

## HOW WE MANAGED OUR CRËCHE.

By ONE WHO HELPED.



HAT are we to do with the babies, is a question that is always cropping up. Never, perhaps, more strongly forcing itself into notice, than in all and any attempts made to help the poor to help themselves. And that idea should always be kept well to the front, in all the efforts our girls

make on behalf of the struggling working-classes. They do not so much require assistance from outside, as to be kindly shown how much power after all lies with themselves to be brought into use by forethought, patience, self-denial, and thrift.

We had a very good ragged-school meeting three nights every week. (It will be as well not to localise our district for many reasons.) By much patience our unruly scholars (as they had been at first) were drilled into quietness and order, which we teachers prided ourselves would not be easily equalled in a school of higher pretensions. But the rags, they did sometimes present a picture rivalling Dorothy Tennant's sketches. When they were clean, we felt thankful; and, except with newcomers, who knew not "the ways of the place," we had at last very little reason to complain of dirt.

Some of our helpers volunteered to teach needlework to any of the girls who were not otherwise employed, and who would be willing to spare one or two afternoons each week. Then the situation became complicated, for several mothers came, and begged not to be shut out, merely because they were mothers, and not strictly girls. It was really a reasonable request; even though to young hands only making their experience, it was embarrassing enough. No mothers' meeting had been tried in that district, and for so far, we knew no married ladies within easy reach who could be counted on absolutely for assistance, if such an experiment should be made.

However, we agreed among ourselves to turn no woman away—matron or maid. To tempt our elder scholars to the sewing-class—which, after the novelty had worn off, promised not to be a great success—we resolved upon a little bribe. We made a rule, which, on explaining to them, they passed themselves unanimously, that for our first "season" only such articles of clothing as could be washed should be brought, and that everything must be clean, though we did not insist upon all being ironed. Half the price per yard that we paid for the calico or print each sewer must give us, and we gave one half-yard at our own cost as a small *bonne bouche*. Some of the dilapidations were certainly very extensive, and we were fairly astounded, when, after a few weeks, one of our most regular girls and best workers (if such a term really applied to any!) triumphantly displayed an article of inner attire entirely made out of our half-yards and not at all badly joined either. She must have taken the trouble of unpicking at home the work of each Tuesday and Friday afternoon, and so getting without payment an unmended, new, though pieced, garment.

The ingenuity and ingenuousness fairly astonished and amused us. We found no fault, but we said: "This must not occur again."

Then arose our great crying trouble—those babies. Many of our big girls could not attend except in charge of "the baby" (who must be left with some one) while mother went out for her day's work. If the mother herself came to us, it simply meant that the infant was too young to be left, and when four or five were brought and one was fractious—Oh, dear; but it was a very great trial to us all!

Our first plan, which had worked well, had been, after giving out material, threading needles and fixing seams, for two of us to take turns in reading a suitable entertaining book, while others watched the workers and saw that all their wants were supplied silently and at once. We allowed no conversation during the reading. Very often we held a sleeping baby to set the mother's hands free for work. But, if it was a screaming struggling atom of humanity, we felt very helpless and our meeting became disturbed, instead of the pleasant restful hour we hoped and tried to make it. Then one kind lady, to whom we usually confided our troubles, offered to send down to our room an old, large mattress and some disused clean plaid shawls. She thought we might coax the mothers into letting their babies lie there and kick about. From her own home experiences, she said that most of them would fall asleep as the double result of comfort and exercise.

Oh, the curious differences of even tiny babes! When we got the mothers to put half a dozen down "all of a row," as they said, "and looking just like a picture," one would kick and another doubled up its mite of a fist and struck out bravely, while a third rolled to the very edge and was only just stopped in time before it turned over on to the floor. The restlessness of babies was very perplexing. We pitied the mothers more than ever.

So we hid back to our trusty counsellor, and out of the gift of the mattress evolved the idea of a *crèche*. That it was of immense use and grew in popularity after a few trials, was certain. The poor souls came early so that "baby" might have "pick and choice" of the corner least worn and handiest to the mother's seat. Could we get, not one large mattress, but several small ones, not laid on the floor, but spread on discarded cots from out-grown nurseries? would our friends believe in us and rally round us to the extent of trusting us with funds? For our ragged school itself was only a patched up builder's shed partitioned off to suit our requirements, and without any possible room which by any alteration or accommodation could take in this new growth. So, if our plan could be made to work, it meant that we must pay a trifle of rent for a room big enough for our women, our cots and ourselves. And if such could be compassed, why not strike out boldly at once and take the poor little infants every day? Already many sighs had been drawn and very plain hints given. Our infant monitress (for our ragged school had increased, and we had a paid, most efficient, kindly mistress every week-day but Saturday) already was hampered with babies in the charge of babies! As we visited we found dreadful-looking old hags with four, five, six infants to "tend" while their mothers earned daily bread, and we had good reason for believing that more gin than milk was used by such caretakers. The

Gentlemen's Committee, who had generously guaranteed the salary of our mistress, were not anxious to undertake additional responsibilities. Wise heads were shaken, and we were told that all these horrible worn-out creatures, who made a few pence by "taking care" (Heaven forgive them!) of these little ones "who could tell no tales," would rise in open rebellion and circulate dreadful stories about our *crèche*. We were sanguine and resolved to try.

Two ladies who heard about our intended experiment, but who were personally unknown to any of us, each sent us £5. "We are committed to the venture now," we said, one and all. Forthwith we engaged two little rooms opening with folding doors, in a house at the most frequented part of our district, and near to the factory where many of our women and girls worked. One of our number had had her eye on it from the moment our scheme was broached. The house—four rooms, mite of a kitchen and about a dozen feet square of ground at the back—was owned by a most respectable woman who earned a scanty living as a designer. Her sister lived with her when not out on engagements as a monthly nurse. Both were growing old, and being gradually left out in the cold by younger and more capable hands in both lines of life. More than that—the nurse was suffering from severe varicose veins, and night watching began to tell upon her. If only she would not be too grand for our first matron! She knew all about children, and could be trusted so entirely.

The two sisters were not as hopeful as we were, but the desirability of a *crèche* they said they had often discussed. They told us sad stories of little ones, maimed, injured for life; days actually cut short by the ignorance, carelessness or wilfulness of many of these so-called care-takers. It was something, we felt, to have as our earliest helpers those who recognised the advantage of such an attempt.

Seven cots in divers stages of dilapidation were sent to our "day nursery for infants," as we called our two rooms. All but one were long enough, so "Nurse" declared for two babies—if laid as she termed it "heels to heels." The mattresses we made—cutting up our first gift and buying flock for the rest. Good clean flock, which needed only a little pulling out, we bought for 2s. the fourteen pounds. The same tradesman gave us strong unbleached linen, not of course so good as tick, or as neat in appearance. But as each must be covered with some sort of blanket, we agreed with "Nurse" it would do nicely for our start. We paid 5s. for all we required, and as a contribution to our experiment, which he warmly commended, he sent us a large square of carpet, much faded by being in his window, but otherwise perfect, which exactly covered our front room floor. We made small pillows of flock too, but our cot blankets cost us £2. We purchased for 5s. a little square steady table with deep drawer, "Nurse" put in her own rocking-chair, and again by begging, we had four tiny chairs with rods to keep in the babies sent to us. A coat of varnish made them respectable, as green enamel had done the beds. About 3s. was laid out on these items.

Nurse's salary troubled us most. It was sure to be our heaviest claim, and our cherished £10 had its limit. After much consideration, we decided to offer her 15s. a week for three months. It was impossible as yet to count with anything like certainty as to what sum

the pence paid by the women per day would amount to. That must depend upon the popularity of the nursery and its matron.

As will be evident, we girls were saved from a number of small items which would have made a considerable total if we had had to provide them ourselves.

Small saucepans for food, basins, spoons, in fact, kitchen and table utensils, however scanty, would involve some outlay. All these necessities (of a much better kind, too, than we should have thought it prudent to buy at our first start) Nurse and her sister had, and pressed upon us as their own contribution. It has not been mentioned that we appealed to all our friends for old table, bed and chamber linen. And between turning, patching, and darning, we started with what Nurse herself admitted to be a very fair supply. We had been so afraid that she would despise our small economies, but a wiser adviser and more capable willing heart and hands never venture had. She insisted upon a double inventory being taken of all the "public property," and further suggested that two of us should carefully examine the linen press once a month, and arrange some afternoon for the neat repairing of all worn and weak articles. Her sister undertook our washing.

By careful inquiries we found that the mothers who left their little ones to the care of old cronies paid different sums; the least was 2d. when the baby was so young that the mother had to attend to it during each day herself; up to 3d. if she left with it in the morning whatever food or milk she thought sufficient, or 4d. if she provided nothing whatever.

We took no baby under 3d., as the trouble with such tiny infants is very great, and as Nurse explained there were such very bad habits that must be cured, if the nursery was to be kept nice. We agreed, on her advice, aided by the few matrons of our circle who from being amused had grown interested in our plans, not to encourage any mothers to bring food they had prepared. We found from a little tour of inspection that it was always most unappetising and frequently quite sour from want of care. So we agreed to charge a uniform rate of 4d. per day.

Then we framed a few rules which we had

printed (8s. per 1,000) and distributed through the district. First naturally came the rate of pay, and the fact (which was sternly enforced despite every plea) that the money must be laid down when the child was left. Then the hours, from 7 in the morning to 7 at night. 1d. for every extra hour, and no deduction for half days. The nursery was to be closed on Saturday and Sundays. Next, our Nurse was to be at liberty to bath any infant whose state in her judgment required it—a rule against which endless protests were made, and excuses offered, but to which Nurse stood firm, and we, of course when appealed to, as we often were, supported her. Then, that no habitual drunkard should be permitted to bring her child there, and that only children born in wedlock should be received. The last rule was sorrowfully pressed upon us by repeated painful circumstances.

So the two neat spotlessly clean rooms were opened one Monday morning. All the cots were in the back parlour, whose window was shaded by washed-out Madras muslin curtains. A blind and rollers had been given for the front room with two really pretty old-fashioned chintz curtains. The Tay square was spread—a rough towel by the side of a large nursery basin (with a chip out of the brim), one of the most useful gifts, a tiny fire—even though it was April; but the idea of all the possible employment for our women by the universal house-cleaning had suggested an early opening. Some broken toys lay about in tempting variety, and a large milk bowl, already creaming over, was inviting. Nurse begged to be left all to herself for the first few hours; so when the two girls who had agreed to visit that week (and we had all settled to take an active oversight in turn week by week) went down in the early forenoon—we found, after all our elaborate preparations—just five babies—"Two threepennies and three fourpennies," Nurse said, smiling at our blank disappointment; adding, "and very well too for a beginning." And we had looked for quite a crowd!

One was asleep in a cot, "tired out by the good and necessary wash it had received."

We were told afterwards, that when the mother came for it at night and soundly rated Nurse for "her impudence in daring to interfere

with her child," she cooled down as she looked at its pretty face, and admitted that dirt didn't improve it! A second was scrambling after a ball and screaming with delight. A third, wan and half-starved, wouldn't rest except in Nurse's arms, and already patted her face with skinny hand. The others, stolid, amazed, but comfortable.

Next day sixteen were brought in, and before the week ended, success seemed certain. Taking the average of weeks, except in the height of summer when families are away from home and women's work is slack, the pence covered all outlay for food, and left a small margin towards wages, replacing of goods worn or broken, and the like. Only in a few cases did any drunken or disorderly woman create trouble, and the fear of malicious stories, after two attempts which were sternly and promptly disposed of, died away. An assistant became necessary and the elder children of our ragged school were only too eager to be allowed to come, a week at a time, to help mind the babies, and gain a little experience themselves.

We should hardly like to give instances of little lives brightened by our Nurse, or say how many delicate stunted children developed into fairly strong healthy boys and girls. A young doctor volunteered to be our honorary "consultant," and did us immense service by authorising the prompt expulsion of any child who seemed either to be sickening with some common ailment, or who was brought too soon after recovery for the safety of the rest.

One testimony may be given, the most emphatic perhaps. The landlord of a public-house (their name was Legion), applied to our Nurse after several months, to be allowed to put up a notice "purveyor of spirits to the day nursery." He declared we had seriously interfered with his trade, and driven many of his old steady customers clean away. So he demanded this by way of compensation, and retired in a sad state of wrathful disgust when he was assured that no spirits in any form were ever tasted by any person about our crèche. We found that voluntary contributions of about £30 a year sufficed amply to meet all necessary expenses. That is, of course, in addition to the pence paid for the children day by day.

M. B. M.

VARIETIES.

A FAITHFUL DOOR-KEEPER.

The famous Scotch divine, Dr. Norman Macleod, has left the following account of one with whom he was for several years associated—a plain, honest, God-fearing and God-serving man, who doubtless many times uttered the words of the Psalmist, "I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."

"Tom Baird, the carter, the beadle of my working-man's church," says Dr. Macleod, "was as noble a fellow as ever lived, God-fearing, true, unselfish.

"I shall never forget what he said when I asked him to stand at the door of the working-man's congregation, and when I thought he was unwilling to do so in his working-clothes.

"If," said I, "you do not like to do it, Tom, if you are ashamed—"

"Ashamed!" he exclaimed, as he turned round upon me. "I'm mair ashamed o' yoursel', sir. Do ye think that I believe, as ye know I do, that Jesus Christ, who died for me, was stripped o' His raiment on the cross, and I—Na, na, I'm proud to stand at the door."

"Dear old fellow! There he stood for

seven winters, without a sixpence of pay, all for love, though at my request the working congregation gave him a silver watch.

"When he was dying from small-pox, the same unselfish nature appeared. When asked if they would let me know, he replied—

"There's no man living I like as I do him. I know he would come. But he shouldna come on account of his wife and bairns, and so ye must not tell him."

"I never saw him in his illness, never hearing of his danger till too late."

HAMMER OR ANVIL?

Longfellow said "In this world a man must be either anvil or hammer." Longfellow was wrong, however. Lots of men are neither the active hammer nor the sturdy anvil. They are nothing but bellows.

MUSIC.

"When griping grief the heart doth wound,  
And doleful dumps the mind oppress,  
Then music, with her silver sound,  
With speedy help doth lend redress."  
*Shakespeare.*

A CLEVER WOMAN.

A clever woman is one who looks well after the ways of her own household.

A clever woman is one who undertakes nothing that she does not understand.

A clever woman is one who is mistress of tact, and knows how to make the social wheels run smoothly.

A clever woman is one who makes the other woman think herself the cleverer.

A clever woman is one who acts like hot water on tea; she brings the sweetness and strength out of everybody else.

A clever woman is one who always makes the best of any situation.

A clever woman is one whose ability is never unpleasantly felt by the rest of the world.

A clever woman is one who is at ease in any place and among any people.

ON OUR OWN RESOURCES.—"To be thrown on our own resources is to be cast in the very lap of fortune; for our faculties then undergo a development, and display an energy of which they were previously unsusceptible."  
*Franklin.*