

were fast asleep. What's that story the children are so fond of? Isn't there something in it about a boy who was spirited away to a palace of snow, and yet didn't realise that he was blue with cold?"

"Yes: Jennet is always reading it to the younger ones."

"Well, that boy is rather like your sister. She isn't at all conscious that she is sitting in the middle of an icy lake, and has a frozen heart. She feels quite comfortable, I can assure you. And, Kate, dear, you must leave off fretting about her, and just quietly let her alone."

"I will try," returned Mrs. Fowler, meekly. "But it's hard, Robert—it's very hard indeed. I do love her still."

(To be continued.)

## OUR FLOWER MISSION.

By A. W.

IN the many hospitals scattered throughout London and the larger towns of England and Scotland, thousands of suffering invalids lie day after day, separated from their friends, and tended only by professional nurses, whose time is too much occupied by their duties to permit of their doing much to amuse or beguile the weary, idle hours to which their patients are condemned. Even among the adult men and women a very large proportion are insufficiently educated, and unable to lessen the tedium of confinement by the aid of literature; while in other cases the result of illness is a lassitude which takes away for a time the possibility of effort to undertake reading which would at other times be enjoyed without much mental exertion. And if this is the case with the grown-up inmates of these benevolent institutions, how much more is it so with those children, the brightness of whose young lives has been darkened by disease, and shadowed with suffering. Surely it is a noble work to attempt in any way to bring to these patients in hospitals some of the consolations of friendship; to carry to them some rays of light from outside, which may diffuse a little sunshine upon the dull lives of the suffering inmates.

The object of this paper is to show our girl readers how an experiment for this purpose was successfully undertaken and accomplished in a hospital with which the writer was at one time connected; and to point out to them how, by the exercise of a little self-denial, and a little effort, they may imitate that example; and by so doing not only benefit those to whom they carry pleasure and comfort, but also exercise some influence, small though it may be, in improving the social character and circumstances of their poorer neighbours in general.

The writer of this paper was at one period of his life a resident physician in the hospital of a large county town, at a time when some thought was being given to the rather unæsthetic condition of hospital wards in general. A movement had been promoted, chiefly by the medical students who carried on their studies in the wards of the hospital, to provide engravings and other pictures for the walls; and some of the nurses, who took a pride in the cleanliness and neatness of the rooms under their control, had bought some plants in flower-pots, and had them blooming on various tables. The idea occurred to a lady who was one day visiting the hospital, that an exceedingly nice effect would be produced if, during the summer, regular supplies of cut flowers could be introduced in all the wards, and replaced as they withered. Being one of those energetic individuals whose charitable

acts do not terminate in good resolutions which are never fulfilled, this good genius of the hospital proceeded to plan an arrangement for carrying out the idea which had occurred to her, and with the aid of various friends, some of whom lived in the suburbs of the town and had large gardens, it was arranged that any flowers which could be spared should be delivered one afternoon every week at a room which was to be hired for the purpose. Happily a charitable society in which this lady was interested had a room which was not required on certain afternoons, and an offer being made to allow this room to be utilised, this part of the scheme was carried out without any cost. But the collection of the flowers was only one part of the plan; there remained the rather more difficult part of the distribution, and some prejudices had to be overcome before a body of young ladies could be obtained to meet, and after arranging the flowers, carry them to the hospital and enter the wards with them. The general public has a very vague and erroneous idea of the usual appearance of the wards in a hospital. Very many people seem to fancy that if they enter one they will be faced by all forms of repulsive illness, and by the groans and tears of suffering patients, and the young ladies whom our friend now tried to interest in the cause had their full share of such prejudices. Some, however, were persuaded to volunteer their assistance, and the relatives of some of the staff who were in a position to know better were induced to come, and in the end a staff of from twelve to sixteen young ladies were enrolled. These undertook to meet weekly in the room to which the flowers were sent, to arrange them into bouquets, and to visit the hospital afterwards and distribute them among the wards. The permission of the superintendent and staff of the hospital was obtained and an hour fixed for their visit at a time when the ward cleaning would be finished for the day, the doctors' visits completed, and the work of the dressers and others also finished. The work commenced with probably a very incomplete idea of how it was to be done, but in a short time became organised in a very complete manner. Flowers were sent in such abundance by friends who became aware of the movement that during the first summer, not only were there large central bouquets for every ward of the hospital, but when time offered it was possible to tie up a small bouquet for each individual patient, and very much prized these small gifts were.

But the small bouquet presented to each individual patient had a much greater value than intrinsically belonged to it, a value which was only discovered after a little time. These little flowers served the purpose of an introduction to short conversations between the patients and the young ladies who brought them; and as many patients were in the hospital for many weeks, necessarily quite a friendship arose between the visitors and those sufferers whom they visited weekly, to whom they brought flowers, and whom they cheered by their kindly interest and gentle sympathy. The writer can testify to the manner in which these little flowers were cherished from week to week, and, even from a medical point of observation, can tell how the weekly visit, soon ardently anticipated by all the patients, exercised a beneficial influence upon their physical health. Another happy element now was added to the distribution of flowers. Shortly before this movement was inaugurated the city to which the writer refers had been visited by the American evangelists, Messrs. Moody and Sankey, and the hymns which were introduced to the notice of this country by Mr. Sankey had taken a deep hold upon many of the lower classes of the population. Not only the lower classes, for many of those

in higher positions had appreciated the sweet simplicity of many of the hymns, and had recognised their adaptability for those who were unable to sympathise with a higher class of devotional music. Some of the young ladies who were assisting in the flower mission, as it soon came to be called, had been members of a choir formed by Mr. Sankey on his visit to the city; and it occurred to them that some of the patients might like to hear a few hymns sung in a quiet manner when the distribution of flowers was completed. The experiment was made; without any instrumental accompaniment these girlish voices were raised in song throughout the wards of the hospital; and this addition to the mission turned out a complete success. Requests were constantly made for more hymns, until the singers' voices were almost exhausted; and even those patients who were very ill seemed to enjoy the sweet music, which, quiet and simple as it was, did not in any way disturb or harass them.

That the flowers and singing were thoroughly appreciated by the patients, was proved in a most satisfactory manner to the writer. Part of his duty in the hospital was to issue permits to those of the patients who were sufficiently convalescent to leave the hospital for two or three hours in the afternoon; and, as a rule, from six to eight of these permits were asked for every afternoon. But on the day on which the flower mission was expected, he was rarely asked for even one permit; the patients being unwilling to be absent during the looked-for visit. He can bear testimony also to the fact that in no case was the influence on the invalids other than beneficial. If some patient happened to be very ill, a request might have to be made that no singing should take place in that particular ward; but the distribution of flowers took place; and the short conversations to which they led up, and the inquiries and mutual interest excited, were not at all interfered with. And with the vast majority of patients, many of whom are accustomed to a wandering and eventful life, the weekly relief from the monotony of the ordinary régime of hospital existence was an occurrence to be hopefully anticipated for some time before the day, and joyfully remembered afterwards. At a time when, perhaps more than at any other, attention is being given to the sad conditions under which most of the poor classes exist, and to the chasm which existed between the well-to-do classes and those who have to struggle for a bare existence, any means, however humble and small, which may present themselves for alleviating that sadness, for bridging that chasm, should be taken advantage of and utilised.

And I would be wrong indeed if I left it to be assumed that all the advantages of such a scheme are on the side of the hospital patients. Rather would I point out how such opportunities of witnessing the patience with which such hospital patients bear their sufferings, of sympathising with their sorrows, and of lightening the tedium of their sickness, must waken the minds of the visitors to the responsibilities which lie upon them as members of a civilised and of a Christian community. It has too much been the habit to bring up girls in the belief that their main object in life should be to conduct themselves with propriety, and consult their own interests and happiness; and it has been left out of view almost entirely that they, equally with men, have sacred duties, duties to society at large, which, though of a different kind, are of equal importance as regards the happiness of the community at large. The theoretical idea of a perfect commonwealth is one in which every individual works in harmony with others for the common happiness and good, or, to repeat the word in another form, for the common weal.