

The Foundling Hospital:



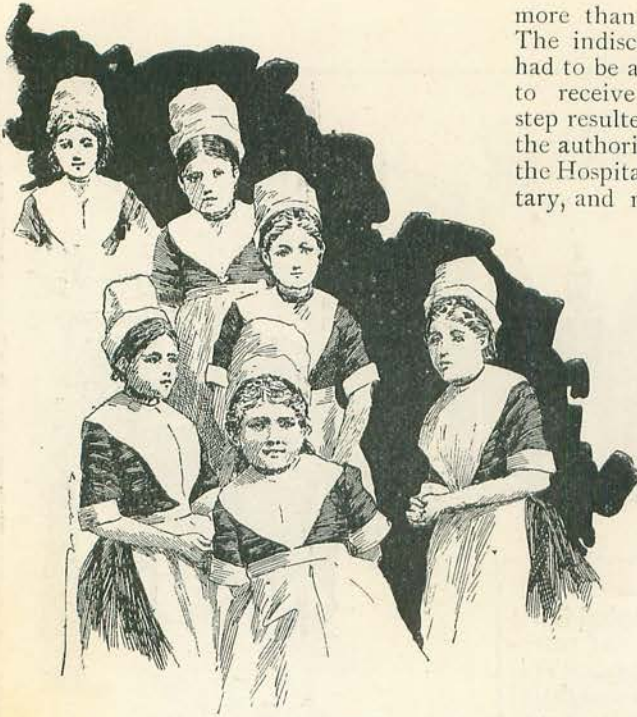
HE Foundling Hospital is not an institution for the reception of foundlings. This will be news to five-sixths of our readers, and it is easy to imagine some of them ex-

claiming: "But do you mean to tell us that, if we discover a human mite abandoned on someone's doorstep, and take it to the Foundling Hospital, it will not be admitted?" We do. "Why, then, call the place a Foundling Hospital?" Thereby hangs a deeply interesting story—a story of human wrong, of human suffering; of evil, of good; of sorrow, of succour—a veritable world's story, focussing the large-souled sympathy of mankind, the weakness and trust of woman, and the treachery and infidelity of man.

The institution owes its origin to one of Nature's noblemen; it is a monument equally to the head and the heart of Captain Thomas Coram. Captain Coram, in no ordinary sense of the word, went about doing good. His life was made up of attempts to improve something or somebody. Early in the eighteenth century, he used, in his walks between the City, where he had business, and Rotherhithe, where he lived, to constantly come across young children left by the wayside, "sometimes alive, sometimes dead, and sometimes dying." In other countries such children would be taken up by the State, and cared for; in England nothing of the sort had ever been attempted, or even

perhaps dreamed of. Captain Coram's heart was touched by surely the most pitiable sight in creation, and to touch Captain Coram's heart was to set the machinery of his resourceful brain in motion. He rightly considered such exposure of infant humanity a disgrace to civilisation, and proceeded to enlist the services of the high-placed and the large-hearted in the cause. For seventeen long years he laboured against adverse circumstances, until, in 1739, his efforts were rewarded by a charter authorising the founding of an institution "for the maintenance and education of exposed and deserted young children."

A fine statue of Captain Coram, by W. C. Marshall, R.A., and a stone tablet to his memory, placed on the wall of the arcade in front of the building, are the first things to catch the visitor's eye. Coram lived, we are told, to be eighty-four, and died "poor in worldly estate, rich in good works." To help the new-born infant, he brought his grey hairs, if not in sorrow, at least in poverty to the grave. Like so many other benefactors of mankind, in striving to alleviate distress, this "indefatigable schemist"



FOUNDLING GIRLS.

forgot himself, and had he, in his devotion, not had friends who gave more regard to his material needs than he gave himself, he might have closed his eyes to mundane affairs in want by the wayside, even as the objects of his solicitude opened theirs.

It is not necessary to go here at length into the early mistakes made, or to describe how the institution failed of the purpose which the founder had in view. It was intended by him to meet the necessities of deserted motherhood; it came, in the middle of the last century, to be a receptacle for all the babes whom worthless parents did not care to keep. A basket was hung outside the gates of the Hospital. On the first day 117 children were left in it, and a lucrative trade sprung up among tramps who, for a consideration, carried the little ones from all parts of England to the Hospital. In less than four years, 14,934 infants were thus disposed of.

These "regiments of infantry," as a waggish commentator called them, overwhelmed the resources of the institution, and it is not surprising to learn that, from various causes, not

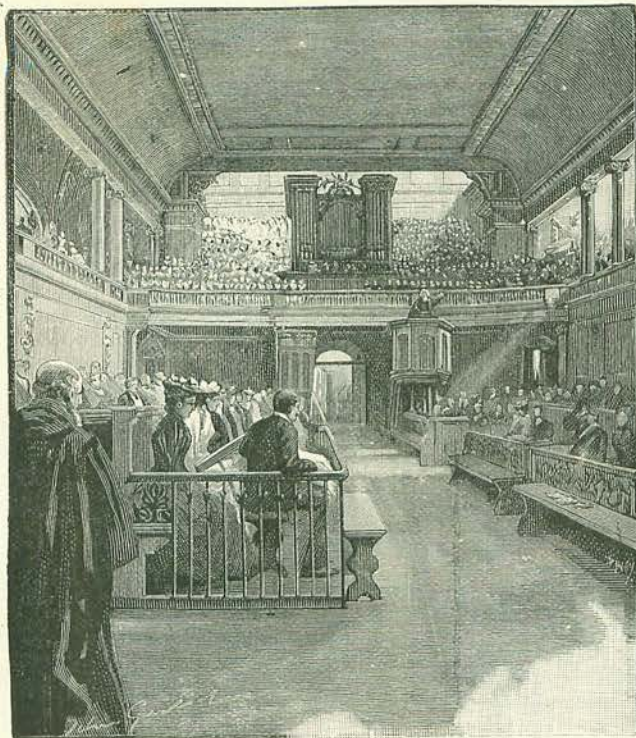
more than 4,000 of the 14,934 survived. The indiscriminate admission of children had to be abolished. Later, it was decided to receive children for money, but this step resulted in other abuses, and we have the authority of the admirable account of the Hospital, compiled by a former secretary, and revised by the present, Mr. W. S. Wintle — a work which may be purchased for half a crown, and is well worth attentive study—for stating that, since January, 1801, no child has been received into the Hospital, either directly or indirectly, with any sum of money, large or small.

To-day the practice is for the mother to take the babe before it is twelve months old to the Hospital, to make her statement before the authorities, and to leave the child to their care absolutely. She must be poor, she must be anxious to regain her good name, and no woman who petitions that her child may be admitted to the Hospital stands a chance of relief if she cannot prove that she has led a life of propriety previous to her misfortune. This point cannot be too strongly borne in mind. As the Reverend Sydney Smith, one of the preachers of the Foundling Chapel put it:—

"No child drinks of our cup or eats of our



FOUNDLING BOYS.



THE CHAPEL.

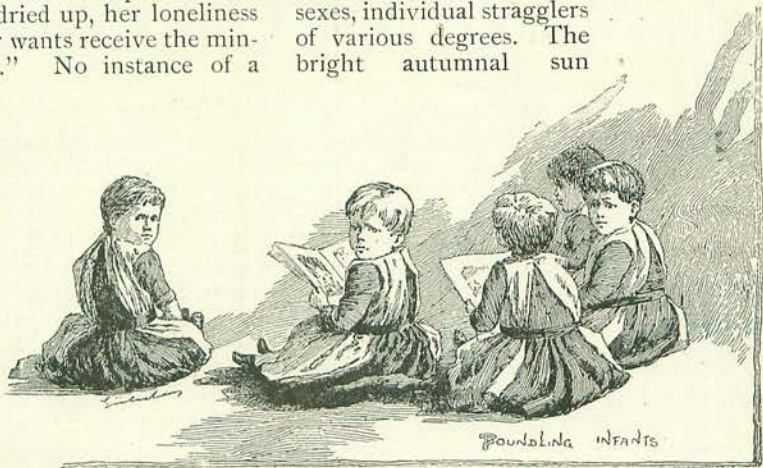
silver coin into the plate at the door is admitted. The spectacle is impressive. In the galleries at the west end of the chapel, on either side of the organ, are seated some five hundred boys and girls, better behaved probably than any other considerable number of young people who appear in church regularly every Sunday. Their happy faces are perhaps a greater pleasure to gaze upon than their healthy voices are to listen to. Divine service over, at one o'clock they march into their respective dining-rooms, the boys being in one wing of the building and the girls in the other. Grace in the former is sung to the accompaniment of a cornet, which one of the boys plays. When they take their places at table, the spectator will find none lacking in appetite for the simple honest repast. On the opposite side of the building the girls are doing not less justice to themselves and

those who have provided and prepared the dinner.

bread whose reception, upon the whole, is not certain to be more conducive than pernicious to the interests of religion and good morals. We hear no mother whom it would not be merciless and shocking to turn away; we exercise the trust reposed in us with a trembling and sensitive conscience; we do not think it enough to say, 'This woman is wretched, and betrayed, and forsaken'; but we calmly reflect if it be expedient that her tears should be dried up, her loneliness sheltered, and all her wants receive the ministration of charity." No instance of a mother going to the bad after she has been relieved by the Governors of the Foundling Hospital has, we believe, ever come to notice!

The general public knows most of the Foundling Hospital from a visit to the chapel on a Sunday morning. Anyone who is prepared to drop a

the scene on any Sunday morning in the year 1891 is precisely that which Charles Dickens described in "No Thoroughfare," a quarter of a century ago:—"There are numerous lookers-on at the dinner, as the custom is. There are two or three governors, whole families from the congregation, smaller groups of both sexes, individual stragglers of various degrees. The bright autumnal sun



FOUNDLING INFANTS

strikes freshly into the wards, and the heavy framed windows through which it shines, and the panelled walls on which it strikes, are such windows and such walls as pervade Hogarth's pictures. The girls' refectory (including that of the younger children) is the principal attraction. Neat attendants silently glide about the orderly and silent tables; the lookers-on move or stop as the fancy takes them; comments in whispers on face such a number from such a window are not infrequent; many of the faces are of a character to fix attention. Some of the visitors from the outside public are accustomed visitors. They have established a speaking acquaintance with the occupants of particular seats at the tables,

interesting of the classes is that of the infants. On the day on which we visit the Foundling for the especial purpose of this paper, they are turned out of their ordinary room, and are squatted on the floor of another in sections before blackboards, and with slates in their laps. They are the veriest, chubbiest urchins imaginable, and, as we approach, three or four of them turn their smiling faces up to ours. They evidently expect to be spoken to, and we ask them what they are doing?

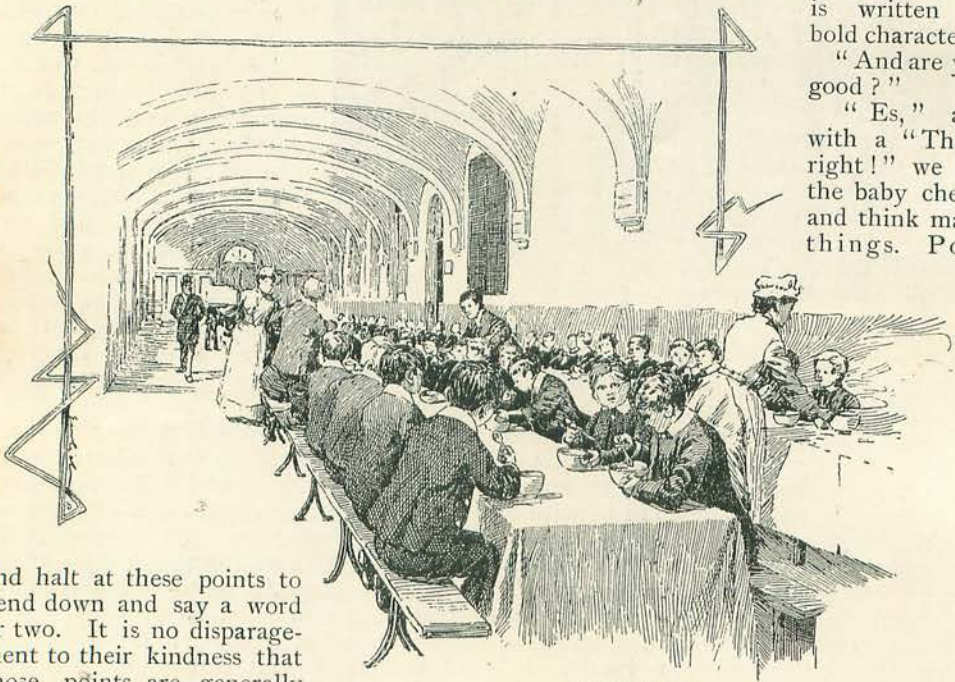
"Writin'," answers a babe of a very few summers.

"Writing what?" we ask.

"Good," is the reply, as a little finger points to the blackboard on which the word is written in bold characters.

"And are you good?"

"Es," and with a "That's right!" we pat the baby cheek, and think many things. Poor



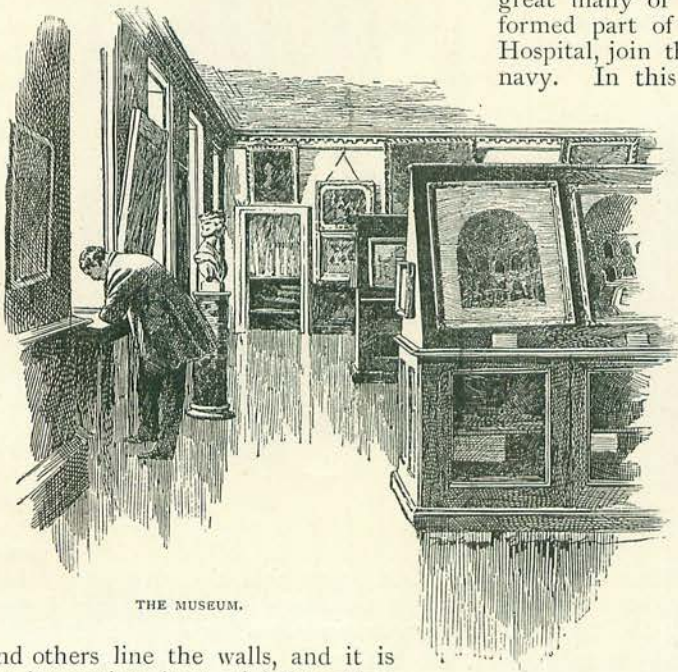
BOYS AT DINNER.

and halt at these points to bend down and say a word or two. It is no disparagement to their kindness that those points are generally points where personal attractions are. The monotony of the long spacious rooms and the double lines of faces is agreeably relieved by these incidents, although so slight."

There is not much to see in the classrooms, which will not be fully conveyed in our illustrations. As we enter the boys' room, we are momentarily startled by the shuffle of feet as every boy rises respectfully in his place. Not being professional school inspectors, such honours are not often accorded us. Resuming their seats, the class work goes on as at any ordinary school. So with the girls. The most

little mites, and yet happy withal! Motherless, fatherless, friendless, and yet inmates of an institution which is not such a bad substitute for father, mother, and friends. What would they be but for it? Recruits perchance in the ranks of shame into which their mothers might have drifted. And their mothers? Who knows but that somewhere out in the world, women are living, and working, and sleeping; dreaming, wondering how fares the helpless mortal for whose existence they are responsible, for whom they still bear a love which no barrier of separation can obliterate?

From the school-rooms let us go to the museum, where are stored some valuables and many curiosities. Pictures by Hogarth



THE MUSEUM.

and others line the walls, and it is an interesting item of information that the Royal Academy of Arts, to which the fashionable world flocks to-day, was suggested to the founders by the crowds of people who in the last century went to see the pictures exhibited at the Foundling Hospital. Artists rallied strongly to the support of the institution, which also enlisted the services of Handel, who devoted his "Messiah" to its benefit, and presented the organ which is still in use. Lovers of art history and art treasures will find much on the walls and in the show-cases of the Foundling Hospital to gratify them. What will attract the majority of people more, however, than Handel's gifts, or Hogarth's or Sir Joshua Reynolds' canvases, are the tokens which it early became necessary to stipulate should be left with the child for the purpose, if need be, of identification. All sorts of things were left, from a coin or a key to a trinket or a piece of ribbon. Hearts and wedding rings are numerous, the former, no doubt, emblems more often than not of broken hearts, the latter eloquent of disappointed hopes. In some instances the token took the shape of verse.

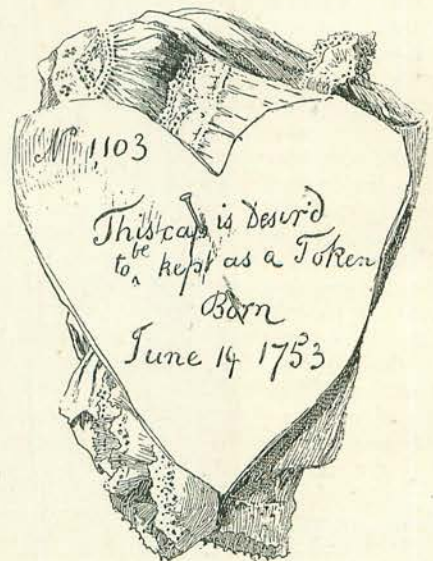
What becomes of the inmates of the Hospital when the time arrives to turn

them out into the world to gain a living? The boys, at the age of fourteen, are usually apprenticed to some trade. A great many of them, however, who have formed part of the juvenile band at the Hospital, join the bands of the army and navy. In this position they seem to do

especially well. Testimonials of gratitude from lads brought up at the Hospital are not wanting. One is a handsome Chinese vase, bearing the inscription: "Presented to the Foundling Hospital by George Ross, Corporal, Band, 74th Highlanders, as a small token of gratitude for the years of childhood spent in the institution. Hong Kong, 15th February, 1879." Another is an inkstand made of Irish bog oak, and was "Presented to the Governors of the Foundling Hospital by Corporal Samuel Reid, a foundling, of Her Ma-

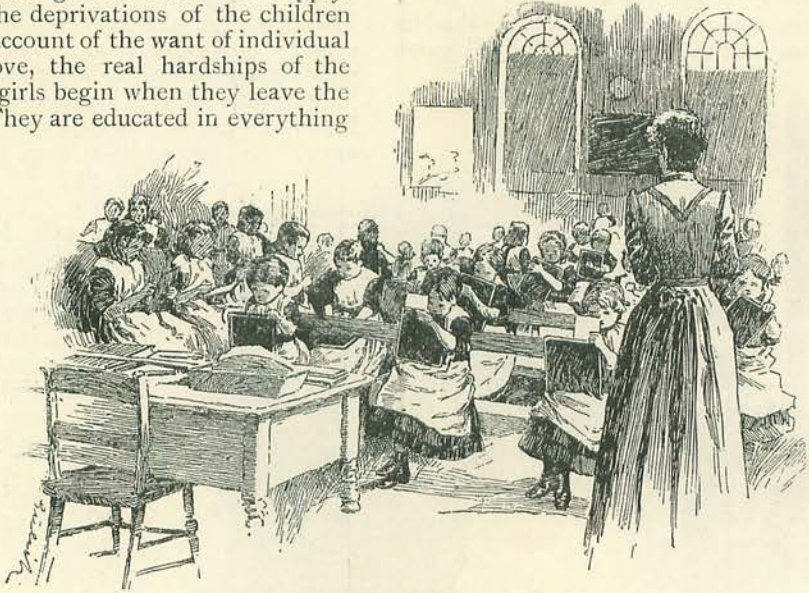
jesty's Regiment Military Train, as a token of deep gratitude. April 26, 1868."

The girls go into domestic service, and with initial care make excellent servants. In these days, when good domestics are so difficult to get, the demand for foundling



A TOKEN.

girls is much greater than the supply. Whatever the deprivations of the children may be on account of the want of individual motherly love, the real hardships of the lives of the girls begin when they leave the Hospital. They are educated in everything



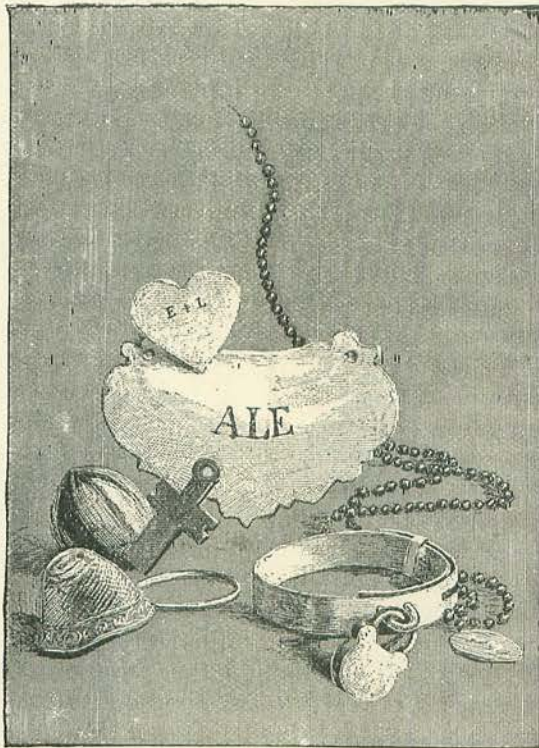
GIRLS IN SCHOOL

save worldly knowledge. Where an ordinary girl runs errands for her parents, and becomes a little woman by the time she reaches her teens, the foundling girls remain in absolute ignorance of how to purchase any single article, or transact the simplest affairs outside the home. This is one drawback. Another and sadder is when, standing on the threshold of the great world, they realise that they are not as the majority of other girls are. They go to service, and they have not a friend of any kind to see or to talk about. Do what it will, the Hospital cannot supply the place of relatives, and, however much her origin may be screened from her fellow-servants, in all probability

the time comes when the latter say: "How strange we never hear you speak of your father, or your mother, or your sister, or your brother." Then the lonely maiden

invents little stories and tells fibs, which the most truthful among us may pardon, respecting the father and mother who are dead, or whatever other explanation may occur to her. If the inquisitive world only knew what pains thoughtful inquiries may cause!

A visit to the Foundling Hospital will afford food for many an hour's reflection. We are often urged to recognise woman's equality with man. The Foundling Hospital is a pathetic reminder of her eternal inequality.



TOKENS.