THE INFANT CLASS.

THE WILSON INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL AND MISSION.

THIRTY years ago the official records of juvenile crimes in our city were so startling as to arouse the thinking and benevolent to devise some means for the improvement of the condition of the children of the poor.

Education was not then as now compulsory; thousands of parents were either too poor or too indifferent to the interests of their offspring to send them to school.

Both classes allowed their children the full liberty of the streets, or, prompted sometimes by avarice, but more frequently by poverty, sought to profit by their small irregular earnings in the factory or work-shop. As an experimental step a few ladies of various denominations formed a voluntary association, and sustained for two years an asylum for friendless boys; the Juvenile Asylum, chartered in 1851, offered such superior advantages that the boys were then transferred to its care.

But something had to be done for the little girls, who, begging from door to door, idling on the street corners, or wandering among saloons to sell matches and song-books, were fast losing their innocent brightness, and laying the foundation for a depraved and useless womanhood.

The ladies, among whom were Mrs. James P. Wilson, Mrs. Charles Abernethy, Mrs. Edward Bayard, Mrs. Jonathan Sturges, Mrs. Jasper Grosvenor, Mrs. William W. Chester, and Mrs. Erastus Benedict, now turned their attention in

this direction, opening a school in a small upper room at 118 Avenue D, the pioneer of the many industrial schools since organized in New York city.

The children of families reduced by vice or misfortune to extreme poverty were sought for and brought in from the streets and alleys, and made welcome; three hours' instruction in the common English branches were given in the morning, a warm dinner at noon, and two hours devoted to lessons in plain sewing during the afternoon session.

From this modest beginning step by step has developed the noble and beautiful charity named in honor of one of its founders — Mrs. James P. Wilson — and now comprising a day school, in which two hundred girls are instructed in the elementary English branches, needle-work, and household duties; an evangelical mission church; mothers' meetings; a circulating library; young men's club; and Night Refuge, affording comfortable lodgings and meals to homeless girls. A day at the Mission House will be pleasantly spent. Here it is, a large substantial building on the corner of St. Mark's Place and Avenue A, its eastern side facing Tompkins Square, no longer unsightly as in former times, but a well-kept park, adorned by grass, trees, and a central fountain.

A bright little girl in a neat frock and white apron answers the bell, directing us in a business-like manner to the schoolroom.

The morning exercises have already begun, for we hear a softened murmur of piping voices. Listen! Somewhere above us two hundred little ones are carolling the opening hymn. Following the sound, we ascend two broad flights of stairs, here and there meeting ruddy, bare-armed little lasses in blue aprons and gingham dresses, some carrying buckets of water, others on their knees scrubbing the floors, with a droll assumption of importance.

These are the little house-work maids, detailed from the day school for the week to put into practice what they have learned by theory. This office is regarded rather as an honor than otherwise, and the service being rewarded daily by a large loaf of bread, is eagerly sought for by the elder scholars. In this way considerably over one thousand loaves were earned during the past year.

As the door of the school-room opens, a perfect flood of harmony bursts upon the ear; chiming like silver bells, clear lusty, and strong, ring out the childish voices. Our presence hinders not the singing, but instantly the bright eyes of all the little singers are turned toward us with a friendly curiosity, and an appeal that goes straight to the heart.

The simple hymn is ended. Several small girls, each holding a tiny rod of office, now leave their seats, and with a funny air of authority walk up and down the aisles between the desks. This one taps an offending scholar on the shoulder; another flourishes her rod threateningly at a "whisperer"; all are watchful of their charges, not a gesture escaping the vigilance of these small tyrants, who speak not, but *look* very well the command, "Fold your arms, and be silent," as they pace reverently up and down during the reading of the Scriptures. When the chapter is finished, we bow our heads while the children kneel, repeating the Lord's Prayer in unison. Glancing at their grave, innocent little faces, we join heartily in the petition that they may never be led into temptation, but delivered from evil alway. A question lesson on the Lord's Prayer follows, the children explaining each passage with a readiness showing appreciation of its meaning. After a short address from the teacher, the doxology is sung, and the scholars feel that work must now begin in earnest.

At a signal the infant classes close their seats, fold their arms, and march to the sound of music around and out of the room. Some hang their heads timidly; others cast bright but bashful glances at us in passing. The second primaries then follow, and so on until none are left but the first primaries, who with much bustle and clatter are getting out their slates and books for study.

Half an hour later peep into the room where the infant classes are sitting. "Why," you exclaim, "here are veritable babies, blue-eyed and chubby, looking as wise and solemn as a company of little owls." Motherly young arms are around them, and motherly voices of little elder sisters are cooing words of comfort to soothe them.

But the baby eyes grow troubled and misty; baby lips begin to quiver: we must come away, for, plebeian babies though they be, like their more fortunate brothers and sisters, they strongly object to being objects of curiosity.

The tear shower is coming; but no; the young girl teacher opens the piano, and straightway all trouble is forgotten, for fifty piping voices, to the air of "Sweet little Buttercup," ring out merrily:

"Be kind to the babies,
The dear little babies,
Then with you they seldom will cry;
Touch gently the babies,
Speak softly to babies,
As softly as if mother were by."

Some of these babies are motherless, and must come to the school to be cared for by their elder sisters. In many cases they are now marching to the sewing-room, whither we follow them.

When all are seated, Bertha, a pretty, fair-haired German child, proud of her office as assistant, passes around a basket filled with packages. Quickly each girl unfolds her work, and pins on her breast a tiny muslin bag marked with her name, and containing her sewing implements.

With a funny little air of patronage Bertha makes the rounds again, supplying colored threads from her spool basket; then seats herself in view of the classes, ready for further orders.

THE SEWING CLASS.

the mission visitor has found young children and infants shut up in winter in rooms freezingly cold, the mother fearing to leave a fire burning during her absence at work, on account of accidents.

Here they are sheltered, and fed, and safe, the protection of these innocents being one of the most charming features of this mission.

While we have lingered with the little ones, the "first primaries" have written their copies and recited their lessons; Soon busy fingers are plying the needle; the little seamstresses bend earnestly over their work. Now and then one lifts her hand: something puzzles her. The teacher kindly explains, and helps her.

The greater number of these children are German. Is it their prim flaxen braids and blue kerchiefs, their quaint faces and general old-world air, that make them look more like little women than children?

Where do they come from? From the

crowded tenement-houses, the garrets and cellars, of the most densely populated ward of our great city, just where there is the least chance for them to learn the sober, decent, womanly ways and knowledge they will acquire within these walls.

What is it so interests these little maids all in a row? They are cutting out dolls' dresses. Here are others making them up. Soon they will be making larger ones for "real live girls" to wear.

These sewing lessons would soon weary the little folks were it not for their variety and the lively exercise songs interspersed among them.

Patches of cotton cloth are given to young beginners to be sewed together; then a single patch to be hemmed. The plain hemmed patch is then invested with a new interest by having a bird, a flower, a house, or a human figure drawn in its centre. The child outlines the design in colored threads, and lo! this rude needle-painting becomes a "thing of beauty" in the child's eyes, a treasure of her own handiwork. She wraps it up carefully, and with pride exhibits it to the home circle.

Later, that little girl works a set of designs on squares of fine linen prettily fringed, and, beaming with happiness, will show you a set of fruit napkins pretty enough to grace any table.

And so, through running, hemming, felling, binding, patching, and darning, the young tyro progresses to the happy time when she will exercise her accumulated knowledge of stitches on garments of her own.

Let us peep again into the infant department on our way to the "first primary." Hush! the babies are all asleep; their wee mothers have said their A, B, C's, sung their simple songs, and, to pass the time, are learning to join together gayly colored patches of cloth.

In the next room everything wears a business-like aspect at the long low tables. Here a row of girls, none over twelve, are quilting strips of bright woollen patchwork into warm petticoats for the winter. Every strip made of the cloth samples donated by New York merchants is a lesson to these young people, showing that "little things" are not to be despised. At another table the girls are making frocks, aprons, and under-garments. Six hundred articles of wearing apparel were made by these busy little workers last year, all of which were distributed to the happy girls who had earned them by winning the requisite number of merit marks for lessons and good behavior. The prizes were sometimes varied according to the necessities of the scholar, three hundred pairs of stout shoes being awarded during the same year.

Before the tiny fingers tire and the child eyes grow weary, the order is given, at the tinkle of a bell, "Put up work." In a twinkling, garments are folded, needles and thimbles disappear in the tiny muslin bags, and, neatly folded and labelled, the little packages drop in, filling the deep basket.

Now all arms are folded demurely, the piano strikes up a merry quickstep, and away the little ones march, some for the school-room, some for the kitchen-garden, and others to the lavatory. Let us go with the latter.

Here is a merry sight, to be sure, in the dressing-room—a dozen little nymphs frolicking about in gleesome anticipation of the bath, and a staid, round-faced wee Gretchen with flaxen braids trying to look awe-inspiring, as a monitor should, while she administers help and chiding.

"Why you laugh so? Be still, Minna Schwartzen. Ida Müller, take your shoes off—you hear me?" commands this small autocrat with an imperious gesture.

All is merriment and laughter in spite of sober Gretchen. In the bath-room the good-humored attendant places the little ones, two at a time, back to back in the water, washing them gently but briskly, then showing them how to bathe themselves. Rubbing them dry with clean soft towels, in a few moments she sends them, warm and rosily glowing, to the dressing-room, where they speedily make way for another laughing, eager little crew.

The kitchen-garden system of instruction, invented by Miss Emily Huntington, a New England lady, consists of a course of lessons in household work set to music, and interspersed with graceful exercises resembling somewhat those performed in gymnasiums. Plato says, "Musical training is a more potent instrument than any other, because rhythm and harmony make their way into the secret recesses of the soul, in which they mightily fasten."

By this peculiar system simple jingles set to merry tunes, and never to be for-

THE BATH.

gotten, theoretically teach the children of the Wilson Mission—still too young, many of them, to labor—the names, uses, and care of kitchen utensils, the routine of the laundry, and the duties of parlor, dining-room, and chamber maid. Nor is it altogether theory; for every song is not only accompanied by a question lesson to be learned by heart, but is charmingly illustrated by models such as would delight a housekeeper in fairy-land or Lilliput.

Moreover, every week a certain number of the elder girls have an opportunity to put theory into practice by doing the actual house-work of the building.

The spacious square room devoted to the kitchen-garden is finely lighted by four large windows, in which gay plants are blooming. A pretty oaken dresser containing the fairy outfit for complete housekeeping, some long low tables and rows of tiny chairs for the "kitchen-garteners," complete its furniture.

The walls, papered in pale olive, are hung with illustrative charts, and bordered by a dado presenting in gay colors the pictured stories of Bo-Peep and the House that Jack Built.

As we enter, the little kitchen-garteners in couples are skipping in a ring around the room to a lively galop on the piano. All is sunshine, life, and motion; the circle sweeps on, narrowing, till finally the children cluster like so many bees in the centre of the room.

Passing a certain point each couple has received a pair of brooms gayly trimmed with bright ribbons. The music changes; now they dance, again widening into a

ring, then, breaking into three columns, advance toward the teacher, keeping time merrily with a sweeping movement of all the brooms as they sing,

> "Away now swiftly flying,
> It is our sweeping day;
> For brooms and dusters hieing,
> To work without delay.
> *Chorus.*—"Then sweep, sweep, my little maid,
> To make your room so neat."

As the last verse ends, the music changes once more; now comes the sweepers' drill. Up and down, back and forth, move the brooms as the children march like young soldiers.

Just as we are interested in this pretty exercise, presto! there is a change; the atoms in this human kaleidoscope present a new picture, and broom meets broom held aloft in a fairy arcade, under which, to a merry galop, couple after couple dance away, disappearing in the distance.

The sweeping song has impressed on the children's minds how to hunt the cobwebs, sweep the corners, and dust; then comes a question lesson illustrated by models of every sort of broom, from the heavy kitchen sweeper to the dainty feather duster.

Children will remember these songs as their elders remember,

> "Thirty days hath September,
> April, June, and November."

Work in itself is distasteful to the young, nowhere so much so as in charitable institutions, where it is regarded by them as the consequent discipline of their poverty.

While we have been observing the doings of the little ones, another scene of interest has been arranging itself within-doors. Dropping in by twos and threes—for many come from the same tenement—sturdy German vrows, an occasional American, and several Irish matrons have assembled for mothers' meeting—an occasion looked forward to weekly with honest pleasure by these humble women.

These meetings are held for a threefold purpose: to give religious instruction to the mothers of the mission children; to train them for the practical duties of life; and to encourage them to save their money for proper uses, opportunity being given them to purchase dry-goods at wholesale prices.

The opening hymn has been sung, the prayer is ended, and the meeting is now open for work and social enjoyment; the women are kindly encouraged to converse with or ask counsel of the ladies of the committee, four of whom are present. Look in with me, and listen. Here are the babies again; one, a funny wee pink atom scarce a month old, exercises his baby privileges by wailing lustily. His mother, a rosy, blue-eyed, good-humored-looking German woman, apologizing for this and his extreme youth, says to one of the ladies: "I hope madame excuse me; but dese meetings be so goot for me I could not stay home, but shoost come along mit Hans to show him mit my frients. Ha, ha, Hans, mein bester goot liddle man, be still, now."

Hans's mother will earn no blue ticket to-day; but there is that good cup of tea and delicious cake to be thought of and eaten in the company of her gossips—no small consideration to those who seldom indulge in the luxury.

The scene is now a busy one. At one of the long tables a comely young lady is measuring off some flannel for the sturdy vrow, who looks on with an eye and attitude of keenest calculation. Awaiting their turn are several others of eager aspect. The prospect of "good bargains cheap" makes this department a fascinating one; it is consequently well patronized, nearly two thousand yards of goods being sold during the meetings of the season. These goods are partly the donations of New York merchants and private individuals. The remainder is obtained by the personal efforts of the committee, as is also the money paid out to the women for their hour's work at the meeting.

Here a group of women chatting volubly though quietly are sewing on work brought from home, while others are stitching the mission garments, for which each will receive a ticket representing ten cents, which they may take away or apply on account for dry-goods. A motherly looking lady passes from group to group, now pausing to listen to a tale of home troubles, or to an anxious wife's request to advise some remedy for the husband's ailments. To each and all this kindly counsellor gives warm words of sympathy and encouragement.

We have seen the day work of the mission. It is now eight o'clock; let us look at the night side.

In a spacious room on the ground-floor two hundred lads have assembled—Teu-

ton, Celt, and Israelite, what a restless set of turbulents they are!

Not many are reading, though the long tables are well supplied with books and periodicals, and there is a constant run on the library. Pacing up and down with anxious countenance goes the young superintendent, trying to keep watch over all. Had he, like Argus, a hundred eyes,

THE WEEKLY PRAYER-MEETING.

they would be none too many, for behind, before, and all around him conspiracies are brewing.

A trio of offenders have been discovered, and turned into the street; a policeman sees them, and knowing there is trouble in the reading-room, enters.

Now mark the change. One might almost hear a pin drop, where before were multitudinous chatterings. Was there ever an assemblage of such serious, absorbed students? Not one lifts his face from the book or magazine in hand; it matters not that the one is upside down, or the other open at the title-page.

Those youths just entering are sedate of countenance. They belong to the Wilson Young Men's Club, organized under the auspices of the Union Club, of New York, for the improvement of the young men and boys of the neighborhood. The latter are allowed the privileges of the reading-room every evening except Sunday, but enrolled members only are entitled to vote or take part in the regular meetings of the club.

They have not come too soon. The policeman hardly disappears through the doorway before fifty hands are lifted simultaneously for books—books which will scarcely be glanced at, but which will serve very well as excuses behind which to plot new mischiefs.

The superintendent and his assistants are at their wits' end, but help is at hand; the member from the Union Club whose night it is to be present has arrived.

What is it that compels this respectful silence on the part of the insurgents? The member will be sure to have something entertaining and instructive to tell the boys, but that is not the wondrous spell that binds them. Memory has waved her magic wand, and, lo! rollicking echoes, sweet savors, and spicy aromas fill the air.

Once more in fancy they listen to the merry tum-tum of the banjo, the airy treble of the violin, and the bass of the deep-toned viol. Again they feel the floors shake and the rafters tremble to ringing choruses. The fragrant steaming of the coffee salutes them, and the spicy odors of the apples and oranges, and the cakes of that crowning banquet.

"What makes you silent now?" asks a member of our party, addressing a group of boys.

"That is one of the 'bosses' that gave us the party; you bet we'll keep still when he's around," replies one of the eldest, indicating the member from the Union Club.

"It was a smash-up party, it was, an' them fellers jes' played an' sung for us like mad: beat the nigger minstrels all holler, didn't it, Jim?" says another.

"It would be orful bad ef they cut us off on the stove an' the warm room in cold weather; besides, we shouldn't have no music, nor doughnuts, nor nothin'; so we got to be quiet when he's around," sagely remarks a third.

The member from the Union Club is a power; he ought to feel how much the improvement of the boys in this densely populated section of the city depends upon his regular presence and action in the reading-room. The time spent by the Union Club in their monthly entertainments to these ragged, neglected ones is well spent.

We now leave them to the kindly counsels of the presiding member, and step into the large adjoining room which serves as chapel.

It is the weekly prayer-meeting night. How solemn and full of pathos the scene! Surely the Spirit broods over this little company of humble worshippers, who, reverently kneeling, listen to the fervent prayer of the missionary preacher.

Gathered in from the crowded tenements and the wretched hovels in the rear of stifling alleys, they have come in their poor patched garments. Some of the better clad have long been earnest working members of this mission church; others have just accepted the invitation.

Here are some familiar faces we have seen at the mothers' meeting, and there are Bertha, Gretchen, and Minna Schwartzen, the school-children. Poor little ones, they look sleepy.

But look at those old people in the foreground near the preacher—that aged woman with a shawl thrown over her gray head, and that old couple so absorbed in the sermon! They are nearing the border-land; already the light of a great peace illumines their furrowed faces. They have rested their steadfast hope in the great beyond, "where there is no more parting, neither is there any shedding of tears."

Untroubled about doctrinal belief, they enjoy that blessed condition of simple trust known chiefly to believers of lowly estate. The closing hymn has been given out, and all are singing. As we listen to the ringing tones of childhood, and the quavering feeble notes of old age, there comes to mind that beautiful stanza:

"Child-like though the voices be,
And untunable the parts,
Thou wilt own the minstrelsy
If it flow from child-like hearts."

Once more it is night; the wind whistles shrilly down the streets, and goes howling across the open square, making the trees bend and shiver. A pitiless rain beats down, freezing as it falls upon the pavements. A bitter night to be abroad, and yet here is some one, a slender young creature, wandering alone, weary, hungry, and homeless—where shall she turn?

A watchman on his beat approaches; she shrinks away from him, but he confronts her, and wins from her her pitiful trouble. The mission bell rings; though it is late, very late, some one is astir to answer. The poor, trembling, homeless one—for it is she directed to the Night Refuge, is welcomed kindly: from out the darkness and storm she passes into light and warmth and comfort.

At the last great day she may truly bear witness: "I was a stranger, and ye took me in; I was a-hungered, and ye fed me!"

AN IDLE POET.

'Tis said that when the nightingale
His mate has found,
He fills no more the woodland deeps
With songful sound.

I sing not since I found my love,
For, like the bird's,
My heart is full of song too sweet,
Too deep, for words.