WEALTH WELL SPENT.

TWO MORE FREE LIBRARIES.

THOUSANDS POURED OUT TO PROVIDE LITERATURE FOR THE MASSES—MERIT RECOGNIZED.

People who can put their hands into their pockets and give half a hundred thousand dollars to found a home, endow a college or build a public library, without feeling it, are scarce—people who do so are scarcer yet. New-York, however, is fortunate in having some wealthy residents whose openhandedness in such matters does much to justify the words of the Honorable "Joe" Chamberlain at the recent Chamber of Commerce dinner, when he said of America: "I suppose there is no country in which private munificence is on a larger scale, or in which the obligations which attach to the possession of wealth are more freely or more generally recognized."

Prominent among these are "the Vanderbilt boys," as Wall Street calls them. To the generosity of George, the youngest of them, the New-York Free Circulating Library Association, in a measure, the public generally and the crowded dwellers about Jackson Square at Thirteenth st. and Eighth-ave. particularly are indebted for a new branch building and free library, whence children and graybeards, store clerks and sewing girls, and in fact all grades of the poor—and rich too, for the matter of that—may, for the price of asking, go and read in quiet and comfort in well warmed and lighted rooms, the best literature of the day, or take it home with them for their few leisure hours.

Some of the mantle of Catharine Lorillard Wolfe seems too to have fallen with her money. For the Association has another equally fine branch, now almost completed, in West Forty-second-st., built by Miss Catharine Bruce, a cousin of Catharine Wolfe and daughter of George Bruce, the well-known type-founder. Still another wealthy woman has promised the society to erect an additional branch, when these two have been filled with books and the need for more room becomes pressing.

FUNNY MISTAKES AT A FREE LIBRARY.

These gifts show that the quiet, persevering work of the New-York Free Circulating Library meets with recognition. The association has now four buildings—the two above mentioned, in course of construction—the Ottendorfer Library in Second ave., the gift of Oswald Ottendorfer, Editor and proprietor of the *Staats-Zeitung*, and the parent building in Bond-st., often satirically called "the boys'" library. A TRIBUNE reporter visited the latter recently to see how the school boys, who are its best patrons, choose their books and use them. Here comes a chubby lad—sent evidently by his big sister, for it is her card he produces. He has been cautioned not to forget, you can see, for he hurries up to the delivery wicket without looking to the right or left. What will he ask for—poetry or a novel? Listen!

"Please'm-I-want-the-dude-without-society," all in one breath.

"The what?" says the astonished girl who acts as assistant librarian. The little man repeats it twice, without a blink or the slightest variation. Long practice, however, has made her as expert in translating mispronunciations as a postoffice clerk in deciphering illegible addresses.

"It's 'The Do-Without-Society' he wants," she says, and quickly gives it him.

"Do you meet with many such?" is asked.

"Yes, indeed," is the reply, "and some of them so laughable I can with difficulty keep my face straight while puzzling over them. Adults make many ludicrous errors of course, but the readers of 'janiville' fiction, as they call it, are prolific in happy 'bulls.' A school girl in her teens asked for the 'Destracting Young Preacher,' meaning distracted—'The Lady of Aroostook,' by association, perhaps, with Stockton's famous story, becomes 'The Lady and the Rooster'—'The Dog Fiend' is softened down into 'The Dog Friend'—and Darwin is credited with pushing his researches into 'The Origin of Speeches.' One boy wants a 'transferation of Cesar'; in another's mind 'The Picture of a Woman' stands for 'The Portrait of a Lady'; and the pathetic 'Widow of Glencoe' is brought down from her pedestal and dubbed plain 'Mrs. Glencoe.' One of my little favorites, the only son of a widow, came in one day with his card, on which was his name 'Johnnie Smith,' and said he wants it changed to 'Johnnie De Peyster.' 'What's that for?' I said, 'are you tired of the co n nouer name and want a more high soun ding one?'

"'Oh, no'm,' he said proudly; 'we're married!'"

INSTANCES OF YOUTHFUL INGENUITY.

As a rule the books are well taken care of and receive only ordinary wear and tear, but if one be returned in much worse condition than when it went away—who can beat a boy at excuses?

"What makes the cover of this book so dirty, my boy?" says Miss Coe, the faithful librarian, trying to look stern.

"Please, m'm, it was all right when I left home, but I passed so many dirty people in the Bowery it got black rubbin' against 'em."

A boy must have reached the mature age of twelve before he can be intrusted with a treasure from the shelves. Here comes an unusually small specimen whose inches declare him to be about nine, but he has street wisdom enough and to spare for an old man.

"Please, m'm, I want to join," he says.

"You're certainly not twelve yet, my boy."

"Oh, yes'm, I am, please'm. I'm a twin, and I never grew big 'cause I had cramps that kept me down, me mother says; but I'll bring you in the other and you'll see how big he is."

Out he goes and straightway ushers in a big sheepish boy, looking about fourteen, who nods his head when accused of being "the other." He doesn't want to "join," and certainly bears no family resemblance to the little fellow, who if he isn't twelve ought to be—for his precocity—and the corner grocer has vouched for him on the application ticket he presents, and so he "joins." His first request is for "The Boy Trapper Serious." Finding that "The Boy Trapper" series consists of several volumes and that he can have one at a time only, he lays off the first instalment of his prize, staring at the prints in it on the way home, with bulging eyes—greatly to the discomfort of all pedestrians he meets.

Here is a little unobtrusive library that—while the great Astor collection, with nearly a quarter of a million books, supplies about 250 readers daily—circulates over 600 books every day in the year, with only 223,000 volumes on its shelves. A little library that—while the public are called to admire the liberality which allows them to gaze for a few hours in the day at the glories of the Lenox collection behind glass doors—provides rare books of reference that the student can carry to his garret and pore over for a week. A little library that—while others still resist the appeal for sunday-opening with cavillings about expense and morals—solved the question long ago by throwing its reading-room and shelves open on Sundays—after morning service in the churches, until 9 in the evening. The percentage of works of fiction taken out here is only 34, juvenile stories 29 per cent, the rest is good reading of an instructive nature and very many students, workmen, shop girls and clerks go to make up the yearly circulation of 225,000.

KNOWING A GOOD BOOK WHEN THEY GET IT.

To keep up such a circulation each book must go out a good many times. Darwin's "What I Saw Round the World" did duty fifty-seven times last year. Woltmann's "History of Painting," a closely guarded and expensive book of reference only, in other libraries, has been pored over by eight different art students at their lodgings in the last five months. This means a good deal of inevitable wear and 700 well thumbed, but not abused, veteran volumes had to be honorably discharged last year and the ranks filled with new recruits. There are more male readers than female among the poorer classes. Housework and sewing her own clothes seem to occupy the working woman fully in the hours which the man devotes to leisure. Our German population reads more per man than any other, closely followed by the New-Englander. That much good is accomplished no one can doubt. "The benefit to my patients alone," said Dr. R. W. Muller, one of the trustees, the other day, "is enormous. Most of them are poor Germans and good books would be beyond their reach but for this system. An interesting book read to them, if they are not able to read themselves, soothes pain, draws the mind away from home worries, and is to the sick poor something of what change of air and scene is to the rich."

To keep this up costs money, however, and though the city helps a little—$5,000 a year for each 100,000 of circulation—yet $5,000 will not purchase and support a library with 100,000 circulation by any means. The association spent $13,000 last year for new books, replacing old ones and general running expenses. The trustees give their services for nothing, the girls who act as assistant librarians get from $300 to $500 a year, and everything else is in proportion. Every dollar tells and nothing is wasted. The association is now nine years old and has won its own way up from small beginnings among the ladies of Grace Church congregation. Some of its principal supporters, who have given largely to it are: John Jacob Astor, Andrew Carnegie, Cyrus W. Field, Mrs. Benjamin H. Field and J. Pierpont Morgan. More money is pressingly needed to purchase books for the new buildings, to equip them thoroughly and make them do all the good their generous givers have a right to expect.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE NEW BUILDING.

The Bruce building, besides which there is not another free circulating library in the city above Twenty-third-st., stands in West Forty-second-st. and is a model in its way of what a small, handy and effective working library building should be. A glance shows that it will be well lighted, for almost the whole front has been given up to windows. To G. E. Harney, the architect, of No. 149 Broadway, is due considerable credit for the manner in which he has economized space without crowding and provided light and lightness without losing any of the air of solidity and strength which the edifice presents. The outside measurement is 25x100 feet; the material used, old gold-colored brick and Belleville stone, with terra cotta facings; the height, three stories and a basement. It is finished throughout with natural ash—no gaudiness, but good workmanship everywhere being apparent. The main room is on the first floor and contains most of the books ranged on shelves according to a system which the practical experience of the librarian has brought as near perfection as may be with the means at hand. This too is the general delivery room. In the rear is a small Board and Trustee room.

The second floor is devoted to reading rooms, one for each sex. This is a feature that none of the other buildings of the society contain, the reading rooms being common to both sexes. On the top floor in the front is the infirmary for old books, whose backs are bent and broken in the service, where skilful fingers rebind their gashes and repair their uniforms. In the rear are comfortable janitor's apartments. The basement contains boilers and other heating apparatus and a storage, receiving and unpacking room.

The Vanderbilt building, in West Thirteenth-st., is built by Architect Richard M. Hunt, of THE TRIBUNE Building, on much the same general idea, differing slightly in detail, according to each architect's individual taste, but not enough to make a separate description necessary in order to form a fair estimate of its character. It too is 25x100, built in the Dutch style, of pressed brick and terra cotta, with handsome ornamental glass windows and panels of them. It stands in a thickly settled neighborhood of cheap and old-style tenement houses, looking out upon the dusty, smoke-begrimed and seemingly discouraged little three-cornered park, where dirty children peer through the iron fence that surrounds what stands to them for greensward and foliage, waiting for some one to come and provide an innocent and instruction for their small precocious brains. How much good a few thousand well selected, freely distributed books will do among such a population, who can compute?

THE LITTLE SHOE.

A STRANGE STORY OF THE SEA.

From The San Francisco Chronicle.

Twenty-six years ago a little child toddled from its mother's doorstep on the shores of Half-moon bay to its playground on the smooth, pebbly beach, where it was accustomed to pass the sunny hours in innocent play, gathering shiny shells, bright pebbles, and gay sea mosses to carry home to add to its little hoard of treasures. There was no thought of danger in the mother's mind as she saw her little one go with unsteady steps down toward the shore, where the wavelets, lapping on the strand, were throwing up the objects for which the little toddler made a daily search. The hours passed on, and at length the mother, becoming anxious at the prolonged absence of her baby went to the door to call her home. She scanned the long stretch of the beach, but the little one was nowhere to be seen. The tide which was at the ebb when the little one left her home had come in, and there was nothing but white sand to be seen as far as the eye could reach. A search among the neighbors' houses brought no tidings of the little one, and the mother, now thoroughly alarmed, assisted by other members of the family, began an anxious search for the missing babe. The afternoon and evening were away, and through the night the friends and neighbors kept up the search among the sandhills and shrubs which lined the beach, but without avail. Not a trace could be found of the child.

The hours lengthened into days and the search had been abandoned so far as hopes of finding the child alive were concerned, but still the sorrowing mother made her daily search along the beach where her baby had been wont to play, hoping to find something which would give at least a clew to the fate of her darling. One day, the third or fourth after the disappearance of the child, the mother found a little bundle of clothing, wet and torn by the waves, which covered the remains of her little one, the body having been cast up by the sea during the night.

Catching the body up, she ran with it to the little house from which the light seemed to have fled with the loss of the child.

The little body was prepared by tender hands for burial, but it was found that the right foot of the little one was missing. It was supposed that the child had fallen from a reef of rocks which ran out into deep water and had been drowned, and that some fish or sea monster had eaten off the foot. There seemed to be no mystery about the death, and the other children of the family were wont to listen with awe as the mother told in the gloaming how the little sister wandered away from home and was drowned. The children grew up and married and had little ones of their own, and the grandmother told again to a new set of auditors how her little baby girl went out to play and was killed by the cruel sea.

Simple as the death of the child seemed at the time, it turns out to have been one of those mysteries of the sea which are only revealed by accident. A short time ago one of the sons of the old lady, and a brother of the lost girl, picked up on the beach a piece of a large abalone shell which had been thrown up by the tide. He was attracted by the bright colors of the shell, and as he turned the shell to look at the inside he was astonished to find attached to the interior of the shell the perfect representation of a child's shoe. Even to the little break in the toe, where the leather had worn away, every detail was preserved in the brilliant colors which are characteristic of the interior of the abalone shell. Little thinking of the mystery revealed by the reproduction by nature of a baby's shoe, the young man carried the shell home as a curiosity. The first person to whom he showed it was his mother. No sooner did the old lady see the curiosity than she exclaimed: "It is my baby's shoe! The shoe of my little girl that was lost twenty-six years ago."

The rest of the family ridiculed the idea, but going to a drawer, such as most mothers have in their house, she produced the mate to the shoe. A careful comparison showed that the line-incrusted shoe in the shell and the memento of the dead child, carefully kept by a loving mother through the long years that she had mourned her little one, were undoubtedly mates.

The mystery of the child's death was revealed at last. Any one who knows the nature and habits of the abalone can readily understand what occurred. The little one had ventured out in the rocky reef, and in her clambering had slipped from the slimy, moss-covered rocks into the shallow water below.

Perhaps nothing more than a wetting would have happened to her, but as fate would have it her foot got slipped between the rock and the edge of a large abalone which was clinging to the rock, and the shell at once closed on the tender ankle, and the little one was a prisoner, to be held till the rising tide swept over her and put an end to the innocent life. It may be that she was thrown into the water and held in the vise-like grip of the univalve so that her agony was brief, or she may have been held until the slowly rising waters choked her feeble cries for help.

Such cases are not unknown. A few years ago a child was frequently seen in San Diego whose right hand, with the exception of the thumb and forefinger, was gone. The story told by his mates was that while hunting abalones on the reef he incautiously inserted his fingers under the sharp edge of an abalone shell. Before he could withdraw them the shell had closed down. He lay on the rock held by the hand till the tide began to come in. Seeing his danger and realizing that he had only himself to depend upon for aid, he managed to get out his knife with his left hand and by dint of hard work hacked off the imprisoned fingers and released himself.

On another occasion a gentleman connected with one of the newspapers in this city was wandering with some friends on the reefs near Cypress Point at Monterey. His companions had gone ahead, and as he hurried on to overtake them he slipped in a hole on the reef. His foot went into the mouth, as it may be called, of an abalone. To his horror he was unable to extricate himself. It was just about the turn of tide, and realizing his danger he shouted lustily for help. Fortunately the other members of the party were not too far away to hear him and they returned to his rescue. One of the parts stripped and plunged into the pool, and with a large knife cut the cartilage with which the mollusk held the shell clasped to the rock. Had help not been at hand he would have been drowned by the incoming tide, and in all probability his fate would forever have remained a mystery.

HE WILL SKIP IT THIS TIME.

From The Chicago Tribune.

The President—Dan, have you said anything yet to the message about Government officials meddling with elections?

Dan—Yes, sir; under the head of Civil Service reform I have made a few allusions to the practice in terms of strong condemna—

The President crumpling copy of New-York paper savagely in his hand)—Better leave all that out, Dan.

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