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A VISIT TO THE HOUSE OF REFUGE – The Good Impressions of a Lady Visitor to Glen Mills – An Excellent System Used

Alice A Roberts in the Norristown Herald, has the following kind words for a well-known Delaware County institution and a popular resident of Media who is connected with it in an official way:

“A work that is well worth the trouble of doing is that which is undertaken by the committee who have in charge one of Pennsylvania’s most noble institutions, the House of Refuge. On the hills at the station called Glen Mills, are situated the buildings, the elegant and commodious cottages where boys live in families. The large main building where the meetings of the directors are held and where the business of the school is transacted, the chapel where the boys are assembled for religious instructions and for lectures and entertainment; the gymnasium, one of the largest and best equipped in the United States; the various school buildings and workshops – all surrounded by beautifully kept lawns and walks, make one of the most charming pictures imaginable. The views of the surrounding hills and valleys with their garnered crops and stretches of woodland are magnificent and exert of themselves an untold influence in reclaiming the wayward youth who must go to school here.

“There are about eight hundred and fifty boys in the school, ranging in age from six to eighteen years. Their faces, some of them dear, sweet faces, poverty and neglect have hardened and on which the want of love, which every human being needs, has left a desolate look.

“It was my good fortune to visit the boys with Colonel Hawley, one of the directors, who has ever the good of the boys at heart, and who does not think his duty finished when he has met with his friends and directed how they shall be taken care of, but who goes straight to the boy and interests himself in each one and thinks of something to entertain and interest.

IN THE KINDERGARTEN – “The kindergarten is managed very much as all good kindergartens are. The songs and games and work are enjoyed very much by all. Besides this, they are all being taught to read and write and cipher. These little boys are kept in a cottage by themselves; their dainty white beds spotlessly clean; their little table with white cloth carefully set, and all their appointments for recreation, work and study, all that the most fastidious could wish; and yet through it all we were sorry for these poor little bits of humanity who could not have known a tender loving mother’s care and devotion.

“At the gymnasium the boys are under the care of an experienced teacher. We saw a class in Indian club swinging. The teachers told us that it was the class of the lowest grade of intellect in the school. “They were boys that were perhaps sixteen or more years of age who had been either too worthless to learn or had not the opportunity to go to school. The obedience and quick precision necessary to the giving of movements required by the teachers were very difficult for some. In the basement of the gymnasium is a swimming pool, the water being warmed to the proper temperature. The boys are allowed by cottages in their turn, evenings at the swimming pool. While we were in the basement looking at the miniature lake, we turned and saw a door leading into what appeared an underground tunnel, which it proved to be, all the buildings are so connected, lighted with electric light, and ventilated. In case of a storm or inclement weather, the boys do not have to go out of doors to their work or to school.

“We visited various school rooms where the classes were being taught according to the best methods, and where they are evidently making rapid progress, for these boys are no stupid. We visited the various shops, where the boys work in wood and iron. Those who are old enough are taught a trade, so that they are allowed to know there is no need of them going without employment, as they are skilled in the use of their hands and eyes.

“As we passed through the different rooms many of the boys dropped for the instant their work to shake hands with Colonel Hawley, who was evidently a great favorite with them. The bright look which they all gave him was evidently all the reward he desired for his thoughtfulness for them. ‘Are we to have a lecture, Colonel?’ greeted him on every side.

"In the printing department the boys get out a daily paper which is a little sheet. In every department there is evidence of the inborn American genius. In the paper hanging and wall decorating department some of the designs were beautiful. In some of the cottages the border on the sitting room wall had been designed and executed by the boys. It was entitled the 'Circus' and it certainly has made more attractive their reading and play room.

"At 5 o'clock the boys are all lined up in a large room for the purpose of separating them into their families. During the day they all work according to their ability and aptitude, but at their homes they are classed according to size. This makes possible very fine drills and military discipline. I can think of no grander sight than that made by this small army of boys lined up in quiet readiness waiting for the order to march to their homes. There is a friendly rivalry among the different cottages for the report in marching and drill work.

HOW THEY LIVE – "As it came on supper time we visited the cottages to see how they lived. The boys had not yet arrived when we went into No. 9 so our party descended to the basement to see them come in. As soon as the boys were disbanded and could speak to Colonel Hawley they kept us busy shaking hands with them. One boy was afraid that so many of them shaking hands would soil the ladies' gloves. Colonel Hawley had some x-ray pictures in his pocket, which he showed and explained in the great delight of the boys. One youth had a black cat which he informed me was the mascot of that cottage, and brought them all their good luck.

"So on through all the various phases of their systematic life we went. At one cottage we found the boys assembled in their reading room, some reading, some playing checkers and other games. One of the boys suggested that if one of the ladies would play on the organ a hymn they would sing, and they all united in the singing. In one cottage where the boys had received a particularly good report, the matron had prepared a treat of molasses candy.

"Everything through the whole institution was clean, neat and systematic. The boys are healthy and in good physical condition, and apparently in good spirits. There would seem no reason why such a training for several years should not serve to correct evil tendencies in all these boys – the training of the head and the hand and shall I say the heart?

"Only a few people in the world, says Colonel Hawley ever think to do these things which would teach these boys to be men, to feel that they have a friend, a human friend, to whom they can go in time of trouble and need. And that money and the work of devoted teachers can do for these boys is being done there at the House of Refuge. Yet, they have few friends and little incentive to follow in the path of virtue, other than that which habit gives them, I come away convinced that were we all more mindful of the waifs who have not yet been sent to this school, or if time and opportunity permitted, would take the trouble to become the friend of only one of these poor children, whose condition may be partly due to the poverty of parents, that we would be following in the footsteps of Him who said, 'Suffer little children to come unto me,' and we would be better men and women for it."