

## Rainsford Island.

THE ANTINOMIAN ELDER.—AN ANCIENT SUMMER RESORT.—THE BOSTON ALMSHOUSE.



EVEN miles from town, and half a mile from Long Island, the pleasant little island of Rainsford rises from the harbor, near the entrance of the Western Way, with hardly a dozen acres of soil, drawn out for half a mile, and indented with many a pretty cove and miniature bay. Its two bluffs are connected by a low and narrow isthmus, from which the all-devouring sea receives continuous repulses, along the line of the sea-wall. Its first white resident appears to have been Elder Edward Raynsford, to whom the island was probably granted in 1636, at the request of Owen Rowe, of London, who wrote to Governor Winthrop, asking that "Mr Ransford may be accommodated with lands for a farme, to Keepe my cattle, that so my stocke may be preserved." He was the first ruling elder of the Old South Church, a large landholder on Long Island, and one of the substantial men of the Colony. There is a tradition that he came from a very good English family, and that his brother, Sir Richard Rainsford, succeeded Sir Matthew Hale as Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench. Nevertheless, the colonial authorities disarmed him, in 1637, for heresy. (What mountains of revolvers and brooms would fill the State House, if that dereliction were similarly punished to-day!) Yet, though a heretic, and possibly even an Antinomian, it is said that the good elder bought his little domain of its Indian lords, preferring a just title to one founded on the right of might. Here he lived during many years, with his wife and children, until 1680, when he died; and eight years later his wife was buried in King's Chapel Burying-Ground. After her death the island-property was divided, passing through many hands, until, in 1737, Boston bought it, of the Lorings of Hull, for £570. "to be used and improved for a publick hospital for the reception and accommodation of such sick and infectious persons as shall be sent there by order." A hospital was erected, having four rooms on a floor, and a proper person put in charge. Until 1852 Rainsford's Island was used as a quarantine.

As early as 1677, just after the close of King Philip's War, a vessel was quarantined in Nantasket Roads, with the small-pox; but sundry people from the villages about the harbor boarded her, and the dread infection was soon let loose in Massachusetts, nearly a thousand persons falling victims.

This grim lesson taught the Colony people the need of stricter quarantine regulations; and, after several attempts elsewhere, they established their lazaretto on this sequestered islet. It appears to have been under the joint control of Boston and Massachusetts; and the keepers of the Light-house and the commanders of the Castle had orders to send there all vessels in which contagious diseases were found.

Occasionally junketing-parties visited the island, even in those ancient days, on a variety of pretexts. Ezekiel Price tells us, in his diary, that, on Sept. 2, 1778, he went down the harbor to Hospital Island, with the selectmen and other Boston gentlemen, and "had a view of the French fleet then in the harbour, as well as those stationed in Nantasket Harbour; they made a very formidable appearance, and were disposed so as to protect us from any approach of the British Navy."

Nearly three-quarters of a century ago, the sweet singer of the harbor thus apostrophized "Rainsford's pleasant little isle:" —

"The sailor here when dire disease  
His body has opprest;  
May lie upon the bed of ease,  
With kind attentions blest.

"Here Welch, the son of healing art,  
Will due prescriptions give;  
And use each mean to soothe the heart,  
And make the sufferer live.

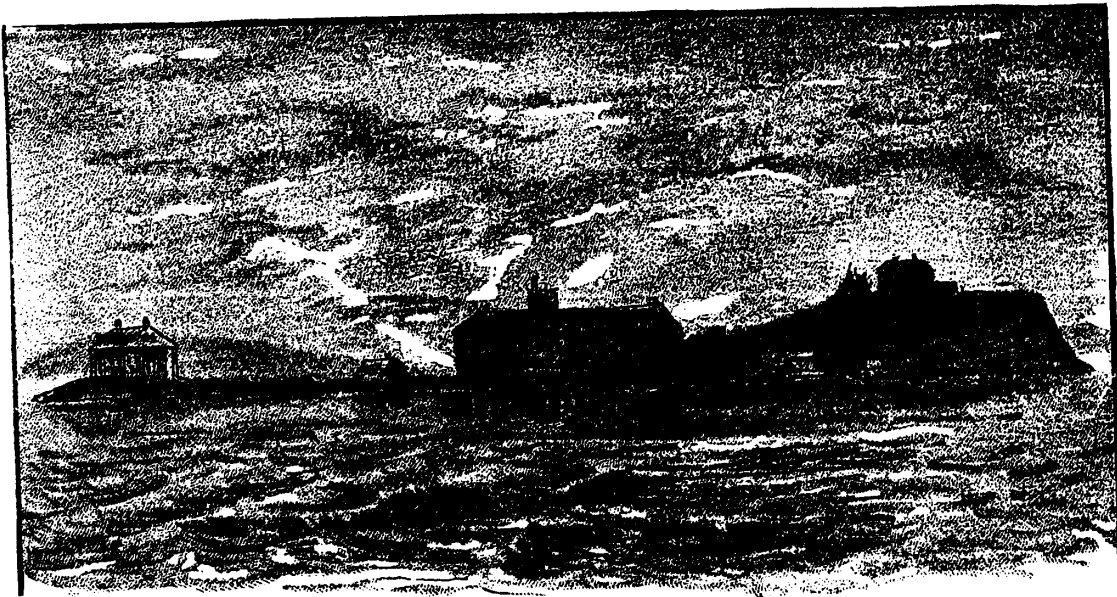
"Here sprightly youth may exercise,  
Upon the bowling green;  
When no rude storms deform the skies,  
And nature shines serene.

"Long may the legislative care,  
Thy kind protection be;  
And long may Mercy's hand prepare,  
Her dwelling-place in thee."

On Great Head stands the Old Mansion House, built in 1819, which was for many years the chief summer resort in the harbor, and has given comfortable shelter to many well-known Bostonians of the old *régime*. The town authorities allowed the keepers to take boarders, when no infectious diseases were upon the island; and the fever and small-pox hospitals were often crowded, besides the old mansion. It must have been a grewsome summer-resort, and abounding in suggestions not conducive to hilarity; yet our grandfathers appear to have found real and lively pleasure here. The North Bluff (or Great Head) also has the superintendent's house, the

old dead-house, and several other buildings, besides the wharf at which the city steamboat touches. These houses are now mainly used for pauper women. The West Head is that part of the island west of the narrow isthmus, and is devoted to pauper men. Here is the long, low building erected for the Fever Hospital, and generally known as the Bowling Alleys.

The imposing Greek temple on high ground beyond was the Small-Pox Hospital, and not (as its appearance indicates) the shrine of the tutelär divinity of the harbor. It is a stone building, and dates from 1832. Near by is a high promontory of slate projecting to the southward into the harbor, and sheltering two pretty coves. The graveyard is on West Head, and



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has monuments nearly a century and a half old, many of which bear pathetic records. Here are buried most of the old keepers of the island, and many sailors and officers of foreign ships, who have ended their voyages here. Up to a date well within the present century, it was the custom for Boston families to send their members, when taken with dangerous infectious diseases, to the island, whence they were tolerably certain never to return. Numbers of these unfortunates rest in the local cemetery. Although within sight of the spires of their home-town, they were rigidly isolated on this dreary strand, and allowed to drift down into the darkness of death without the comfort and support of their neighboring friends and relatives. Many years ago a remarkable stone tomb was discovered here, containing a skeleton and an iron sword-hilt. Dr. J. V. C. Smith, who, as Port Physician, spent many years on the island, wrote a fanciful account of this grim treasure-trove, suggesting a strange history.

In 1852 the State took possession of Rainsford, for a pauper colony, and spent about \$100,000 in buildings and improvements. The State institution was broken up in 1866, and its inmates went to the inland almshouses.

In 1872 Boston bought the island and all its buildings, for \$40,000, and the large hospital was converted into a city almshouse. Up to the year 1882 a number of ex-soldiers, Massachusetts veterans of the Secession War, were kept here, living on the cold bread of municipal charity. At that time they were transferred to the new Soldiers' Home, on Powder-Horn Hill, Chelsea, where they can pass their broken old age in honor and peace, and free from the taint of pauperism.

In the good time coming, when chronic poverty shall have become a matter only of tradition, this beautiful and picturesque little gem of the sea, with its rocky shores and snug coves, and its noble view out on the Atlantic, may become once more an abode of summer pleasure, resorted to by the elegant patrician descendants of the plain shopkeepers who used to weather the dog-days in the Small-Pox Hospital forty years ago.

