



OUR MODEL DAY NURSERY.*

BY LADY GEORGINA VERNON.



EAR reader, have you an idle moment? Come then, peep into our crèche with me, and I think you will agree with the verdict of a mother who told me last week, "It is as good as home to them, and a deal cleaner nor most of the homes!" But though I say crèche, we do not use such a word amongst our *poor* friends, for doubtless it would be thought to be derived from *screech*, and give unpleasant associations, and so we call it "Our Day Nursery." But to me, "crèche" brings pleasant thoughts of my first experience of such institutions; and before my mind's eye there rises up the vision of such a well-managed, happy little crèche, opening out of a dark street in Paris, all sunbeams within, under the loving management of three Sisters of Charity, with quaint white caps, and whose black dresses covered as motherly hearts as ever beat; for, thank God! neither stiff coif, nor stiffer rules, can subdue in a woman's heart the God-gift of love for His little ones.

Well, come in through this little garden. We are very proud of our garden. Please note that plot of grass under the shady tree: not a very big plot, and not a very handsome tree, but the grass is fresh, and the tree makes a nice shade for the little ones in hot summer days. None are out here now, for twelve o'clock is rest-time. Open the door into the cheer-

ful little hall, where, on low stands, hang all the quaint little garments—hoods, caps, bonnets—belonging to the wee tribe. Now enter the room to the left *gently*, and see first, in the far corner, that encircling fold, like a wooden paling, surrounding the thick mattress on the floor, that is covered with a warm blanket and a sheet: here lie, in various attitudes, little rogues and cherubs who have fallen asleep—happy urchins!—most with toys in the little fat hands, thus having entered into peaceful dreamland through the pleasant door of play and pleasure. See how that wee girl in the blue frock cuddles that strange-looking doll, all guiltless of legs or arms, but well-loved, nevertheless! And then that curly-headed lad of four summers: how tightly the outstretched hand grasps the mimic gun! All the little faces are happy in their sleep. Now peep into the cradles; see the row of twelve cradles, all ranged side by side, each with its little sleeping inmate. Ah, nay! here is one bright-eyed wee baby, peering and trying to raise the little bare head to see what is going on. Hush! hush! baby; sleep again a little bit. By the fire sits nurse, toasting the small pink toes of the youngest treasure confided to the nursery. "Only six weeks old, ma'am, and see what a head of hair!" says nurse, with motherly pride, lifting up the black-headed babe to show. "I wish our Johnnie had been here to-day for you to see; he is a fine child, and does us credit, I say." Yes, Johnnie should do us credit, for we have had him three years in the nursery, while mother works at the nailing; and I believe Johnnie has been saved many a scald and many a fall (the common lot of babies in this town) by the fostering care of the nursery; but to-day mother has a holiday, and Johnnie is with her. Now, do you see Mary, "the help," how she is filling all the little row of blue and white basins on that low table with steaming rice and milk, while the big basin of brown sugar

* The particulars given in the following sketch are drawn from the experience of more than one Day Nursery with which the writer has been associated, and are not the actual description of any special one.

shows that the children's likings are cared for? One o'clock strikes, and a knock is heard at the outside door. "It is the mothers," says nurse, and whips up a couple of babies into her arms, while Mary follows, with two more, into a cosy little room, with a fire, where the *wee* babies, six in number, are all made over to their mothers for half an hour, and then given up again to good nurse, with many a kiss and blessing.

But stay, we have only seen the *baby* department; look into this other room, and here you see our Infant School: thirty-six little dots, all in pink pinafores, ranged on benches along the wall, following with eager eyes the teacher who sits before them telling a story. But this does not last long, for glances—hungry glances—are being cast towards the door; and now teacher says

"Rise!" and with one accord the little party stand up. "March!" and into the hall they march, where there wait a troop of steady elder brothers and sisters, who, hastily putting on the several caps and cloaks, marshal off, each one her charge, to its dinner at home; and soon after two they will re-assemble. But stay! there is one who has not gone with the others: "Ah, poor girl!" says the teacher aside, "she is a cripple. When she was a baby, the little girl who had the care of her let her fall, and the injuries she got then made her a cripple for life; but she likes to come here.—Come, Janie, and tell the lady what you do in school." The poor little

cripple rose and, with a bright, intelligent face, came up to us. "Please, ma'am, mother says I'm to comfort the little ones if they cry;" and she smiled a half-wistful smile, as if in self-wonder at the strange path in which she, a hopeless cripple, was led. "Comforter," sweet name! "Yes," said teacher; "and if one of the little ones falls down, or gets hurt or tired, it is always Janie who dries the tears the quickest;" and she smiled at Janie with affection. "Ah, ma'am! the mothers say it is a wonderful thing how much fewer accidents there are now amongst the children. Why, before we had this nursery, there was not a week but what there was some sad accident—children burnt or scalded, or driven over in the streets; and now, at least, we keep them safe." "And happy, too," thought I.

And now, reader, have you seen enough? And may I tell you how we work our Day Nursery? for I long to see the day when there shall be one or two in every town, and especially in all manufacturing towns or

villages. When ours was first started, many a kind person, willing to help, said, "I should like to see the children better looked after, poor little things! but do you not think that taking them off the mothers' hands encourages them to neglect their homes and to work out?" "No," I said, "I do not think so, for, unfortunately, the system of working out is already established for the women; we *cannot* check it, the employers of labour may do so in time." In one town I know, an employer did—to his honour be it spoken—refuse to employ women, thereby losing many hundreds a year; but there are not many who will do that; and till the evil ceases, our duty is to try and make the best we can of it, and at least not allow the poor innocents to suffer for what is not their fault. Those only who have visited

among the dwellings of the poor in manufacturing towns, or where the mother's work keeps her from home, can realise the real, urgent necessity of doing something for "the babies." Older children are now well looked after—thanks to the vigorous efforts of our Government—but there is still a great work to be done in the saving of infant life; for I do not hesitate to say, thousands of babies through England die annually from two special causes: first, the loss of their natural food, and the consequent feeding on bread and corn-flour, and other aliments totally unsuited to their needs, through the mother leaving them all day; and, secondly, owing to the



"TELLING A STORY."

utter want of proper care and nursing to which the poor frail infants are subjected: either they are left with some little girl to be pushed about in a perambulator, quieted with the sour, uncleaned tube of a feeding-bottle to suck at; or they are confided to some old crone, who probably sits by her fire smoking, while the poor infants in her care lie in the so-called cradle—probably an old box, with unwashed, tattered shawls and bits of blanket; or, if old enough, go "scrawling" on poor little bare knees over dirt and hard stones, perhaps where broken china lies—anywhere, so long as they don't bother her! Is it a wonder that so constantly there are those sad paragraphs in the papers telling of children driven over in the street? precious little lives sacrificed, all for want of some one's care; or if the little life is not quite crushed out, yet the careless childhood's joy quenched in the wailing of pain? Is it a marvel that in every hospital we find so many little beds tenanted by sweet children who should be out in the sunshine, enjoying their young life, now laid in suffering for weeks,

perhaps, through a scald or a burn, done "when mother was out?" How my thoughts fly back to a certain little bed where, for five long weeks of agony, a darling lay in such lovely patience! She had been burnt while doing a woman's work, poor wee thing! attending to the younger children and putting on the kettle for tea. Her fearful injuries made her case hopeless from the first, but the sweet *rosy* face and long auburn hair were untouched by the flames, and it was difficult at first to realise the truth; but day by day she faded away, her greatest pleasure being to have "Safe in the arms of Jesus" sung to her by the kind nurse. And now she is there, sweet child! safe for ever.

I appeal to you, rich mothers, who can go into your own well-appointed sunny nurseries, and see your darlings surrounded with every care that love can provide—do you not feel for the *equally* precious children of the poor? Does not the very intensity of your love for the children that God has given you make you yearn to do something for the neglected little ones? Oh! let each one of us who are mothers or sisters of dear children do her part in raising these *homes* for the often neglected children of the poor; and, believe me, when the employers of labour refuse to employ the mothers of young children, then we can close our nurseries thankfully, and give back the little ones to their rightful nurses. The Day Nursery is a most useful institution; even in the country, especially at the time of hay or corn harvest, it is an immense boon to the poor; but it is in our towns that the want is most urgently felt.

The first desideratum in such an undertaking is to get a really cheerful, healthy house, with, if possible, a little garden; or, if it be in a large town, where that is not possible, I have seen a little court turned into a charming play-ground, with the help of some bits of matting for the babies to roll about on, where green grass cannot be had. Then let your two chief rooms—the nursery for the wee babies, and what I may call the infant school for the elder ones—have a sunny, bright aspect. Sun is as good for little ones as love, and without love or sun no young thing can thrive. There should also be a smaller room where the mothers may come to their young babies, which I consider one of the most essential rules of the nursery, for it is almost impossible to rear a number of infants without their natural food; here and there you may see a healthy child brought up by hand, but I do not think such children have the stamina of those fed by their mothers, as will often be proved if sickness befall them, when the only remedy in many cases is breast-milk.

In our Day Nursery the head nurse is a widow, whose daughter is our teacher, and they occupy the kitchen as their sitting-room. We have been fortunate in letting the two rooms up-stairs to an old lady, whose soul is absorbed in a tortoise-shell cat and about a dozen canaries; and I verily believe the noise they make prevents her hearing if our little charges should be noisy; at least, she never complains, and

what she pays goes far to help the *rent*. The rent of the house, though, is *the* trial; otherwise, our nursery would pay its way, for the children's pence quite pay the salaries of the nurse, and "help," and teacher, and the food the babies consume, which is not much. Our rule is to allow each baby under a year a pint of new milk a day, which is thickened with well-baked flour after the baby is six months old; then to the children above a year we give boiled bread and milk, rice and milk, mashed potatoes and milk, or some other simple food, but always using milk as the staple article of their diet; while the children above two years go home to their mothers for dinner. There are two or three, whose mothers live at a distance, who cannot go home: these we allow to bring their dinners with them.

I will draw up a specimen balance-sheet to prove how such a nursery can be managed, and you will see, as I said before, that the rent is the chief difficulty. In our own case we had to take a large house, and the yearly rent is £18; but our lodger pays 5s. a week, which lessens our rent to £5; and this, I am glad to say, we have little difficulty in raising by yearly subscriptions. Another great help we often get is some kind donation of rice or sugar from the grocers of the town.

Annual Receipts.

	£	s.	d.
36 Children above 2 years, at 4d. per week	31	4	0
15 Children between 1 and 2 years, at 9d. per week ...	29	5	0
6 Babies under 1 year, at 1s. per week	15	12	0
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	£76	1	0

Annual Expenditure.

	£	s.	d.
Nurse's Salary	20	0	0
Teacher's Salary	20	0	0
Girl to help	12	0	0
Coals	8	0	0
Milk, 3s. per week	7	16	0
Rice, 100 lbs., at 2½d.	1	0	10
Tapioca, 50 lbs., at 3½d.	0	14	7
Sugar, 137 lbs., at 3d.	1	14	3
Potatoes	1	0	0
Bread	2	14	8
Soap and etceteras	1	0	8
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	£76	1	0

And so, with thankful hearts, we gather in the little ones from the crowded cottages and from the streets, full of dangers to their fragile lives; and I believe we may humbly say we have had a blessing on our work, for in these three years we have not once had to close our nursery from any infectious disease. And here one word of thanks to our medical man, who allows any child who appears unwell when received at the nursery in the morning to be sent direct to his house for an opinion, and, if need be, a dose. This has been an untold boon to us.

And now, let me urge on those who can to "go and do likewise," feeling quite sure that the care of these little ones will not lose its reward.