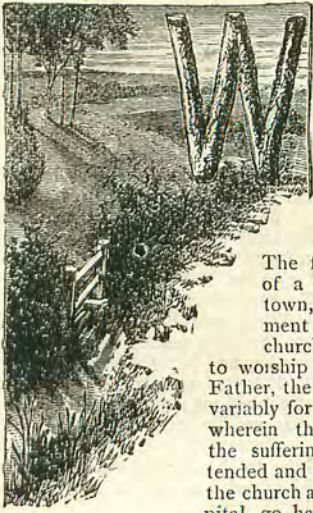


## HOSPITALS AND THE BENEFITS THEY CONFER.

By EMMA BREWER.



HEREVER civilisation and Christianity exist, there you may be sure of finding hospitals.

The first desire of a country, a town, or a settlement is for a church in which

to worship the loving Father, the next is invariably for a hospital wherein the sick and the suffering may be tended and cured; thus the church and the hospital go hand in hand

over the world, purifying, healing, and comforting all for whom Christ died.

There was a time in the world's history when there were no hospitals, but it was previous to the establishment of Christianity. Hospitals, therefore, are a sort of first-fruits of our Saviour's life among us.

The object of the early Christians in instituting hospitals was the housing and feeding of their poor, and as time went on they became rather houses of entertainment than hospitals as we understand them.

Hospitals, simply for the medical relief of the sick, diseased, and wounded, were first heard of in the eighth and ninth centuries, the most renowned and successful being that of Cordova, in Spain.

Hospitals are better understood than any of our institutions—they are friends to us all, and there is no doubt in our minds as to the blessings they prove to the people among whom they stand.

We have among us hospitals of all kinds, and for the treatment of every disease of mind and body; and certainly they were never needed in the world more than now; when the conditions under which we live impose so constant a strain upon mind and body as to become almost unendurable; when the ever-increasing progress of science and mechanical contrivances to save time and labour have imported new forms of accidents and injuries into our working classes; when dense populations are drawn to certain centres insufficient in space to support them. All of these are fruitful sources of disease to mind and body, and for those so afflicted our hospitals open their doors, showing no respect of persons, never refusing an accident when they have a bed on which to place the sufferer, and bestowing upon the poorest the best that skill and kindness can do for them. Lord Macaulay recognised this when he said: "Every bricklayer who falls from a scaffold, every sweeper of a crossing who is run over by a carriage, may now have his wounds dressed and his limbs set with a skill such as a hundred and sixty years ago all the wealth of a great lord could not have furnished."

The giant work performed by hospitals, and the amount of good done by them, can only be equalled by the demands made upon them for help.

It is the fashion to speak of the good old

times, to the disparagement of those in which we live, and to speak of ourselves as having fallen from the high standard of our forefathers to become slaves to luxury. Whatever and whomsoever these phrases apply to, they are not suitable to hospitals and hospital workers. Everyone old enough to remember even thirty years ago, can testify that the bygone times will not bear comparison with the present for earnestness, self-denial, self-devotion, hard study, Christian love and tenderness, which are the distinguishing characteristics of those now engaged in hospital work, be they doctors or nurses, matrons, stewards or visitors.

Picture the old nurses in their slipshod shoes, and gowns bedecked with snuff, their breath redolent of "tincter o' rubub and sommat to it, please, sir," and their sly and often cruel ways; and then regard the refined, dignified behaviour of those now entrusted with the nursing, before whom the most reckless of our hospital students would hesitate to utter a flippant remark or a coarse joke; and whose touch, and voice, and presence help the sufferers to bear the most painful operations with fortitude.

Look at hospitals which way you will, they are good and productive of good. First, they are erected and carried on by acts of self-sacrifice, or in other words, by voluntary contributions, which means a constant and active carrying out of the command, "Bear ye one another's burdens." They keep up a continual sympathy between rich and poor; they afford opportunities for educated, earnest women to spend their time and talents in a vocation for which they are specially suited; they are centres of knowledge, they are powers for good in the land, and they are the sources of help and comfort to the people round about them.

If, as I believe, a wonderful improvement has taken place in our hospitals and hospital workers during the last half century, then there is no doubt that women and their influence have had much to do in bringing about the change.

Many of the women who have consecrated their lives to the work of nursing seem utterly to forget their own identity. It was only a few days ago I saw two refined gentlewomen working in a ward that made one feel faint, and gave one a choking sensation only to pass through it. They were handling, cleansing, soothing, dressing, the most awful forms of disease without one look of disgust, and without showing any sign of its being extraordinary work. I said to one of them, "Oh, how can you so control yourself!"

Her answer made me feel ashamed: "I assure you," she said, "I never feel disgust; I love these children as though they were my own."

The cry is often repeated, "How little is done in this country of ours to relieve misery!"

Oh, if I could only take those who idly utter this cry to places where I have been lately, how humble it would make them feel, and how astonished! Never was there so much quiet, unostentatious self-devotion for others as now; never so much sympathy between rich and poor; never so much real helpful work going on for the relief of sorrow and distress; and I fully acknowledge that never in the world's history was all this more needed.

As to hospitals, one must have been in them and seen the work going on in order to realise their far-reaching and benevolent influence.

There is an awful solemnity in the thought that while we in health are moving about briskly and cheerily, doing our work or taking our pleasure, in this great London there are between six and seven thousand beds constantly occupied by young and old, suffering from every form of mental and bodily disease, and that the numbers of people who occupy these beds in the London hospitals every year is about 60,000; while the number of outpatients, all more or less suffering, averages 940,000, together making a million; one in five, that is to say, of the London population almost entirely shut out from work and pleasure, and of a class sufficiently poor to be unable to pay a doctor.

One naturally goes from the thought of these sick and suffering ones to the army of medical men and nurses who tend and watch them day and night. It is not an easy life to be a nurse—it is one of great labour and strict discipline; it demands the giving up of self, it calls for constant and untiring vigilance, and requires of a woman the best years of her life, and yet at every great hospital there are so many applications for the office of nurse beyond those that can be employed as to be quite astonishing.

St. Thomas's, for example, was compelled to refuse over six hundred last year, and the London Hospital refuses on an average twelve daily.

This shows plainly the earnest desire there is for work among our women, and their readiness to place themselves in training for it.

I have asked several times at the hospital "what constitutes a good nurse?"

The answer has always been, "First and foremost a good woman."

But with every wish to become a nurse it is not every good woman who can be one, even though the opportunity be given her, for the life is one demanding much physical strength, and some of the work of a nurse is almost revolting, and not rarely the constitution breaks down under the strain.

Physical health is essential, therefore, in a nurse, so also is common sense, large heartedness, self-sacrifice, and obedience. Thank God there are many who possess these qualifications, both at work and waiting for work—women who, living out their lives, make the world better.

Hospitals have won the love, confidence, and support of those for whom they were instituted—I mean the working classes and the poor. This is in itself a good sign, for these people are sharp critics.

In a hundred ways they show their appreciation of these their own institutions. For example, the railway porters and cabmen, without any prompting, make collections among themselves for their benefit. Bodies of workpeople do the same, often sending some of their best work in the shape of easy chairs and couches to the wards. Post office officials, too, have lately made collections in order to buy toys for the children's wards and children's hospitals.

I have been to many of our London hospitals lately and made myself thoroughly acquainted with them, and I can say with certainty that there is an abundance of work and of every kind suitable to every class and rank in life waiting to be done. If there is anything you can do well and persistently, though it be ever so little, bestow it upon the hospitals, where it will be valued, and in the doing of it I am sure you will find happiness.