

## **Appeal on behalf of the proposed Hospital for Scik Children in Edinburgh.**

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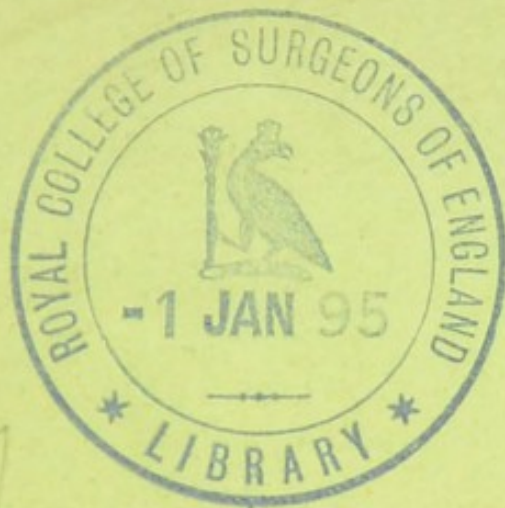
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C. Wilson

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ON BEHALF OF THE

Proposed Hospital for Sick Children

IN

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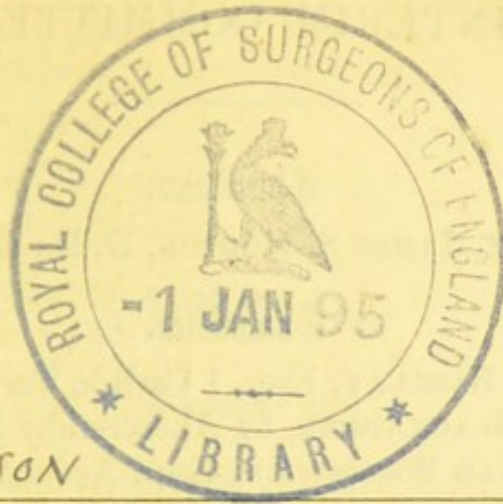
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*Charles Wilson*

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# APPEAL

IN BEHALF OF

## THE PROPOSED HOSPITAL FOR SICK CHILDREN IN EDINBURGH.

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THE time has arrived when, after a preliminary discussion of the most cheering tendencies, a direct appeal is to be made to the public on behalf of the proposed Hospital for Sick Children.

It would be unjustifiable to advance so weighty a claim upon charity as that necessary for the object contemplated, were it not that the circumstances upon which the claim is founded are so truly urgent that the real danger of reproach must be in remaining longer inactive. We have no more authentic information regarding the extent of human suffering and mortality in Scotland, and especially in our chief cities, than that which is conveyed to us in the periodical reports of our Registrar-General, while we have obviously none which is equally widely grounded. In the supplement to the returns for 1858 we are informed that of 23,420 deaths at all ages in our eight principal towns, 11,290, or upwards of 48 per cent., were of children under five years. In Edinburgh, the proportion was nearly 41 per cent.; and in Leith it was almost 50 per cent. Were the infantile mortality recorded that of the poorer classes exclusively,



its amount, enormous as it is, must have been stated at even a far higher proportion; but it is given merely as it has extended over our communities in the mass, including all ranks of society. The rates differ little from what has been the computed average for the last three years, and they reveal to us truths pregnant with solemn reflection to every earnest thinker.

It is not enough to consider merely that the frightful extent of infantile mortality thus disclosed to us is tantamount, with a very subordinate measure of allowance for increments of population, to the melancholy fact that nearly a half of all children born in our cities is at present consigned to destruction before their sixth year. We must look further than this, and trace many of the survivors through a subsequent life of mental and physical decrepitude and suffering; while, in examining the more immediate consequences, we cannot escape picturing to ourselves the many wretched homes which sickness and death, never far distant, have thus impoverished and rendered desolate. Sad as this mortality is, it might have been one to which, under the divine Providence, we were constrained to submit by a law of our nature; but it is with a far different lesson that its great variations everywhere, according to condition and locality, demonstrate its dependence upon preventable causes, such as humanity is bound to consider and recognise, that it may use the highest order of appliances suggested by medical science for their removal.

In other countries of Europe this condition of infantile fatality and suffering has been felt even more severely than among ourselves; and here, it is trusted, may be found the reason that they have anticipated us in the ardour of their endeavours to abate its violence. Where the plea of distress



was that of the innocence and helplessness of childhood, it only required to be heard to secure a response in countless directions; and there is now scarcely a nation in Europe, however little advanced generally in refinement or civilisation, where we cannot point to at least one, and sometimes to many, institutions set apart expressly for the relief of the diseases of tender years, and everywhere warmly confided in by the classes among whom they meet the objects of their benevolence. Many of these institutions serve also as sources of valuable instruction for the physician, who thus carries with him the profit of their lessons into other spheres of society, and so repays, in the homes of the rich, the generosity which enabled him first to carry solace into those of the poor.

To a certain class of minds, whose existence, however, it would be repulsive to contemplate, the question might possibly arise, Whether, if there be this appalling infantile mortality, representing nearly half the deaths in our Scottish cities, a sufficient number of children do not still survive? It would not be enough to repel this as a harsh and cruel question, such as no kind-hearted man, and no mother of any description, could ever ask. Far more than this, it may be pronounced that such a question rests upon a complete misconception of the facts as they are. By a law of population, than which none is more intelligible or more thoroughly established by experience, it is shown everywhere that, other things being equal, the more numerous the infantile deaths the more numerous are the births. Thus the population, instead of gliding evenly into mature life, eddies, as it were, in its stage of inefficiency and weakness; and we have not fewer children, but fewer men, and these of a less sound and vigorous type. There is, therefore, much, in every sense,



to be achieved by the better study and more successful treatment of the diseases of childhood ; but the opportunity for this cannot be supplied to an adequate extent, or with the proper adjuncts, by the medical profession itself, however zealous have been its labours ; and the humane public, as if conscious of a responsibility, must come to its aid.

It is under these circumstances at home, and with this example abroad, that an appeal is now made to the humanity and liberality of the inhabitants of Edinburgh, which it is trusted also will not be unregarded beyond the city, by the benevolent, in whatever rank and station, throughout the country. There are already many splendid charities for children in our capital, but none of these contemplate the child as a sufferer, or assuage his distresses where they are the most keenly and calamitously felt. It is, therefore, in behalf of a new class of claimants that it is hoped to awaken a new range of sympathies ; and as these connect themselves with the best feelings and qualities of our nature, and as the address to them is sustained by facts of the deepest and saddest significance, it is not feared that the result will be otherwise than commensurate with the necessities which have urged the application. Thus, on such a theme, while we cannot divest it of its association with the feelings, and still less slight their influence, we seek and find in the judgment our most solid support. We cannot rationally tolerate an evil, which, for the simple reason that it exists, we know has not yet been adequately encountered ; and we can have no surer conviction than that our further progress in this department of the healing art, as in every other, must be in proportion to the extent and quality of the opportunities permitted for the elaboration and diffusion of our knowledge. To remain merely passive in the face of truths so certain and



so momentous would be a dereliction: to frustrate them in their due influence by frivolous objections, where they cannot be opposed by better founded obstacles, would have more the complexion of a crime.

But it has been objected, as a fault to the kind of institution now contemplated, that it seeks to separate the mother from her offspring; leaving the one to yearn for the object of her care and affection, and the other to pine drearily for home. Alas! it is in that very home that the children whose fate we lament droop and die. Not every hearth is cheerful, and blessed with warmth, and light, and sweetness; and all sick pallets are not surrounded with noiseless glidings, smoothed with gentle hands, tended with mild whisperings, or watched by kindly, anxious faces. Where poverty is not hard and cold, and its touch blighting and fatal, or where affection is not bereft of comforts and powerless, who would interpose between the child and a mother's love? But in the reverse of this, or in the worse alternative where vice has grown familiar along with penury, and the mother's heart is callous for her offspring because she is hopeless for herself, who would not offer succour where the plea was the stronger because it was voiceless, and thus endeavour to mitigate the parent's trials or revive her fondness? And even the usually frugal and contented, if humble, home is painfully changed by the intrusion of illness; for the narrow resources of the household produce a double calamity, by at once throwing discomfort on the healthy and aggravation of suffering on the sick. This is not fancy, just as the infant ailings, and deaths, and funerals, with their cost, and care, and complicated misery, are not fancy. It is to meet such distresses that a Sick Children's Hospital presents its refuge; and it need not offer its benefits to those who can command the means



of comfort and safety for the sufferer at home. The true question with the others, and with the sole fitting class of inmates, must too frequently be, whether there shall be a short parting, with an easily reached source of hope through the soothing attentions, and healthful and reviving influences, in the refuge of the children's hospital; or whether the parting shall be for ever, and the refuge the grave. Yet, even with the most destitute, there will be many cases which need not enter the wards of the institution, and can be efficiently treated as out-patients: while the nursling, above all, would thus find its fittest attention, for it could seldom be prudently, in what may be often a choice of evils, separated from the mother; and to receive both as a united charge into the hospital would, though it may become advisable as an exception, prove too heavy a burden as a rule.

The design of the proposed institution may be shortly noted as follows:—

I. To provide for the reception, maintenance, and medical treatment of the children of the poor, during sickness, within a cheerfully and salubriously placed building, having such adjuncts of open garden and playground attached as are everywhere recognised to be peculiarly necessary to establish the fragile health in the early periods of life; and to furnish with advice and medicine, as out-patients, others whom it may be unnecessary or impracticable to receive into the hospital.

II. To promote the advancement of medical science with reference to the diseases of childhood, by permitting these to be studied where grouped in sufficient numbers, and thus brought into close relation to each other under the observation of those who are willing to devote to them a particular attention; and especially to provide for the more efficient



instruction of students in this essential department of medical knowledge.

III. To diffuse among all classes of the community, and chiefly to impart to mothers among the poor, a better acquaintance with the management of infants and children during health or illness; and, in particular, to assist in the education and training of women in the special duties of children's nurses.

IV. To conduce ultimately, in this way, not only, it is trusted, to the mitigation of the virulence of epidemics, and to the saving of myriads of lives, now hopelessly sacrificed, but to the promotion of habits of decency and order among all within the sphere of the institution's influence; as well as to aspire to the cultivation of the affections of the heart, by surrounding the patients with acts of kindness, the recollections of which they will carry home with them, and possibly retain long afterwards.

These objects cannot be accomplished, or even attempted, without the grateful sense of reward which always attends the consciousness of being engaged in a humanely natural and important duty. To secure their attainment, experience tells us that no institution can be held as fully adequate, which does not afford accommodation to from fifty to sixty patients; and it is to an establishment of this magnitude, therefore, that the promoters of the undertaking earnestly look forward. Such an amount of accommodation would only be half that sought by the analogous institution in London, which, however, is yet far from having reached its contemplated scope; and it would be less, moreover, than is supplied in several Continental towns, widely inferior to Edinburgh in extent and splendour. A suitably placed building, already in a certain degree appropriate, or capable



of being modified as required, might possibly be obtained by lease or purchase; or, what would be undoubtedly preferable, a fitting edifice might be reared at a cost which may be estimated at about £6000. For the maintenance of the hospital afterwards, in full and complete efficiency, it is calculated that an annual income of £1200 would suffice. But, while aiming at this completeness of plan, as desirable for the great purposes of the institution, it will now, with the existing conviction for its necessity, be commenced upon whatever scale, and with whatever means, the public generosity may provide; leaving it afterwards to bespeak its own claims to a continuance, or an increase, of confidence and favour.

The picture before us would have been indeed a sad one, had there been nowhere a light of charity and mercy to point a gleam upon the darkness. To raise the necessary funds abroad, the public generosity has been everywhere found sufficient; aided, as it has been, by the legacies of benevolent testators, and further sustained by a liberality which has often found its congenial source in the gratitude inspired by the escape from a domestic affliction, or in the sympathies arising where a loss has been endured. Thus a parent bestows a donation, often a very considerable one, on the death or on the restoration of a child; while not a few wealthy individuals mark their good will by each endowing one or more beds in the hospital, which bear ever after a plate inscribed with their names, in grateful recognition and remembrance of their bounty. To effect this in Vienna, a sum of 3000 florins, or £300 sterling, is required for each bed; the interest of this amount being held sufficient for the perpetual maintenance of a single patient in the charity. But, on the other hand, besides this more costly, but most



genial, of memorials, the smallest contributions, whether pecuniary or of useful products or services, are always alike warmly acknowledged from those less affluent benefactors, whose donations must rather be measured by their means than by their will.

Thus harbingered, the project is henceforward committed to the benevolence of the community; and that, it is repeated, in its widest sense, for the necessities to which it addresses itself are in many respects not less national than local, and the affections before which it has a right to plead have their home everywhere. In how far its purpose can be carried out, it is for the public to determine. On whatever scale they permit the institution to commence, whether adequate or inadequate, they may at least depend upon the resources provided being applied energetically, economically, and prudently. Let, then, the helplessness of the child be acknowledged as the foremost plea which humanity can urge for a special attempt to alleviate its sufferings; and let those who are ever busy in guarding the interests, and soothing the distresses, of mature age now own a still deeper responsibility, when they are thus made cognizant of the far heavier afflictions endured by myriads with reference to whom we are nothing if we are not the natural guardians, and whose weakness has no refuge but in our strength. And it is a cheering reflection, that wherever the man has his truly noble and natural impulse, the Christian will not be found destitute of his divine precept. There are in Scripture no more touching passages than those in which our Saviour inculcates the love and guardianship of little children; and when we have thus assured to us His blessing, we may look forward with confidence to the issue.

*C.W.*



