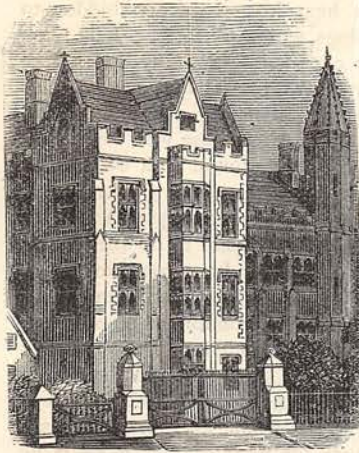


MY ATTENDANCE AT THE BROMPTON HOSPITAL.

BY AN OUT-PATIENT.



I AM well now, but five years ago I was a not very promising "case" at Brompton Hospital. There was no manner of doubt as to my eligibility for admission, for I had suffered many things of many physicians, and had no prospect but that of struggling hard for life whilst

almost cut off from the means of living. Yet a beneficent law of compensation has provided for such as I was. Our sheer inability to pay the family doctor renders accessible to us the treatment of the highest specialists, and we tax even their utmost skill. Very few consumptives, indeed, come out scatheless from the unequal combat between science and disease. But the same rule of counterbalancing good consoles them still. Denied the more active pleasures of the robust, the valetudinarian is fitted by his sensitive nature to relish all the more keenly whatever of joy may come in his way. Knowing only too well the insidious character of his baffled foe, he views his restoration itself as a glad surprise, and many more than the scriptural tenth of those healed here long to return something beyond the formal letter of thanks which is required of every patient when his visits cease. Let me, therefore, describe the common cause for our unutterable gratitude, and at the same time indicate how great a national blessing Brompton Hospital has become, by telling somewhat of the place and its frequenters.

As climatic conditions have great influence in chest disorders, it was a wise choice which pitched upon mild and salubrious Brompton as the site of this institution, and an equally judicious selection was exercised in the adoption of a handsome architectural design for the building, which, being surrounded by its own grounds, is as pleasant-looking as though it were a nobleman's mansion. It is now in the thirty-seventh year of its useful existence. Its patients come from every part of the kingdom; its physicians have such opportunities for studying the disease as did not exist before this hospital was established; and its success has led to the starting of three similar institutions in other parts of London specially devoted to cases of consumption. The learning of years gained here has, no doubt, helped to revolutionise the method of treatment everywhere. For the fashion of medicine

changeth. Dr. Sangrado's favourite remedy, which he prescribed unsparingly and indiscriminately for all the ills that flesh is heir to, was warm water and bleeding; and phthisis has probably sometimes been doctored about as rationally. Now, however, instead of exhausting the patient they build him up. A generous diet and a course of well-proved medicines and cod-liver oil, and, above all, pure air and plenty of it, are the means of cure which the highest science approves; and, after a tolerably long trial of them, I should be sorry to return to the old system. The governors of Brompton Hospital call consumption the most frequent and destructive malady in existence; and when we find that last year nearly 43,000 cases were treated at the four London consumption hospitals, of which Brompton and Victoria are the chief, we anxiously ask what has been done to mitigate the ravages of this national scourge. The reply is reassuring. The *poitrinaire* has an infinitely greater chance of recovery than he had in days gone by, and we learn that it is in keeping with the experience of Brompton Hospital that, if medical science be ever destined to achieve the great triumph of removing this fatal malady, or to effect the humbler good of arresting its progress with certainty, the hour of such improvements must surely be hastened by the establishment of an institution which affords ample means for deep and sustained investigation of the disease. It is with the out-patients that I am most concerned, and I find that the number of new cases in this department last year was 12,603, all of whom come with a letter of recommendation entitling them to advice and medicine free for three months. For the disease generally takes two years to run its course, whatever be the result. As to the in-patients, they long ago outgrew their accommodation in the original building, and many of them are now quartered in the villas on the opposite side of Fulham Road, the whole establishment containing 257 beds. There is, in addition, a home at Chelsea for probationers and convalescents, and a valuable charity, affording temporary relief to destitute patients, called the "Rose" fund, in honour of Mr. Philip Rose, the honorary secretary, a great benefactor and practically the founder of the hospital. To crown all, this great work was started in dependence on voluntary help, and so thoroughly has its beneficent mission been recognised that funds have always been abundantly forthcoming.

One day at Brompton is very much like another. The first is the worst, and in my case it happened to be especially trying to one unused to the sight of collective suffering. It was a glorious midsummer day. The greensward around the building was looking its freshest, and the leafy trees overhead were musical with the joyous twitter of birds, escaped from the smoke of the City. These were advantages, indeed; but the worst of it was that every inmate who could possibly

crawl out did so, and every out-patient who was due did not fail to pay his appointed visit; so that the scene irresistibly reminded one of the congregation of impotent folk at the Pool of Bethesda. The resemblance was more than an outward one, as I found on entering; for, despite the official precautions, the stronger patients did not scruple, in a few discreditable instances, to take a mean advantage of the more feeble, in order to step first into the physician's presence. One could sympathise with the feelings of David Muir, the young Scotch poet, even if by no means inclined to follow his example. He, poor boy, once essayed to enter Brompton Hospital; but his heart failed him as he approached its portals, and he fell back despairingly to his native hills—and died there. But courage! This has been the starting-place of deliverance for many a despairing sufferer, and it will be so to many more. Who can tell which of us may be among the fortunate?

The gate-porter of my day was stout, ruddy, and of a cheerful countenance, and he smiled a genial smile as he handed to each comer a card permitting him to see the doctor. Two eminent physicians attend daily, and their tickets are given out alternately. Perhaps a good deal may depend upon the colour of the bit of pasteboard one receives at his first visit, since that decides under whose care he shall remain as long as he goes there. The patients think so; for example, the men on my side fervently congratulated me on having the advantage of seeing Dr. A, the cleverest physician of all, and I have no reason to question the justice of their praise; but I was quite as confidently told by those on the other side that they considered themselves especially lucky in being under the care of Dr. B. And so, doubtless, one principle of science, as well as one heroic spirit of devotion to their arduous duty, and one unflinching sentiment of kindness, guides the actions of the whole of the medical staff.

As you enter, your name is registered by the secretary; for the doctors' time is precious. Perhaps there are a couple of hundred patients for each to see; and, in order not to take up valuable minutes needlessly, you must go early and give the secretary several particulars, which he will write down for your physician's guidance. Then you make up your mind to wait. It is only half-past eleven; your doctor will not arrive till one; and, if you happen to have a high number on your ticket, you may reckon upon a four hours' stay. You sit down, therefore, on a narrow and exceedingly hard, high-backed form, and note your surroundings, and chat with your neighbours. There is no need of formal introduction here. Community of suffering establishes a sort of freemasonry which ignores conventional restraints. You find that some of the healthiest faces around you belong to men who have been in-patients, and who exhaust their superlatives in speaking of the benefit the institution has been to them. It has lifted care from them; taken them from homes where the poor wife was worn out with watching and nursing, where the wolf was peeping in at the door; surrounded them with every

necessary comfort and anticipated their wants; given them a present of money and clothing if they were absolutely destitute; and sent them on their way rejoicing. They are looking forward to complete recovery; and nothing can be more cheering to the new patient than to hear his companion bidden to throw physic to the dogs and walk forth a hale man. I had this agreeable experience, and my hopes rose accordingly. But my next impressions were not so satisfactory. A young man at my elbow was talking to an unhappy sufferer whose case was clearly not hopeful, and who consequently found fault with everything. It was but rarely that grumbling was heard; for we knew that every possible advantage was afforded us, and the officials showed a desire to do the utmost they could for us, which elicited due recognition. Yet who can wonder if some forlorn one, merely in having to nurse his pain in relative discomfort while awaiting treatment which had not succeeded in bringing back vigour to his fading form, should feel that circumstances were against him, and complain that fate was cruel? The young stranger, for his part, expressed perfect content, because for eight successive years he had come here, ceasing only for brief intervals, and each time had derived more benefit than before. Eight years! What a martyrdom to be thankful for! His feeling, however, was truly expressed. He had learned in the school of suffering the great lesson of life. He did not choose his lot, but he made the best of it. My neighbours were poor, some even to squalor; but many had been better off, and had come here as a last resort. Not a few had come too late. None of them dreamed of trying quack remedies. No; the poor and the ignorant cannot be the chief supporters of the "medicine men" who promise to work miracles. Their victims must surely be the well-to-do people who can afford to pay. I had seen something of the mischief wrought by such pretenders, and was delighted to hear the expressions of honest contempt which greeted a reference to gentry of that sort. But one cannot continually talk, more especially when the conversation is interrupted by fits of coughing. And you cough more at Brompton than anywhere. A loud cough from one patient is sure to be followed by a sympathetic chorus from all the rest. Happily, there are other means of passing the time. Benevolent souls have furnished the tables with old periodicals and illustrated newspapers, which are very welcome. The advent of an unexpected visitor caused a diversion. It was a respectable-looking woman, leading a little boy by the hand. Her presence was a surprise, for between the sexes there is a hard line of demarcation drawn, the females being quartered in the corridor and we in a separate waiting-room. I happened presently to be seated nearly opposite the new-comers; and, looking at the child, I thought that the mother had been quite needlessly scared in believing his case a fit one for the hospital. But she was dressed in deep mourning, and probably had good cause to be anxious. I think so especially because, when a remark was made about the curability of consumption, she broke in with the observation that, if she were the Government, she would have the disease

stamped out. I was curious to know how. "I would make it a crime for a consumptive man to marry," was the resolute reply. We did not pursue the subject further, for at that moment the bell rang, and she was ushered into the consulting-room, whither I soon followed. The interviews here are of the briefest kind. Behind a screen the physician "sounds" the fresh cases, and at his table questions the others. How thoroughly the calm, sympathetic manner of the great doctor wins the confidence of his patients! Some of them, indeed, would fain pour out a long story of their symptoms; but the physician's trained eye sees more than many words can tell him; and, the prescription completed, the conversation has to be closed. Then we go to the dispensary, there to be supplied with medicines in champagne-bottles, and forthwith march out of the hospital.

In this way does each visit pass off, until the time comes for a change, either by reason of renewed

health or of improved circumstances. And as one passes out for the last time, his heart softens with more than usual pity for those whom he leaves behind, still fighting with the grisly enemy from whose clutch he has wonderfully escaped. Once more he looks, as he has often looked, at the fountain whose ripple resounds ceaselessly through the corridor. And, with sights of despair before his eyes, and utterances of despondency ringing in his ears, he reads the comfortable words which the Good Samaritans have, in their thoughtful care, inscribed there to suggest solace to each, and to point out another comfort to the unhappy ones who are denied the blessing of physical relief. Over the babbling spring, where it may be seen of all as they come to cool their fevered lips, is written the promise which was revealed to the beloved disciple in his rapt vision: "The Lamb shall lead them unto fountains of living waters, and God shall wipe all tears from their eyes."

SUSPENSE.

A Story. By the Author of "A Hard Case."

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH.



FOR the last few weeks Carry's letters had been growing more and more unsatisfactory. Lionel shrank from telling his father of their engagement; and stolen interviews, smuggled letters, and all the usual hopes and anxieties such secrets bring, gave Carry doubtful happiness. That Lionel was

very much in love I had no doubt; but though in her eyes he was perfection, she unconsciously gave me the impression that he was weak and selfish, and would rather sacrifice her feelings than brave an angry interview with his father.

I had for a time been so absorbed in my own troubles that I had given Carry's letters less attention than usual, and had entirely forgotten that I had looked forward to Godwin's return as likely to put everything straight; but now I remembered, with dismay, that I had cut myself off from all intercourse with him, that even upon such an important matter as this I could ask for no advice and seek for no help. The confidence Carry placed in me was absolute: she was sure her secret was as safe with me as with herself; and it would have been a very small part of the truth I could have confided to Godwin, but a hint would have been enough to make him see she wanted care and advice, and would have lightened the weight of

responsibility laid on my shoulders. All I could do now was to urge her to tell him herself all about it. I had made as little as possible to her and to every one of my quarrel with him: miserable and angry as I felt, I had no wish to lower him in other people's eyes, and, above all things, I was anxious she should still be able to trust him. But Carry answered that the secret was not hers, but Lionel's, and that until he gave her leave she could say nothing about it to any one; and I must promise that, whatever happened, I would stand by her and think kindly of her, and I must remember how very, very fond she and Lionel were of each other. This letter made me uneasy, though I could not guess its real meaning, and I was totally unprepared for the news she sent me a few days later:—

"DEAREST GRACIE,—I think I am the most miserable girl in the world, and perhaps you will think the most wicked, but, oh! you don't know how Lionel and I love each other. The very day I wrote to you last Aunt Lucy found out all about it. Uncle John was ill, and was obliged to stay in bed, and we thought she was with him when she came suddenly into the drawing-room where we were. She was so angry and grieved, and she tried to make us promise we would give it all up, but we couldn't. Then, quite late that night, Lionel and I got a little talk; his room is just over mine, and he leaned out of the bottom of his window and I stood on the dressing-table and leaned out of the top of mine, and no one could hear us, and we could almost touch each other's hands. He said the only thing would be for us to run away, and he knew some one who would help us—a lady who had done just the same, and had never been sorry for it. And we must do it as soon as possible, before Uncle John knew anything about it, for we knew Aunt Lucy wouldn't bother him while he was ill. I promised I would go at half-past twelve the very next night. You may fancy what I felt like in the morning, and how I thought every one must guess; and I didn't see Lionel all day. When I went up to my room at eleven o'clock I put out all my things in readiness and packed a little bag, and then, without knocking, Aunt Lucy came in and saw them. She did not ask me anything, but said she wanted me to come and sit with her a little while in Uncle John's room; and of course I had to go, and I half thought she guessed. I sat there a long while, till after twelve, and then I said I was tired, might I not go? But she said she wanted me a little longer, and I did not know what to do. Half-past twelve came and I felt desperate. I said I was so tired I could not stay, but still she kept me; and one o'clock struck, and I heard a voice outside and knew Lionel was