

CHAPTER X.

NEW YORK INSTITUTIONS ON STATEN ISLAND.

SAILOR'S SNUG HARBOR.

(Staten Island.)

SAILORS, though a very useful and industrious class, rank among the most reckless and improvident of the world. Without them the commerce of the world could not be conducted; and while a few of them have always been noted for their intelligence, piety, and thrift, the vast majority have ever been literally *afloat*—creatures of accident, drifting hither and thither wherever caprice or fancy might carry them. They rarely have many friends, except those who participate in their vices, and help to squander their hard earnings. Sailors are proverbially reckless of health, excessively given to dissipation and sensuality while on shore, exposed to the vicissitudes of changing climates while at sea; add to these, then, the danger of other casualties, and their

life-long improvidence, and it will be clear that most of them must early become inmates of hospitals, and objects of charity. More than two hundred thousand sailors annually enter the New York harbor, many of whom are in need of medical or surgical aid. To provide for this want the Marine Hospital was established, and the Seaman's Retreat founded. Still a place of rest where the crippled or worn-out *tar* might in quietude spend the evening twilight of his career was greatly needed. It remained for a noble hearted bachelor-sailor (more careful and successful than most of his fellows), to establish for these cast-off wrecks of the sea a home, unrivalled in the world in the beauty of its location, and the abundance of its comforts.

Captain Robert Richard Randall, of New York City, by the provision of his will, dated June 1, 1801, bequeathed (certain specific legacies being satisfied) all the residue of his estate, real and personal, to the Chancellor of the State, the Mayor and Recorder of the city, the President of the Chamber of Commerce, the President of the Marine Society, the Senior Ministers of the Episcopal and of the Presbyterian Churches of New York, and to their successors in office respectively, to be received by them in trust, and applied to the erection of an Asylum or Marine Hospital, to be called "The Sailor's Snug Harbor," the same to be opened as soon as the income of the estate should, in the judgment of the trustees, be sufficient to support fifty seamen. Mr. Randall's real estate was situated in what is now the First and Fifteenth wards of the city of New York, and consisted of certain building lots in the former, and of twenty-one acres of land in the latter. The trustees were duly incorporated February 6, 1806. Protractive and expensive suits, brought by the relatives of the testator, prevented the trustees from carrying out his wishes for many years after his decease. The United States' Supreme Court finally decided in favor of the trust in March, 1830. The Asylum was to have been erected on his up-town property, situated south of what is now Union Square, and between Fourth and Sixth avenues, but the unexpected growth of the city, and the consequent increase in the value of real estate, induced the trustees to lease the city property and locate the Institution elsewhere. The estate at the decease of the testator was valued at about \$30,000, but it is now estimated at about \$2,000,000. It may be interesting to know that the colossal retail store of

A. T. Stewart, Esq., corner Tenth street and Broadway, stands on a part of this property, and that an annual ground-rent is paid by this gentleman of about \$35,000. The income of the estate is still steadily increasing. In May, 1831, the trustees purchased a farm of 130 acres, to which twenty-one acres were subsequently added, situated on the northern shore of Staten Island, for the sum of \$6,000.

The corner-stone of the Asylum was laid with appropriate exercises October 21, 1831, and on the first day of August, 1833, the building was formally opened for the reception of the thirty sailors approved by a committee appointed for that purpose. The main building consists of a central, 65 by 100 feet, three stories above the basement, and of two wings 51 by 100 feet each, two and a half stories high, the parts being connected with corridors 40 feet long by 16 wide, giving a total frontage of 247 feet. The building stands on a graceful eminence; its front is of marble, with a majestic portico ornamented with eight massive Ionic columns, presenting a palatial aspect as seen from the bay. In the rear of the main edifice is a three-story brick, 80 feet square, erected in 1854, in the basement of which are the Steward's office and the great kitchen of the establishment, furnished with an ample supply of steam-kettles. The first floor of this building contains the dining-rooms, and the other floors contain dormitories, which are mostly large, square rooms, containing four beds each. This building is connected with the main edifice by a covered passage-way. A little to the right of this stands the chapel, a fine brick, with seating for several hundred persons, and adjoining stands a well-arranged parsonage for the use of the chaplain. Further back stand the wash-house and the bake-house, each two stories, of brick, and well arranged. Still further to the rear stands the hospital, erected twenty years ago. It is a well-built three-story brick, with heavy granite trimmings, and contains space for seventy-five beds. Sixty-one persons are now in the hospital, some of whom have been under treatment thirty years. Our attention was called to grandfather Morris, a colored sailor, one hundred and six years old, who has been in the "Harbor" over a quarter of a century. We hoped to get some reminiscences of the Institution from him, but his mind was too much absorbed in better things. He remembers George Whitefield and other eminent men of the good *lang syne*. He can only talk of Jesus and Heaven. He expects to make

but one more short voyage, and reach in due time the haven where there are no shipwrecks or misfortunes, and where people are all of a color. We were next taken to Captain Webster, in another ward, who thinks himself one hundred and eight years old, but whom the steward informed us was ninety-six. He is buoyant and cheerful, full of conversation and humor, and speaks of a "good hope" also for the life to come.

The "Harbor" contains at this writing four hundred inmates besides the officers and help. Liberty is granted the inmates to visit friends, and go to the city or elsewhere as they may reasonably desire. The main building contains a reading-room furnished with files of papers and periodicals; also a library of about a thousand volumes, containing many excellent and solid works which exhibit the wear of much reading. An indispensable prerequisite to admission is that the applicant has sailed five years under the American flag. This, coupled with disease and poverty, formerly proved sufficient, but the late war has so multiplied the number of crippled seaman, that the trustees have been compelled to be more cautious in their admissions. Most of the inmates live to advanced years. Their home is well conducted, and the finest of the kind in the world. The buildings are all that could be desired, and the grounds, which are richly cultivated and thickly set with fruit and shade-trees, are as charming as nature and art could well make them. About twenty-three acres, containing the buildings and gardens, are enclosed by a massive but handsome iron fence, which cost over eighty thousand dollars. The iron was cast in England, and the fence rests upon a deep and solid foundation, with capped posts of the best granite. Much of the farm is still covered with heavy timber. In the front yard, at a convenient distance from the front entrance, stands a white marble monument, erected by the trustees August 21, 1834, to the memory of the founder of the Institution, whose remains were then removed from their first resting-place.


The affairs of the society are managed by the *ex-officio* trustees named in the will, who annually elect their own officers. The salaried officers are the governor and his assistant, the treasurer, agent, resident chaplain, and physician. These employ such other help as is needed, with consent of the trustees. The officers are kindly disposed, too indulgent to the inmates if anything, and affable to visitors. The Institution is open

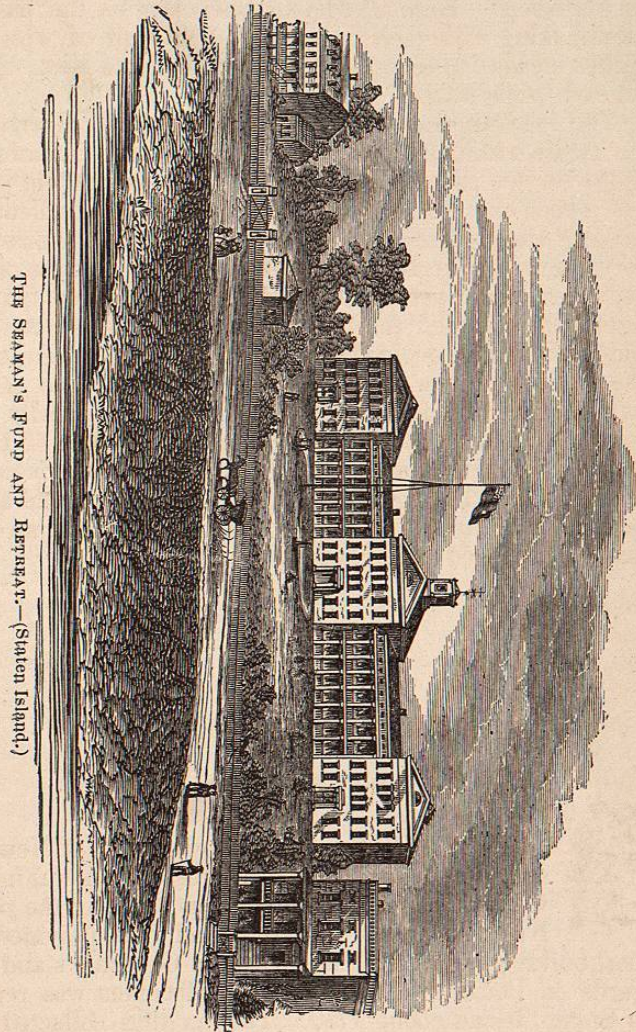
to visitors every day of the week except the Sabbath, and every unoccupied sailor on the premises is ready with characteristic politeness to escort them through the buildings and grounds. The basement of the main edifice is mostly devoted to workshops. Here all who are able carry on the basket or mat making with their own capital, the fruit of which furnishes means for travel and for other private uses. Nearly all earn something.

The chaplain was absent when we visited the Harbor, but his praise was in the mouths of many of the inmates. He holds service twice each Sabbath, and offers public prayers twice each day. The By-Laws, which are an excellent code, make it the duty of each inmate to attend all the religious services unless excused by the governor, for sickness or other sufficient cause, yet we were informed that less than half ordinarily attended the Sabbath services. A stricter discipline would be a decided improvement. Eighty or ninety of the inmates profess religion, some of whom attend and take part in the Fulton-street prayer-meeting occasionally. The former chaplain was shot on the grounds by one of the old seamen, who afterwards shot himself. The man is now believed to have been guilty of a previous murder, and to have become partially insane from a sense of guilt and an apprehension that God would not pardon him.

SEAMEN'S FUND AND RETREAT.

(*Quarantine Landing, Staten Island.*)

 early as 1754, the colonial government of New York established quarantine measures. A tax was imposed upon all seamen and passengers entering the port of New York, and with the fund thus provided, hospital buildings were established, first on Governor's and afterwards on Bedloe's Island. The establishment was removed to Staten Island about 1799. The tax thus collected from passengers and seamen was paid into a joint fund, under the control of the Commissioners of Health of the city of New York, and called the "Mariner's Fund." The



THE SEAMEN'S FUND AND RETREAT.—(Staten Island.)

funds thus created, besides providing the quarantine accommodations, were disposed of by the Legislature in establishing city dispensaries, assisting the Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents, etc., etc. The manifest injustice of taxing seamen for quarantine purposes, and in distributing their hard earnings among other charities in which they had no special interest, was discovered by commercial men of New York over forty years ago, and an effort was made to abolish this long-standing abuse. The Legislature of 1831 created a board of trustees to collect these funds and employ them exclusively for the benefit of seamen. It was believed at that time that over three hundred and forty thousand dollars had been paid by passengers and seamen into the fund, above what had been used for their benefit, and the money still on hand at that time they were authorized to receive from the State treasury, which amounted to over twelve thousand dollars. The first meeting of the board of trustees of the Seamen's Fund and Retreat was held at the Mayor's office, May 9, 1831, and measures were soon taken to maintain all diseased seamen in the Marine Hospital, Staten Island, and in the New York Hospital. After examining several farms on Staten Island, the trustees purchased forty acres of land of Cornelius Corson, fronting on the New York bay, for \$10,000. The land contained a farm-house, to which it was proposed to add an additional building for the reception of patients. The new hospital in process of erection on the summit of the elevation was overtaken with a storm so violent as to throw down its brick walls when they were nearly completed. On the 12th of June, 1832, the executive committee reported the completion of the new building, and about the middle of the following month it was occupied. As the accommodations continued inadequate, a plan was formed for the erection of the main buildings now in use, which are situated much nearer the shore.

The corner-stone of the present hospital was laid July 4, 1834, by Samuel Swartout, Esq., collector of the port, and president of the board of trustees, assisted by the architect, Mr. A. P. Maybee. The address was delivered by the Rev. John E. Miller, Rev. Henry Chase, pastor of the Mariner's Church, and other clergymen assisting in the services. This hospital consists of a main structure fifty feet square and three stories high, with two wings each seventy-six by thirty-four feet, built of hammered blue stone, trimmed with gran-