, adopt them into families willing to take, and able to support and educate them. This wise regulation prevents the overcrowding of the buildings, and avoids the evils incident to massing large numbers of children together through those tender years when the habits of life are being formed. No child in full possession of its faculties is retained after it completes its sixteenth year. The grounds adjoining the buildings are ample, which at certain hours are made vocal by the white-aproned boys who trip and frolic with infinite merriment. Their diet is ample and nutritious, comprising a greater variety than is common in public institutions. The children while here receive the same instruction imparted to those of a similar age in the city, teachers being supplied by the New York Board of Public Instruction. The numbers annually admitted to the Nurseries vary from 1,800 to 3,000, according to the severity of the season. A large farm stretches over the northern portion of the Island, cultivated mainly by men detailed from the Workhouse and Penitentiary, and which affords most of the vegetables for the Nurseries.

THE INFANT HOSPITAL.

FOR many years the practice of sending foundlings and other infants committed to the Department to the Almshouse prevailed, where they were placed in charge of the female inmates. The records show that the mortality of this unfortunate class during this period amounted to the appalling figure of eighty-five or ninety per cent., and it is even believed that excepting the few adopted none survived the first year. In 1866, the Commissioners appointed a matron, and employed paid nurses to take exclusive charge of the infants, and although the mortality continued large there was a manifest change for the better. The next year wet nurses were transferred from the general hospitals to nourish them. Life by this means was so prolonged, and the number so increased that it became necessary to convert several wards of the Almshouse into nurseries, and on the completion of the Inebriate Asylum, the infants were temporarily transferred to that building. The necessity of providing a large and well-arranged hospital, devoted wholly to this class, had long been felt. Such an edifice was begun in 1868, and a portion of it was made ready for the reception of the nurses and children on the 9th of August, 1869. The building stands on the western side of Randall's Island, facing northward, is constructed of brick and stone, in the most approved style of modern hospital architecture.

The plan consists of a long, three-story pavilion, with three large traverse sections, the eastern one not yet having been erected. The offices and private apartments for the physicians are located in the northern portion of the central traverse section, the latter being well arranged on the second floor. The edifice was erected under the supervision of the Medical Board, and contains every facility for light, heat, and ventilation. It is at present divided into eighteen wards, and has accommodations for 153 adults and 217 children, though 260 of the latter class have already been under treatment in it at one time. The completion of the section yet to be added will greatly increase the accommodations. Children are taken as foundlings, orphans, and are often attended by their indigent mothers. They are divided into three

classes: the "wet nursed," the "bottle-fed," and the "walking-children." Unless reclaimed by their parents, they continue in the Hospital until two or three years old, when they are placed in a nursery where one nurse can take charge and instruct ten or twelve of them. As many wet-nurses as possible are obtained, though the supply is never equal to the demand. 1,516 infants were under treatment during the year closing January 1, 1870, 710 of whom died. Since entering the new Hospital, the rate of mortality has been greatly lessened. During the five months of 1868 (from August to December inclusive), 383 deaths occurred, or 21.10 per cent. per month of the inmates. During the same period in 1869, 156 died, or 10.07 per cent. of the inmates, a decrease of over one-half. The statistics of mortality during the whole year of 1870 were 58.99 per cent. of all foundlings received, and 15.06 of those received with their mothers. The chief physician, Dr. Dunster, believes that the annual mortality will be further reduced by the full development of the plans of the Commissioners. It is doubtful whether any better place for foundlings will be provided among the charities of New York.

The nursery population has several times been sadly overtaken with epidemics, now believed to have resulted, at least in part, from an inadequate supply of good water. This evil has now been obviated by the laying of more pipe, affording an abundant supply of pure Croton. The engine-house, containing, besides the heating and ventilating apparatus for the Hospital, the washing and drying apartments, is situated at some distance from the main building. A gas-house for the manufacture and supply of this illuminating agent to all the buildings stands in the rear of the engine-house. The grounds, which slope gracefully to the river, adorned with a row of chestnut, hickory, and oak trees, are being nicely graded, and will, no doubt, in time be highly ornamental. The roads and walks are being built in the most substantial manner, on stone foundations, varying from one to two feet in thickness, and macadamized.

THE IDIOT ASYLUM.

THIS is, after all, the most curious and interesting Institution under the control of the Commissioners. Idiocy has existed in all ages and countries, but no effort appears to have been made for the improvement of this class until the seventeenth century, and no considerable progress made in their education until within the last fifty years. The present century has, however, witnessed the establishment of large institutions for their benefit in France, England, Switzerland, and in various parts of the United States. In 1855, the State of New York erected a fine Asylum at Syracuse, at the expense of nearly \$100,000, with accommodations for one hundred and fifty pupils, which has since been generally well-filled. A large number of persons, representing every degree of imbecility, have annually been thrown on the care of the Commissioners of Charities and Corrections, for whom little was done, more than to supply their physical wants, until 1866, when, with grave doubts of its success as a means of mental development, a school, under the direction of Miss Dunphy, was established. It began with twenty pupils; in 1867 it had increased to forty-two; in 1868 to over seventy, and at this writing to one hundred. The Asylum is a tasty three-story brick structure, with wings, well divided into school-rooms, dormitories, refectory, and other appropriate apartments. It contains at present, besides officers and teachers, 141 persons, whose ages vary from six to thirty years, and who represent nearly every phase of an enfeebled and disordered brain. Here are boys of eight years whose enormous heads far outmeasure the Websters' and Clays', others of twenty-five with whiskers and mustaches, whose skulls are no larger than an ordinary infant of ten months. Some are congenital idiots, born to this enfeebled state, others have been reduced to it by paroxysms, or other casualties. They are divided into two general classes, the hopelessly imbecile, and those capable of some improvement. The forty-one composing the first class at present show but transient gleams of thought or understanding, and are lost for the most part in ceaseless inanity.

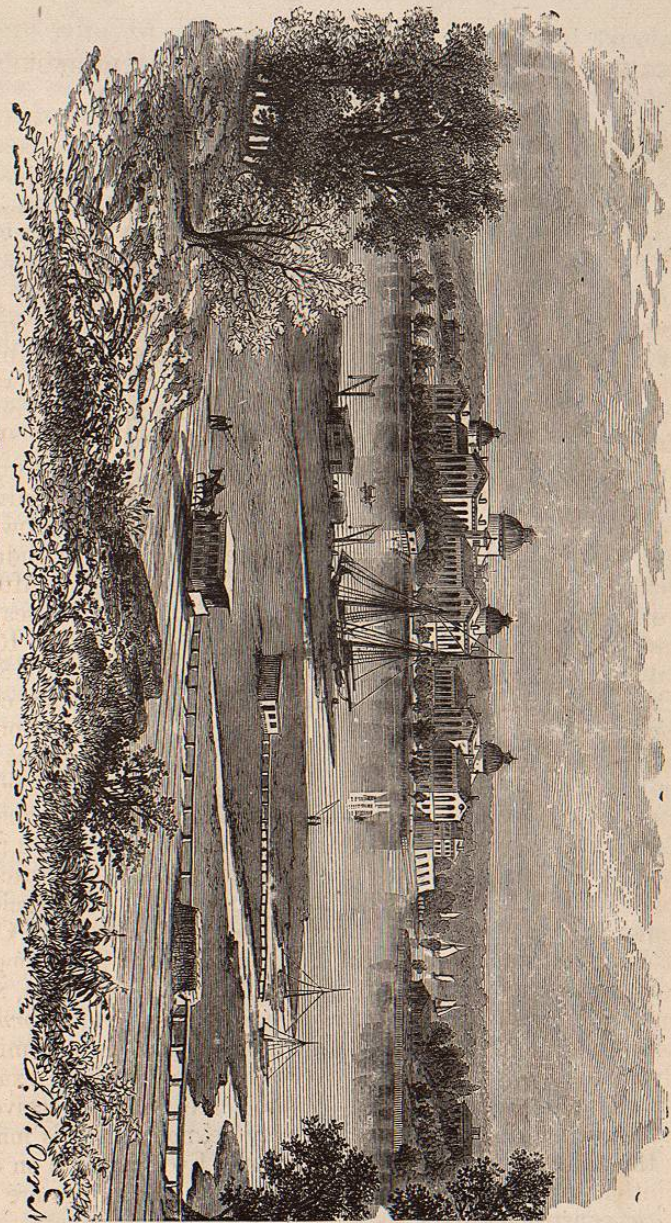
They spend much of the time during the pleasant season

in the play-ground set apart for them, a portion of which is covered with canvass to screen them from the sun. Those admitted to the school enter the primary class, from which most of them are afterwards advanced to the two higher classes. The first lessons taught are cleanliness, order, and obedience, of which many of them seem to have no previous conceptions. The next consist of color and form.

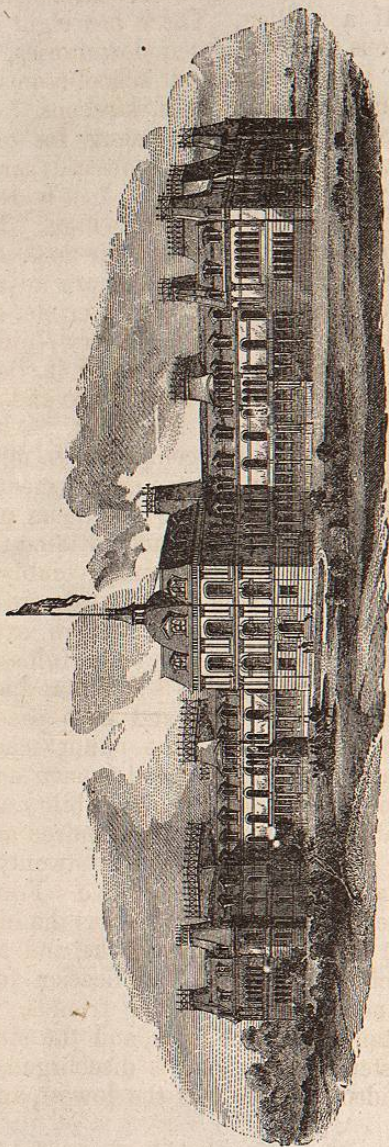
Many idiots have an infantile fondness for bright colors, hence these afford a medium for instruction. As they have no mental control and are destitute of all analytical qualities, the common order of teaching must be reversed, hence words are taught before the letters. A card containing the words "chair," "hand," "book," or "table," printed in large bright letters, is held up before them, by which means they are at length taught the names and definitions of things. The matter of speech is often difficult, as many of them have impediments. The success of this school during the first four years of its history is surprising. The author visited it in 1868, and again in 1870. The school at the second visit exhibited marked improvement. The scholars were all tidy and orderly, their countenances having perceptibly brightened. We asked them various questions in geography which were promptly answered. The advanced class read from the large Reader, in a creditable manner. In singing they almost excel, following the instrument with great exactness. Many make fine progress in penmanship, and a few study instrumental music. One of the girls, who began as an ordinary pupil four years since, is now a teacher in one of the departments. Mathematics are the most difficult things for them to learn, in which they seldom make much progress. A few able to pay board have been admitted at the moderate rate of eight dollars per month. More of this unfortunate class exist in community than is generally supposed, probably several to every one thousand of the population. Idiot schools are valuable, raising many to thoughts and toil who had hitherto been totally neglected, offering also the only test by which a proper discrimination can be made between the true idiot and persons of feeble mind or of slow and imperfect development. The Commissioners have performed a commendable service in the establishment of this school, and have been remarkably successful in their selection of teachers.

SOCIETY FOR THE REFORMATION OF JUVENILE DELINQUENTS
(Randall's Island.)

THE House of Refuge, under the control of the "Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents," is situated on the southern portion of Randall's Island, thirty acres of land being connected with the Institution. The Society, one of the most beneficent and humane in the world, was incorporated in 1824, with power of self-perpetuation. Among its managers have ranked many of the wisest and purest men of the State, who, without pecuniary compensation, have devoted a large portion of their time to its interests for years, and the records of their proceedings for nearly half a century exhibit the most gratifying results. Its first building was erected in Madison Square, where it continued fifteen years, until the growing city forced the managers to evacuate, when they withdrew to Twenty-third street and East river. Here another fifteen were spent, until straitened for room, after much search and discussion, it was resolved to remove the whole to Randall's Island, which was substantially accomplished in 1854. Thousands of children in our great cities and towns are constantly growing up in ignorance and neglect, many homes being little less than schools of vice. A consciousness of guilt, attended with imprisonment and disgrace, crushes what little of self-respect and laudable ambition may yet remain. To hurl these truant youth into a penitentiary, filled with mature and expert criminals, is but to cultivate their treacherous tendencies, and insure their final ruin. This society comes at the opportune moment to open the gates of its City of Refuge to those youthful unfortunates who are brought before the courts for petit offences, and receives them, not for punishment, but for *instruction, discipline, and reformation*. The departments are well arranged and most admirably conducted, presenting at every turn some striking example of system and tidiness. Visitors are politely received, but however distinguished they may be, no change is made in the daily routine of the Institution. Everything is on exhibition in its ordinary field parade. The buildings are of brick, constructed on a magnificent scale in the Italian style,



HOUSE OF REFUGE.—RANDALL'S ISLAND.



FOUNDLING ASYLUM.—RANDALL'S ISLAND.

the two principal structures presenting a graceful façade nearly a thousand feet in length, the whole completed at an expense of half a million. There are eight hundred and eighty-six spacious, well-ventilated dormitories, several finely arranged and amply furnished school-rooms, appropriate hospital departments, dining halls, kitchens, bakeries, laundries, sewing-rooms, elegant apartments for officers, and a model chapel, with seating for a thousand persons. In the rear stand the workshops, each thirty feet wide by one hundred and fifty long, and three stories high. The boys and girls are kept in separate buildings, their respective yards being divided by high walls, and the more advanced of the latter, who have been guilty of social crime, are carefully separated from the more youthful. Every child upon its admission is made to feel that the period of its detention rests with itself. Two general rules are at once and always inculcated. First, "Tell no lies." Secondly, "Always do the best you can." Every child is compelled to toil from six to eight hours every week-day, at some employment suited to its capacity, and to study from four to five hours, under competent teachers. The labor is designed to tame their fiery, vicious natures, to quicken attention, and favorably rouse all the dormant elements of their being. As moderate stints are introduced, affording opportunity to redeem extra time for reading and play, they toil with a cheerfulness and speed that is highly exhilarating. Thus sobered and awakened by toil, they return to their books, and keep pace with those who reside at home and attend the public schools of New York. Hundreds of young men and women are at work in the city and elsewhere rising to respectability and affluence by the steady habits and trades they acquired at the Institution, the former earning from twelve to twenty dollars per week, and the latter from four to twelve. Four grades of conduct have been introduced. Grade 1 is the highest, which every child must retain at least six weeks, and attain to the third class in school, before any application for indenture will be entertained from parents or friends. This grade must also be retained for one year, and the studies of the highest class mastered before one is discharged, and then a situation is provided. Grade 4 is the lowest, and is one of disgrace.

The society opened its first building on New Year's day, 1825, with six wretched girls and three boys. During the

first fifteen years of its operations, it received and again returned to society two thousand five hundred. When it removed to Randall's Island, about six thousand had been received, and up to January, 1871, no less than 13,727. An average of three hundred per annum have thus been returned to the community since the first organization of the society, and we are told that at least seventy-five per cent. of them have lived honest and useful lives. The good accomplished for the country and humanity is incalculable. The sons of eminent merchants and lawyers, and of distinguished divines, have taken lessons here to their lasting advantage; while not a few from the haunts of infamy, who would but for this model "Bethesda" have gone frightfully down the slippery steep of crime, have been raised to sit among the princes of the land. The sanitary interests of the Institution have always been conducted with remarkable success. During the first ten years of its history but five deaths occurred, and in 1832, out of ninety-nine cases of cholera, only two proved fatal. The report of 1869 showed, that of the seventeen hundred and seventy-five different inmates of the year, but three had died, and during the year closing 1871, but six died. But without the transforming influence of pure Christianity, all efforts for the reformation of delinquents must prove sadly abortive.

This Institution is, in its faith and practice, eminently Protestant, and most of its officers and teachers are persons of established Christian character. Rev. B. K. Pierce, D.D., the chaplain, a man of rare culture and long experience in this difficult work, with quick discernment of character, remarkable facility in remembering countenances and names, and with a heart that always bleeds at the woes of a child, is admirably fitted for his critical station. Mr. J. C. Jones, the successful superintendent, is also a man of more than ordinary culture and ability.

Sabbath at the Refuge is a day of delightful, hallowed rest. Once on that day all join in Sunday-School study and recitation, and once they crowd their beautiful chapel, when a thousand faces are turned toward the man of God, and a thousand voices join in liturgical responses. Many have been hopefully converted, and several who were once inmates of the Institution are now studying for the Christian ministry.

With the multiplication of reformatory Institutions, and some unjust disparagements, a smaller number of youth than

formerly are being received from the New York courts. As the supply is undiminished, we can but regard this as a public mistake. In the matter of economy, the Refuge is conducted with remarkable ability. During the last seven years, the net cost of each child, above its own earnings, has but little exceeded seventy dollars per annum, while the gross cost has varied from \$116.20 in 1867, to \$131.13 in 1870, according to the number in the Institution. About twelve thousand dollars have, until recently, been annually received from the license of theaters. In addition to this, the sums contributed from the city treasury and the school fund have, united, been annually less than twenty dollars per capita, while the Catholic Protectory has been paid \$110 for each child, and the Commissioners of Charities and Corrections have expended over one hundred and fifty dollars per annum on each child, in the Industrial school at Hart Island and on the school-ship. This comparison speaks volumes in favor of the Refuge, inasmuch as it greatly surpasses both the Institutions mentioned in the appliances of personal comfort, while in matters of culture, discipline, building up of character, and thoroughness of skilled labor, it probably surpasses every Institution of its kind in the country.

The Managers propose, if appropriate legislation can be secured, to somewhat enlarge their Institution, and receive a class of delinquents still more advanced in crime and years. They fully believe that multitudes of young men, who have grown up without employment and are sent annually to the Penitentiary to be further confirmed in treachery, might in a well-conducted reformatory be taught the arts of skilled labor, mellowed by the appliances of Christianity, and saved for time and eternity. Who with a well-balanced head and suitably affected heart can for a moment doubt it? A society so intent on the accomplishment of its great work, and so rich in desirable fruits, deserves well of the public, and should not be crippled in any of the appliances necessary to its highest success. It is the pioneer of its kind; the twenty other similar Institutions, with their many thousand inmates in this country as well as those of Europe, have grown up through its example. Its managers and friends, in molding their economy, have sought to incorporate the lessons they have industriously culled from the experience and wisdom of ages. Long may it flourish to elevate the fallen and enrich the world.