

HUMAN FLOTSAM IN PERU.

An Unique Asylum—How Foundlings Are Provided for.

Special Correspondence.

Arequipa, Peru, June 18, 1903.—In the center of this old city, nearly opposite the ruins of what was once the Wotian's hospital, which was shaken down by the great earthquake of a quarter of a century ago, is a very ancient-looking structure, spreading over an entire square, whose closed doors and small, heavily barred windows give no hint of what may be going on within. My attention was first attracted by its appearance of antiquity, the utter silence that broods over the locality, and the numbers of black-gowned priests and blue-gowned Sisters of Charity who are constantly gliding in and out of its worn-out portals. One day, having extended my walk to the farther side of the enormous building where it faces an unfrequented thoroughfare, I observed something which aroused my curiosity to the highest pitch, merely a kind of wooden cage or turn-stile set in the wall, shaped like a circular box with two compartments, which seemed to be slowly revolving as I passed. What could it be?—another "mystery of the monkeys," as the people of the city call it? While I looked, the box slowly turned again and presented its blank side to the street, so exactly like the surrounding walls that one might pass a thousand times and never notice it. But a little grove remained in which fingers might be fitted; and of course the spirit of Mother Eve impelled me to try it. Pulled one way, it refused to move; pulled the other, the cage swung around with rheumatic creaks and turned its empty compartments to the street. A dramatic episode demanded a solution of the riddle, and forthwith I became a walking interrogation point until the bottom facts were attained.

FOUNDLING HOSPITAL.

The ancient edifice which is now about three hundred years old and for more than two centuries served as a convent for the nuns of Santa Catalina—is one of the several foundling institutions which have flourished in Peru, and the swinging box, like the cradle of the infant Jesus, is set every night with its hollow side outward, for the reception of any infants that may be placed in it by unknown hands. The mother or midwife, stealing along that deserted street in the darkness, has only to put the newborn citizen into the box, give it the slightest impulse, and the place of the child is instantly open to the tiny occupant, while no eye inside the building can see who placed it there. A Sister of Charity is stationed on the inner side of the wall, whose sole business it is to watch for new arrivals at all hours of the night, to receive and care for them.

A newspaper column is not the place for discussing those social questions that have perplexed the wisest heads and noblest hearts ever since this sinful world was young—those saddest problems that seem to thwart the plans of the Almighty and to almost make one doubt His over-riding care. I am only to relate what exists in Arequipa, as in many other parts of South America, leaving my reader to approve or condemn according to their individual convictions. Certainly Catholic Peru is in advance of most Protestant countries in having almost entirely eradicated the crime of destroying infants before their birth, by rendering it possible for unwedded mothers to dispose of the proofs of their shame, without committing any crime, and possibly suicide. In communities which are perhaps more civilized, the impression appears to prevail that if provision is made for the flotsam and jetsam thus cast up on the sea of human wickedness, it would be an encouragement to vice—as if the young women of the land would flock to avail themselves of the privilege.

VISIT TO UNIQUE ASYLUM.

In due time we obtained permission to visit this unique asylum, which like all other benevolent institutions of South America, is conducted under the direct auspices of the Church of Rome. However, Christians of diverse sects who are traveling the many routes to heaven, may differ on dogmas and doctrinal points, all not blinded by bigotry must yield the palm for unselfish living and tireless practice of charity, the greatest of Christian virtues, to the uncounted army of Catholic devotees, male and female, who have given their lives to the care of the sick, the indigent, the helpless, and the so-called "heathen." No spot on the earth's surface is too bleak, insalubrious, or forbidding, no human being too degraded, and no depth of crime or misery too dark to be penetrated by the ministrations of learned monks and gentle sisters of charity—not merely by the easy method of sending Bibles, tracts and the contributions of other people, but by going to live among the objects of religious solicitude and devoting tollowing years to bettering their condition.

Led by the matron, we went first to inspect the mysterious hole in the wall, those to its inner opening stands a little iron bedstead with a cross at the foot of it and a picture of the mother of sorrows at its head, where rests a good sister whose nightly business it is to watch the revolving cradle and to take out newcomers. She informed me that the number of additions to the household by this means never averaged more than three a week, and that so far during the current year only 51 had been received. She says that the majority of these children whose birthdays nobody celebrates, usually belong to the poorest classes and arrive naked or wrapped in rags; occasionally one is dressed in the daintiest raiment that love and wealth and the instinct of maternal tenderness can suggest, and that with the latter is commonly found a generous sum of money for the child's maintenance and not infrequently a tear-blotted letter beseeching special care for the forsaken baby and promising to pay well for its future support. What suggestions of tragedy are here—of human frailty and divine compassion—of the old perplexing problem that came with the tempter into Eden!

HOW ASYLUM IS SUPPORTED.

This box is an inexhaustible source of revenue for the asylum, and nearly every night it is secretly revolved by

"It's Never too

Late to Mend."

TRY HUSLER'S FLOUR

The money back kind.

outside hands, presumably by those who have unacknowledged children within, and purposely kept in labelled for the support of the infants received on such and such a date. No questions are ever asked, and no efforts made to trace the parentage of the waifs. On certain days of the week the institution is open to visitors, and the children may be adopted by whoever desires them; thus giving the unknown parents an opportunity of secretly seeing their castaways, and of eventually repossessing them without fear of discovery—unless, as sometimes happens, nature is too powerful to be overcome by the artificial means of the revolving box, and the child, like a stray dog, makes a marked resemblance to the authors of their being.

The outer walls of the quaint old building are of red brick and ramble around three inner courtyards, each of which has its central fountain and tangle of flowers and passion vines, and clump of olive or fig tree shading the shrine of a Christ, a Virgin or Saint. These courts are surrounded by corridors, whose tiled arches are upheld by long lines of queerly carved pillars, now streaked with mold and crumbling under the insidious tooth of time. Traversing their moss-grown pavements we found the path obstructed by donkeys that had been driven to the inner doors with supplies of food, milk and vegetables. The blue-gowned matron, her round, benevolent face shining like a full-blown peony in the sun, with rosary, crucifix and bunch of keys jangling at her side, and the drape of her wide, white bonnet standing out like sails—falling to budge the animals by the usual "set-th-th-th!" put her strong, fat shoulder to each one's rump and quietly pushed it out of the way. Such intricate cleanliness prevails everywhere that one might eat off every inch of flooring, whether of wood, tile or adobe, and such absolute silence reigned that we found it difficult to believe there were actually a great number of children quartered under the roof. No muddy little foot-prints, nor any of those dingy, faded, and faded of childhood gleamed from the polished floor. A glimpse of the perfect discipline needed in such a crowded institution is anywhere enough to give one a heart-sickening realization of the need of such a place, though comfortable bed and clothing, must become hardly more than automata—rising and retiring, eating, sleeping, playing and praying by inextinguishable rules, led by the nod and beck of their keepers. The good sisterhood, by the way, being all maiden ladies of certain age, scarcely the natural guardians of childhood, having, voluntarily or otherwise, the development of the maternal instinct and being compelled by their vows to sternly repress the most tender sentiments of the heart. Worthy women though they undoubtedly are, I searched every countenance, vain for one trace of that undefinable yet unmistakable sweetness of expression indicative of completed womanhood, that comes only to the faces of those who have loved.

CHILDREN CAREFULLY TRAINED. In this asylum the children are carefully trained in the tenets of the Church, and educated to a moderate extent in the lore of books, while each is taught some useful trade which he or she may practice for future support. Thus, while the boys learn shoemaking, saddlery, poncho-weaving, cabinet work, etc., the girls manufacture artificial flowers, fancy boxes, lace and embroidery, and are trained for domestic service. If not adopted, and if self-supporting, they may remain here permanently, should they choose to do so; or at the age of 18 they may go forth to shift for themselves. There are a number of "orphans" here, both male and female, reared in the institution and now nearing middle age, who prepare for to work hard all their days for the general good, rather than leave the shelter of the only home they have ever known. The young men earn considerable funds at their various occupations, and the girls take in fine sewing, embroidery and laundry work. They have also a model bakery in the house, and the very best bread that is sold in the city and the most of it, comes from these ovens. At present there are 421 children in the asylum. The smallest of these able to be out of the nursery, (a class of 47 between the ages of two and five years), were put through their first years in our education, with the songs and parrot-like dialogues, each setting forth their religious faith and the goodness of their protector. All were neatly though poorly clad—dressed in blue gingham gowns, the girls in blue jackets and trousers, both sexes wearing aprons exactly alike, of the same coarse blue cloth that the sisters wear for dresses, with woolen hose knitted by the larger girls and ragged, worn-out by the boys. Each little apron had a square pocket patched on in front, into which was thrust a callio handkerchief, the most lamentable neglect peculiar to childhood's use of the latter article prevailed.

FANNIE B. WARD.

DRYING BEETS. To prevent a loss in sugar percentage in beets, S. W. MacMullen, formerly a member of the Canadian parliament, proposes to subject the beets to a drying process before they go to the sugar factory. Their weight and freight expenses would thereby be reduced 50 per cent. No such deterioration could longer threaten their soundness. Beet growers could store them almost indefinitely and they could be delivered in the factory gradually. The factories themselves could thus operate the whole year. The information, however, is a little late. Already in 1903 it was tried in Germany and was found unprofitable.—Best Sugar Gazette.

CARE OF STRAWBERRY BED.

Strawberry plants produce better crops and finer berries if the soil in which they grow is not disturbed in spring till after the fruit is gathered. The bed should be properly prepared late in the fall so that nothing will be needed in early spring except possibly to rake off a little of the mulch where too heavy and apply sufficient water to keep the vines growing vigorously and fruit developing in good condition. For this reason if no other plants for this spring's settings should be taken from beds grown especially for the purpose and not from those where the fruit crop is expected. Much moisture is required to mature a crop of berries and the soil must not stand still. The strawberry bed should be the richest land on the farm and should be out in the open where a hot, quick fire can be used when needed. In combating strawberry leaf rollers it is important to get after them as quickly after the crop is harvested as possible as they become well grown by that time. Usually some light straw will need to be spread over the patch and ignited when the wind is blowing quick strongly from

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—Longfellow

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