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Contributors

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L I F E

IN

A H O S P I T A L,

BEING

AN EAST END CHAPTER,

BY

WALTER BESANT,

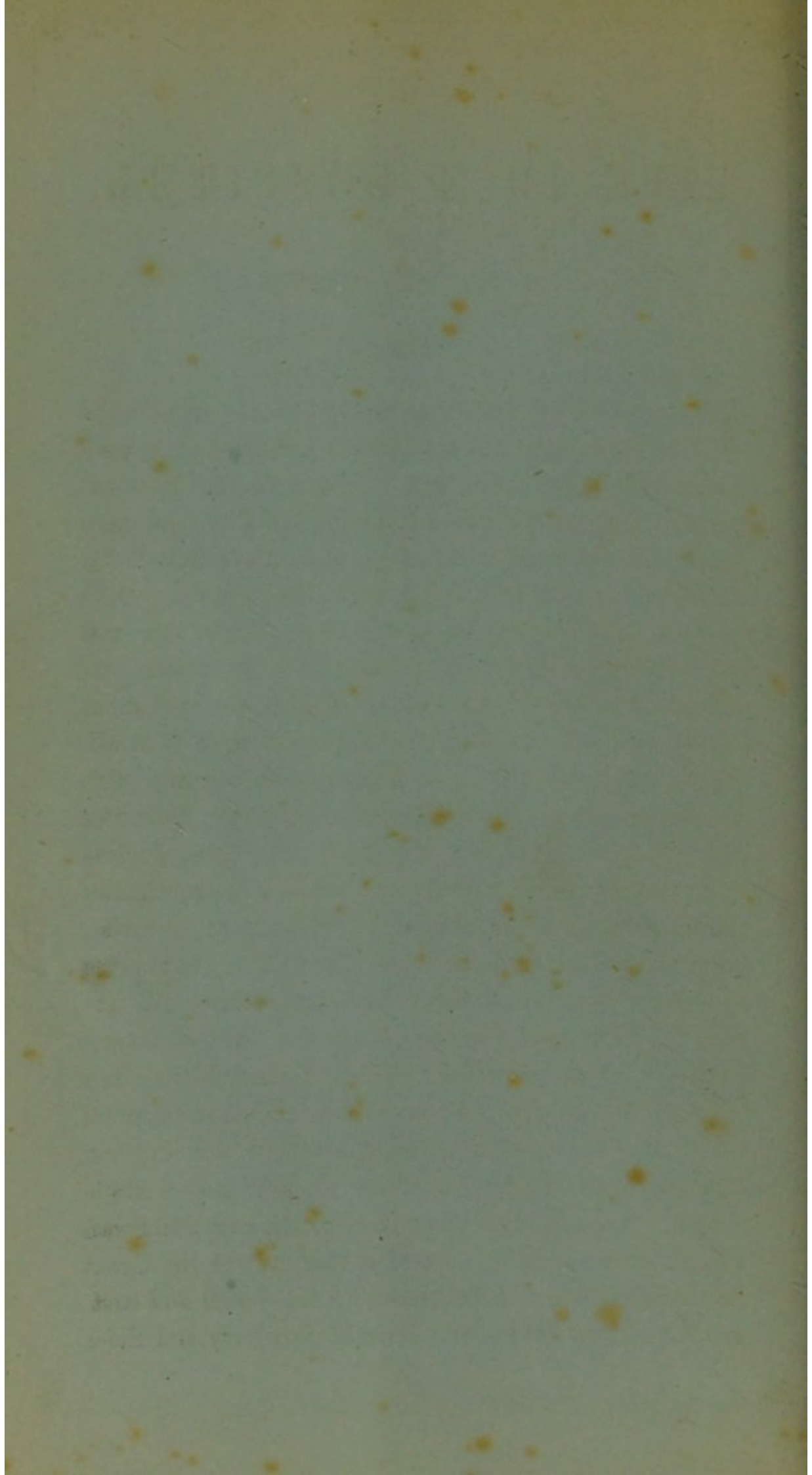
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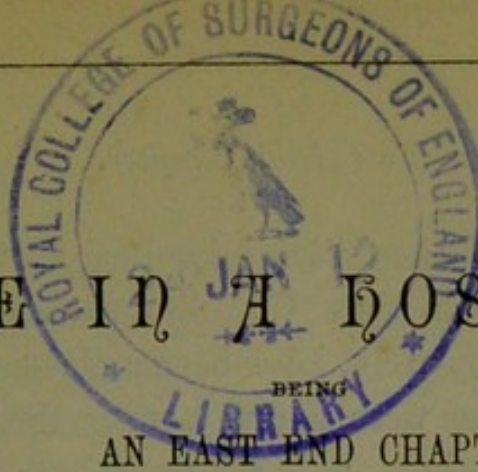
"ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN."



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LIFE IN A HOSPITAL,

BEING
AN EAST END CHAPTER.

IF you take Rocque's map of London and its suburbs for the year 1741-45—there is a reprint of it, very useful and instructive—and if you take the most important sheet of all, that containing the City, you may remark a multitude of curious and interesting facts. So interesting, indeed, is this sheet that you may study it for a great many days, and even years, and not exhaust its interest. One fact, quite new to you, will immediately strike your eye. It is that the vast great city we now call the East End did not then exist at all. There was no East End: all was open country, with an occasional village or cluster of houses. This was only a hundred and forty years ago. The Great Joyless City of two millions of people without a gentleman among them, or a rich man, or a nobleman, or an artist, or an author, or anybody at all lifted above themselves by culture and education—except the clergy—did not exist. There were already, it is true, signs of a tendency to spread eastwards. North of Houndsditch and the Whitechapel Road as far east as the church, there was a large collection of mean streets with not so much as a single church among them all, and only a single chapel. These houses terminated to the north in Swan Fields, where is now the traffic terminus of the Great Eastern Railway. After these, on the north and east, you came upon fields—the fields of Finsbury and those

of Hoxton. The latter delightful suburb, at the present day even less known than Whitechapel, and far more dreary, can never, surely, have been a place of meadows and fields! There were a few houses there already, and the Haberdashers had a hospital or almshouse close to Hoxton Square. The fields of Kingsland ended in a common: on the east, but far removed from the high road, was the pleasant suburb of Hackney, with its church and houses set among gardens and orchards, London Fields on one side and Cambridge Heath on the other, and still farther east the favourite rural retreat of Homerton. You will not find, I believe, these places mentioned in Pope or in any of the polite writers of the day, because these gentlemen never got any farther east than Ludgate Hill and St. Paul's, or the Tower at farthest. South of Hackney, among the fields, lay the hamlet of Bethnal Green. It consisted of a few houses lying about a broad green. At the south-east corner of the Green was a madhouse; a little removed from the road which leads from Bethnal Green to Old Ford was a mysterious building called Bishop Bonner's Hall. If we walk, in the year 1741, through the leafy hedges along Globe Lane, we come into the Mile End Road, where indeed there are a good many houses and buildings. First, there is the London Hospital, newly erected, and beside it Whitechapel Mount, a mound not quite so high as Primrose Hill, but composed entirely of rubbish brought here after the Great Fire of London. There were two or three such hills outside the town, and when one comes to think of it the amount of rubbish to be cleared away must have been tremendous. Half a mile east is the old Jews' Burying Ground. It is walled in now, but you can see

the flat tombstones from the top of an omnibus. Then comes Bancroft's Hospital, and after that the New Jews' Burying Ground—old enough now. On the east side of Stepney Green stands a row of houses called Mile End Old Town. They stand there still, some of them, and very picturesque old houses they are. One remarks also the enormous extent of St. Dunstan's, which is Stepney Parish Churchyard. It is now, as everybody knows, railed in entirely, so that the stones which stand so thickly in memory of the long-forgotten dead can no more be read by anybody, and there seems no longer any reason at all why they should not be all taken away and piled in stacks somewhere, and no more pretence made about any of the dead being remembered by the living, and the place levelled and laid out in a beautiful garden, as they have done in the churchyard of St. George's-in-the-East. But in the year of grace 1741 the churchyard of St. Dunstan's was as yet thinly peopled by the rude forefathers of the hamlet, a green and grassy meadow set with trees and made solemn by the singing of the birds and by the white stones set up on two or three graves where lay the bones of substantial farmers and retired merchants.

Near Stepney Church is a building, probably a tavern, called the World's End, a name which speaks volumes. Beyond World's End there is nothing, only fields and farms and open country. Between White-chapel Road and Cable Street, now a densely populated *quartier*, there is nothing at all; hardly a single house. "Half Way House" to be sure, stands in the middle of the fields; else there is nothing but the fields, and the gardens, and the lanes. If you take a modern map and compare it with the old chart you will find that the

streets which have been built over these fields follow the lines of the more important lanes. This is part of the great truth that the sheep and the cows are the first to lay down roads, and that they do it on the sound engineering principle of the least trouble, while the caravans, muleteers, pack-saddle horses, and wayfarers, following in their track, gradually make out a beaten track, which in time becomes a high road or a street. When we get to that bend of the river which, with the straight line of Ratcliff Highway on the north, includes St. Katharine's, Wapping, and Shadwell, there are plenty of streets with a fine, breezy, free and easy, roystering, drinking, singing, dancing, roaring, fighting, love-making, stabbing, robbing, murdering, press-ganging kind of life going on in them—the short and merry life; the live to-day and die to-morrow life; the devil may care life; with the Execution Dock just below Wapping New Stairs, and quantities of ships lying off either bank where, when the pay is gone—which takes wonderful little time—a man may find a craft bound for any port he pleases in the whole world, and nothing to choose between the ships or their destination; the same weevily biscuit and hard junk; the same new rum; the same rope's end; the same grewsome creature with nine tails; the same scurvy; the same storms; very likely the same shipwreck and watery grave. Why, only to look at the names of the streets is to remember the stories in the old "Annual Registers," where one may look for all the life of England faithfully portrayed. But even Wapping and Shadwell are not by any means covered with houses; there are broad spaces of orchards and market gardens, between the river bank and Ratcliff Highway, so that one may think how,

among the noisy, brawling sailors, there went about the contemplative gardeners, men of peace, and accustomed to consider the goodness of Providence in connection with the fruits of the earth in due season. Where be those gardens now? St. Katharine's Hospital stands beside the Tower: there are plenty of "Stairs" along the north bank, and a good many docks—those little picturesque docks which you may yet see surviving at Rotherhithe. As for the old streets, few survive, for most of them have been swallowed up by the St. Katharine and the London Docks; but there are "bits" of old Wapping left still, and of Shadwell, which still have a fine eighteenth-century look after all the modern improvements.

There is a picture of the London Hospital in the year 1750 or thereabout hanging in the Secretary's room. It shows the single central building standing in an open country. A broad road—Whitechapel has always been nobly liberal in the matter of breadth—runs in front; the "Mount" stands at the side; in front is the ditch of black and stagnant water which formerly lay along the roadside; cattle are being noisily driven along the road; women are running away frightened, and people strolling in the open fields in the foreground. The one great Institution of the East End is also the earliest: it stood there when East London was a collection of scattered hamlets, and when Stepney parish stretched from Bethnal Green on the north to Wapping and Shadwell on the south. It was not for the wants of this district that the hospital was originally founded, for the district had no wants, any more than a country village; it was for the poor in that part of London which we have long ceased to call the East, those who live about

the Minories and on the other side of Bishopsgate Street and about the Tower. For the other side of the City there was Rahere's Foundation of St. Bartholomew; for the people of the Borough there was St. Thomas's. These were the only two hospitals for London in the early part of the century, not including Bethlehem Hospital for the poor mad folk. It is strange to think that a madhouse should be, as Bethlehem was at that time, one of the sights of London. Ladies and visitors went to see the poor gibbering idiots and the raving madmen. Many things there are belonging to humanity which we would fain put away, conceal, and never speak about, if we could; more especially would we, for pity and terror's sake, keep our mad reverently and kindly under lock and key. But to make a show of them! To go and laugh at them!

When one considers the daily life of the poor, as it used to be, say two centuries ago, one presently understands that they had no doctoring at all. Neither physician nor surgeon went among them. When they fell ill they were nursed and physicked by women—the *sage femme* was called in for fevers and all the ills that flesh is heir to; she knew the power of herbs and had them all tied up in her cupboard, sovereign remedies against everything; for cases of accident there were bone-setters; but the physician with the full-bottomed wig and gold-headed cane did not penetrate the dark lanes and narrow courts where the people lived: there were not even any apothecaries among them to sell them a “poisoned poison”; and there were no surgeons carrying on the “general practice” of the present day. Very likely, in simple cases, the old women's remedies were efficacious; but in case of children, who require,

above all, attention to sanitary laws and fresh air, the mortality must have been very great, while the sum of pain and misery and needless suffering from disease, from sheer ignorance of sanitary laws and right treatment, and the absence of proper appliances, must have been truly frightful.

One must always honour the eighteenth century for one thing: the steady growth of sympathy and humanity which began at its commencement, and went on unchecked till its close. Many there were before that time who had founded almshouses and charities. Rahere himself and Whittington are noble examples of those who could perceive and feel for the unseen suffering; but in the last century this feeling became, among the better classes, almost universal. How did it come about? Men had been reading the Gospels for seventeen centuries; preachers had been exhorting them for the same time; the first and most important doctrine of the Gospels is that of Love. Yet no love at all, or, if any, then only one here and one there who could himself feel in sympathetic imagination the pains endured by his brother and be constrained to mitigate, as best he could, the suffering. But, to most, no thought of prevention or of cure. Man was born to pain and misery, disease and starvation; most men were born to suffer pain for ever: it was the design of Providence. Whence, then, came the eighteenth-century benevolence?

This benevolence has done some foolish things: it has established charities which have become a curse instead of a blessing; there have been set up foolish foundations by ostentatious aldermen. But, on the whole, it has done a great and noble work; it has founded hospitals, and made disease less terrible; it

has lengthened life by giving physicians the means of studying disease; it has made life easier; it has bridged over the gulf between rich and poor, so that at no time has there been in this country the deadly hatred against the rich which has been found abroad; and if it has helped to destroy the independence of the poor, it has kept alive a sense of responsibility among the rich. Above all, for the East End, the benevolence of the eighteenth century created the London Hospital.

He who travels in East London cannot fail to become speedily acquainted, first with its great and noble thoroughfare, and next with the huge building which stands in it, half-way between Whitechapel Church and Bow Church. This is the one hospital for the largest and most remarkable city in the world. Remarkable indeed! To begin with, I believe there is no other city in the world which contains two millions of people, and certainly there is none other which has no government, no institutions, no wealthy people, no civic life, no sense of union, no garrison or regiments of soldiers, no nobility, no presence of royalty, only one theatre, no opera house, no music, no college, no public schools, no fine churches, and no public buildings at all, except a hospital. Let us, at least, rejoice that it has a hospital. In front of the London Hospital, where once were open fields, there is now a vast network of poor streets; at the back there is another; on either side there is another. It stands in the very centre of this great and wonderful city. If its Founders had been gifted with the sense prophetic—perhaps they were—they could not have fixed on a site more central, when they moved their dispensary from Goodman's Fields and set it up in the Whitechapel Road. I have been

permitted to see this great Hôtel Dieu, and for the first time have learned something—one cannot comprehend the whole—of what a great hospital is and what it does. And I propose to tell something—no one can tell all—about the place and the impression it produces.

In the first place, it is not an abode of woe and misery; you will hear and see nothing to terrify or to disgust you. The wards are bright and airy; the patients for the most part seem to be easy and in little pain. When, for instance, you have gone through the wards, bent over the beds, talked with those who lie upon them, there remains in your mind, as a result, a typical face. It is a face whose cheeks are pale and sunk; the mouth is drawn, but that is from past, not from present pain; the eyes are softened, and they brighten at the approach of the Sister or the nurse. It is a face which makes one think upon the Mystery of Suffering. Outside the hospital, you see, this was a face lined and scored with the chronicle of a hard and common life, which we foolishly call an ignoble life, because it has been condemned, like the birds of the air and the beasts of the forest, to seek daily bread for itself and its young, and so has little time for anything besides. When the bread-winner goes back to work, those lines and those scores will return to it; the eyes will harden again, the brows will wrinkle; then will come back again the ugly lines across the forehead, and the stiff, combative setting of the mouth. Disease, which gives a respite to work, and a change to the daily current of thought, and quiet rest, and time to think of something besides the wages and the rent, may be, one perceives, a blessed thing.

Next to the patients one thinks of the doctors and

the nurses. It is a great medical school, of course; the lads who are the students live chiefly in the neighbourhood. They are rough and ready, with more enthusiasm perhaps for their profession than for the manners and customs of the West; they go round the wards with the surgeons and physicians in little troops, serious and attentive. After two or three years of this work, daily watching treatment, diagnosis, operations, they will be "qualified," and will be suffered to go abroad and heal the sick. With most of them their work will be chiefly by rule of thumb. They will follow in the way they have been taught, and cease to learn much more. Some, but only a few, will be seized with the noble enthusiasm and generous ardour of science. It is the same in all professions: one man is content to jog along the road as a country vicar; another learns Latin and Greek, and is satisfied with teaching what he has learned; another reads law, and is happy if he can live by practising it; but here and there one lights upon a Huxley, a Tyndall, a Darwin, a Stanley, a Green, a Clifford. Among these boys at the London Hospital may be the Huxley or the Darwin of the next generation.

And then there are the nurses.

They are dressed in a simple, neat, and rather pleasing uniform, which has the effect of making them all look young. Some of them—though I believe there are none under the age of one or two-and-twenty—seem to be mere girls. They are divided into nurses and probationers. The latter consist partly of ladies, who come to learn nursing, and pay thirteen guineas for a three months' course, during which they have to live with the staff of nurses, and in all respects conform

with their rules ; and partly of the better class of servants. A certain amount of education is necessary to make a good nurse, and, of course, a great deal of intelligence. The first duty is blind obedience to the doctor's orders. It is, therefore, by no means desirable that nurses should be themselves students of medicine. At the same time, no one can be a nurse in a hospital without acquiring a very considerable knowledge of medicine and medical treatment. Their hours of work are, for the day nurses, from seven in the morning until half-past nine in the evening, with two hours " off "—*when they can get it*. There are many days, one learns, when the pressure of the work is so great that the two hours' rest cannot be thought of. They breakfast at half-past six all the year round. They take all their meals together, and at night they sleep in dormitories at the top of the building—three or four beds in each small room, without so much as a chair or a table, only a chest of drawers to hold their clothes. One Sunday in a month they have for a holiday. The night nurses work from half-past nine in the evening until half-past nine in the morning—a twelve hours' spell. To pass one's whole day among the sick and suffering ; to get no rest at all, no time for reading, no opportunity for recreation except once a month ; to have no place for solitude—not even at night—seems a hard life indeed. But I think the hardship is not felt : she who sets her hand to the work of nurse counts upon the hardships of the work ; they are part of the life. I have said that it is not always desirable for a nurse to be a doctor ; but there is always going on, all the year round, methodical and theoretical training of nurses by courses of lectures. One course is given by the Matron on the

general duties and details of nursing; a second course is given on elementary anatomy and surgical nursing; and a third on elementary physiology and medical nursing. The hospital is, in fact, a great training school for nurses as well as for physicians and surgeons.

Above the nurses are the Sisters, of whom there is one for every ward; she takes the name of the ward in which she works. Thus, in the Jews' ward, she is the Sister Rothschild. No one is more important in the hospital than the Sister of a ward; unless it be the Matron. She has her own room in the ward; she never leaves it, night or day; she is always among the patients; on her alone depends the *tone* of the ward. Anyone can imagine, in considering the various and incessant requirements of the patients, how easily things might drift into fuss and haste, with friction of temper and worry of mind both for patients and for nurses. It is the Sister's care that everything is done in order, quietly, without fuss; in the ward there must be no rest and no haste; above all, there must be no temper. I have spoken of the typical face of the patient. There is also a typical face of the nurse. It is a young face—such work as theirs keeps the heart young. I know not if it be a pretty face; because, somehow, a beauty of its own follows such work as theirs. It is a calm and serene face; there is no passion in it, nor the history of any—a virginal face; it is a serious face, yet the sunshine never leaves it. In looking upon that face certain words seem to be heard: as that “in her tongue is the law of kindness,” and that “her children”—they and are all around her, each waiting for her footstep and voice—“her children arise and call her blessed.” She

shall, indeed, have the fruit of her hands in the love of those whose sufferings she has assuaged. A holy and a blessed life indeed!—the more holy because it is not guarded by vows of celibacy, poverty, and obedience, nor turned into a guild, society, or sisterhood, nor placed under the direction of any priest, nor labelled with any form of religion.

The new and modern system of nursing may be regarded as altogether a new departure in charity. The eighteenth century gave us benevolence in the form of money. The worthy old merchants in newly-curled wigs, long waistcoats, and laced ruffles, when their hearts were moved, sat down and wrote a draft upon their bankers. Their sons piously keep up the goodly custom, which, it is hoped, will never be allowed to die out. But a still better way has been introduced in these latter days. There are women in plenty, and men a few, who give not only all the money they can, but also—THEMSELVES. This seems as if we were at last beginning to understand the meaning of an example which has been before the world for a good many centuries. No one, I am told on the best authority, ever tires of this work: it brings out the sympathy, the earnestness, the bravery, the patience, the energy, which is in the nature of each; no one has any time to think about herself, nor can there be any question of money, because the pay is, and should always be, small. There are a hundred and fifty nurses in the hospital; a few go away and get married, and are likely to make all the better wives and mothers because they understand something of the wonderful and complicated machinery which constitutes the human frame; some remain in hospital work; some become district nurses; while

there is no end to the demand for private nurses, who are wanted anywhere.

Thus a new profession has grown up, and one which confers upon those who follow it respect, consideration, and good treatment. All you who have small fortunes, and girls whose future lot is an anxiety to you, whose present listless life is a burden to them, I pray, consider this profession. It costs nothing to learn it. Probationers are admitted free; at the end of a month, if appointed, they receive pay, and are found in everything; or they may be trained for a guinea a week. It is the cheapest profession of any to learn. But not everyone can follow this profession. It is reserved only for the brave and strong, the sympathetic, and the intelligent. Stupid girls, bad-tempered girls, impatient girls, weak-headed girls, hysterical girls, must not think of it; nor must those who desire ease and luxury think of it. But for those who really care for the work, and are strong, and can command themselves, it is a splendid and a noble field. All this has been said over and over again. Yet no one can understand the truth of it and the force of it till he has actually been through the wards of a great hospital and seen for himself what the life really means and what is the work done by these brave women. And to think that only a few years ago nursing was considered a refuge for the destitute, like teaching; anybody could nurse or teach; anyone could sit beside a bed and sleep in a chair, and give a patient a dose once every two hours, and wash his hands in the morning, and drop snuff upon his bread and butter, and drink gin. It is an advance, indeed, in thought and manners which has produced so great a change, and transformed a profession of contempt into one of dignity

and respect, and given to women, who wanted it so much, one more chance of honourable work.

There are twenty Sisters in the London Hospital, and therefore twenty wards. To go through the whole of these wards takes two or three hours. The Matron makes this journey twice daily. Each of the medical wards contains fifty-three beds, and the accident ward sometimes has sixty. About 10,000 accidents occur every year, and of these 2,500 are taken as in-patients, which gives an average of about eight days for each case. Boys over seven are taken into the men's ward, and it is found that the presence of the children has a good effect upon the men. The accident ward is naturally the most cheerful of all the wards. The patients are not suffering from any disease. When their case has been attended to, and the acute stage is passed, they are simply having a lazy time, with nothing to do, plenty to eat, and not too much to drink. One young fellow I saw there, for instance, who had got his left hand entangled in a circular saw, with the result of leaving half of it behind him; the wounds were healing fast, and he was then doing his best to make himself useful and to help the Sister and the nurses. They always want to help; they like to show their sense of what is done for them by giving such services as they can. When they are not helping they are talking politics. Men at the East End are great politicians. Of course they always believe in some dim way that this party or that party are going to do great and wonderful things for themselves, but what it is they do not know; they have not yet learned the lesson that they should first find out what they want for themselves, and then send men to the House in order to get that thing, if it

is to be got. If you listen to their talk you will find that they are for the most part wonderfully ignorant of details and the actual facts of government. I remember being told by a working man that the abolition of perpetual pensions would take the taxes off all kinds of things, such as tea, tobacco, and so forth. But there is one admirable thing about the East-Enders, and indeed about humanity all over the world. He has a passionate desire to see equal justice. Let those who despair of the future remember this, and take courage; upon this instinct greater things will yet be built than the world has yet even imagined. As for reading, in the hospital they prefer newspapers to books. And there is a little detail which may be noticed here. The bound magazines which people charitably send to the hospital are too heavy for patients to hold with comfort; smaller books are wanted. Another thing which seems strange is, that the men in all the wards are passionately fond of flowers. The favourite amusement of Alf and 'Arry is commonly reported to be tearing off branches in Epping Forest, trampling on flowers, and wantonly destroying everything beautiful. Well, I don't think it is, myself; though in large numbers, say at Southend on a Sunday in August, 'Arry is undoubtedly noisy. When he is with his sweetheart he is quite a tender-hearted fellow; and when he gets an accident, and "lays up" in hospital for a spell, he shows, besides other admirable qualities, such as patience, courage, and appreciation of kindness, a great and unaffected love for flowers. The flowers—not nearly enough to go round—are sent every week from a certain Flower Mission Society. With each bundle of flowers is a text. I believe that the men care very little about the text, provided they get the flowers.

Other flowers are sent by private persons. There ought to be a great many more, and would be, if people would only think of it, or merely tell their gardeners to send a hamper of flowers once a week. The patients also want pictures to hang on the bare walls, and, though some have been given, there is still room for many more. There are vast quantities of pictures, needless and superfluous, in people's houses, if they would only think of giving them. As to the kind, they should be pictures cheerful and pleasing to look upon—one would not, for instance, send the portrait of Saint Lawrence on a gridiron, or Saint Sebastian with the arrows sticking in him, to the Accident ward. And it is unnecessary to point out that although one would not willingly instil into the Whitechapel mind the germs of bad taste, there has been as yet but little opportunity for artistic culture, and that the influence of the Bethnal Green Museum has, so far, been extremely limited.

I have touched upon the delicate subject of texts. The fact seems to be that the men at the East End have, as a rule, little or no religion. This is shewn at the hospital, where, though out of respect to the institution they listen respectfully, they do not ask for the chaplain or generally look for his services. The women, however, like prayers, as, poor things, they like everything which points to order, quiet, and decency. The heart of a woman seems always naturally to yearn for a tidy house and a well-ordered household. When a patient is found to be dying, the chaplain is sent for, and I believe his ministrations are seldom refused; also his family are summoned to watch, if they please, by his bedside. Six hundred people die every year in this great building—two every day. You may, if you

please, see the room where they conduct the *post-mortem* examinations and the mortuary. But if 600 die, 6,400 are sent away either cured or relieved without counting out-patients. Here is an army to think upon. Death hurls his murderous diseases upon this great city; they strike down 65,000 of the poor men, women, and children in one year, besides those who are rich enough to pay for their own treatment. Out of the 65,000, 7,000 are brought to the beds of this great house, while the remaining 58,000 become out-patients. Sixty-five thousand! Apart from accidents, this means that four or five per cent. of the population are every year attacked by some disease or other. Now disease is nothing in the world but the result of our own ignorance, vice, or stupidity, and therefore the existence of a hospital is necessary for our own sakes if we are to push back year after year, more and more, the barriers of this ignorance. In the after time, when we are dust and ashes, it will doubtless be argued that the ignorance of the nineteenth century in medicine was inconceivable, colossal; that diseases — diseases of the human frame — were actually prevalent, and that, though they were sometimes cured, they were only beginning to be prevented; and that the miseries of human life must, through the plague and torment of these diseases, since then entirely abolished, have been intolerable. One thing, at least, is certain. When one looks up and down these wards one cannot but feel, perhaps for the first time, how poor, mean, and narrow are most of the lives which are led, and how unbounded is the capacity for happiness with which we are endowed. The love of equal justice is not a greater force in the human soul than the capacity and desire for happiness. Why one

should think of this in a hospital more than elsewhere I know not; perhaps because there are gathered here people of all ages. You seem to have humanity gathered together before you, and telling its tale. This old man with a bronchial disorder—his time is well nigh spent; where are the fruits of his works? Next to him there lies a boy—his time is all before him; beyond, a middle-aged man, taken from his work, whatever that may be; or a young man, or another boy, or another old man—and every one, if you please, with his own story. The nurses have little time for talk with them; but in the dead of night, when the others are asleep, there must be many a strange tale—everybody's story is very, very strange if told truthfully—poured by a wakeful patient into the ear of the nurse. One would like, if one were allowed, to go round the beds with a notebook and ask questions. It is, indeed, to me truly wonderful that medical men have not more often become novelists, writers of realistic stories, and romances of true and actual life. Smollett was a physician. Was not Charles Lever also one? Perhaps, however, physicians mostly despise the Art of Fiction and its professors.

The children lying in their cribs; the women in their wards; the men who are likely to go off their heads and those who have brain disease; the padded room, with its india-rubber walls; the Hebrew wards; the ordinary wards; the wards where patients suspected of infectious diseases are kept—one should see them all before one can understand the organization of the place and the work it is doing. The children's wards are, perhaps, the saddest; yet the little ones lie, for the most part, peaceful and quiet. Some sit up and

play with toys—everybody ought to send toys for the little ones at the hospitals. What if, instead of spending money on Easter eggs—it is too late this year—we were to buy toys instead? Nobody wants Easter eggs, nobody ever did want Easter eggs. Let us buy toys. Think how far the money would go in dolls and horses for the poor little patients in the hospitals. The women, in their wards, look even more patient than the men. Most of them are working women, and young, though a good many are mothers, and there are one or two old women lying among them. One old lady whom I saw was, I am quite sure, a Particular Baptist by conviction; if there is any other form of religion narrower than that sect, perhaps she belonged to it. The Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth, was her's. You could see the fact written on that unbending brow. She was proud of it, and it gave her dignity. We who search and doubt and question may envy her. Next to her was a young lady whom I fancied I had seen before; but on that occasion she was flaunting and laughing on the broad pavement of Whitechapel Road with a friend, and both wore fringes of a pronounced kind, and both were hysterically happy, and laughed loud, and exchanged jokes with young men, and were full of high spirits and mirth and the merriment which one does not associate with quite the nobler kind of life. She looked a good deal better here, somehow. One felt quite sure that it was a good thing for her to have a break in that merry and mirthful life of hers; it would be a better thing for her if she should never be able to go back to it. She looked calm now, and composed; she was even rather pretty. One felt that

the weakness and the absence of the other lady with a fringe, and the contemplation of those nurses who never laugh out loud, and yet always look cheerful, could not fail to do her a great deal of good. For, you see, this hospital is a training school for morals and manners and good behaviour generally, as well as a school of medicine and a school for nurses, and a place where people who are ill get well. As for the Hebrew wards, they are very curious and interesting. They have their own kitchens, their own cooks, and even their own plates. This strange people live everywhere among the nations of the earth, yet they will not belong to them, nor eat with them, nor marry with them. At Passover time the patients have their food on special Passover dishes, kept all the year on purpose; there are an abundance of ceremonies to be observed in the washing of dishes and utensils, as well as in the killing of the animals and the cooking of the food. At certain fasts and festivals candles are lighted in the wards, and the oldest woman present says prayers. They have a Feast of Lights before Christmas; they fast rigorously, even though fasting is likely to do them great mischief, on the Day of Atonement; on the first day of Passover they spread the table with beef, mutton, and eggs; the oldest in the ward prays; they sing hymns in Hebrew from eight to ten; they light their candles; they have everything new. The new blankets are kept for Passover; everything that can be renewed is renewed for Passover; and six weeks afterwards there comes a Feast of Flowers. There was a little blind boy in the ward—I know not what was wrong with him—who was everybody's favourite; there was a Polish Jew who could only talk his own language, which is Schmussen, a

tongue but little known, albeit spoken by two millions or so ; there was a specimen of the "hospital bird," a creature who loves to return and to make his nest and to stay there as long as they will let him stay. "He has been fourteen times already in the hospital," said the Sister, looking as severe as she could. "Yes, Sister," he replies ; "but it is not my fault, is it ?" Yet he looked as if he liked to be there.

Of all the patients I saw but one who really seemed unhappy ; she was a Syrian girl from Beyrout, a girl with an olive complexion and long almond eyes full of meaning, and possible passion, and possible wisdom. How very, very wise she would look at ninety or so, when the cheeks and forehead are lined and creased with a thousand lines and creases, and nothing is left of her youth but the depth and fire of those eyes ! She was getting better, but she was homesick ; she wanted to go back to Syria. Her brother, a medical student, came twice a day to see her ; everybody was kind, but—she wanted to go home again.

A great hospital such as this can never be suffered to die. If no one else supported it, the working men of the East End would have to keep it going by their own exertions. In fact, one looks forward to the time when the working men will maintain by their own contributions their own hospitals. There are nearly half a million working men in the area covered by the London Hospital. If these men would only give four shillings apiece every year, or a shilling every quarter, the hospital would have just the income which it ought to have. The contributions of the people, however, do not as yet amount to more than two thousand pounds a year. Since, therefore, the working classes have not

yet learned that they ought to support these institutions, the old eighteenth century method—the benevolent cheque—must still be followed.

I have spoken of flowers, toys, and books. These should all be sent. There are also other things much wanted, but the Committee cannot buy them. Among these things are chairs—easy and comfortable chairs—for the patients when they are able to get out of bed. But no one should send chairs without first asking the Matron what kind of chair she would like for her patients.

All this has been written about the London Hospital, but it will do for any other. It is not time thrown away, but very much the reverse, to visit such a place, if only to learn what true and noble work can be done by women, and what a splendid school of all the virtues as well as of science a well-ordered hospital may be.

Lastly, I have to propose another kind of work for idle women to do, actually a new profession. There are a great many ladies who have nothing to do at all; their lives are languid for want of interest; they cannot be always learning things. Besides, learning things becomes wearisome when there is no object in the study. Now, I have heard of a really genuine opening and a new kind of occupation. First, it is real work, and not a sham; next, it is honourable work; thirdly, it is unpaid work—think of that! lastly, it is work which gives very great happiness to the people for whom it is done. On all these grounds it cannot but commend itself to the attention of English ladies. The work is—to go and read to the patients. I believe there is room in the hospitals of London for a small army of such workers. Remember, it must be real work, not

amateur work ; it must be followed as a duty ; ladies must not drop in now and then, once a fortnight, once a month, when they have got no other engagements ; they must have fixed hours of work ; they must engage and pledge themselves as much as if they were regularly engaged and regularly paid as servants of the staff, and as if their livelihood was concerned in the conscientious and exact performance of their duties. It is not expected that they should go every day and all day, but on certain days and for certain hours. Money, flowers, pictures, easy chairs, toys, books—all may be given for the alleviation of the sick and suffering ; but the best thing that can be given—O ladies of tender and compassionate heart—is YOURSELVES.

WALTER BESANT.





TIGHT

GUTTERS.