

WORKHOUSE WORRIES.

BY THE REV. FREDERICK HASTINGS.



A SKETCH AT ST. PANCRAS.

IN rough brown cloth with brass buttons, and lightish corduroy trousers, kerchief of white-ly-spotted blue around the neck, and with low felt hat in hand, an old man stood in the passage-way. I did not recognise him at first under his altered aspect, but soon remembered where I had first seen him as a tradesman in a busy thoroughfare.

When, after time a situation, but soon found a younger man was required. Thus he drifted to the workhouse. As he sits in my study he makes me realise something of what life in the workhouse must be to a man who wears the uniform of the brown and brass.

It is one thing to go and address a congregation half of men in this brown uniform, and the other half of women in the white cap, small reddish plaid shawl, and blue cotton gown, and quite another thing to live among them, or to have to be one of them. As the old man tells me of his daily life. I get a clearer conception of the worries under the workhouse garb.

"We get up at half-past six; breakfast at seven," says the old man. "Half-past seven we come out of the dining-hall. Our breakfast consists of tea and five ounces of bread and butter. We have dinner at twelve. About eleven I generally feel very hungry, so I eat a bit of bread and butter which I save from my breakfast allowance. You are not supposed to take away anything you can't eat, but the officials kindly wink at the action of us old men. Dinner is a pint of soup and bread. Of course we get tired of having the same regulation diet. I very rarely take all my soup. We get a bit of meat on Tuesday. It is steamed. We often get a great deal of bone,

his failure, I first saw him under the brown and brass, he was walking out of the workhouse chapel, at the close of a service, and put out his hand to clasp mine. I had not known of his ruin, as he had not been one of my flock. A half-crown I then slipped into his palm brought tears to his eyes. He told me afterwards he had for months been without money, and he could hardly believe that he was so rich in possessing that bit of silver. Poor old gentleman! when he gets his card of leave, he comes ever and anon to get me to repeat the dose. He had been removed from St. Pancras workhouse over to the costly new branch of that institution at Streatham. He walked this morning all the way from that place to Camden Town in order to see me. As I looked at the bulky form and short limbs, and thought of the long walk, I could not but feel still deeper pity for the old man. I was glad to be at home, that he might not be disappointed in his hope.

The story of his life may be briefly told. The lease of his business place had run out. He had been promised renewal of it, but when he thought it was all settled, he found that a publican had offered twice as much as it was agreed he should pay for the place. The publican wished to increase the accommodation and attractiveness of his place of temptation. The old tradesman could not raise the extra amount. He had to clear out, and to take another small place at a great disadvantage. Here, alas! he did not succeed. He then obtained for a



A SKETCH FROM LIFE IN ST. PANCRAS WORKHOUSE.

for it weighs in. The potatoes are nice. On Wednesday we have soup again. On Thursday Irish stew, which is still soup, with a little potatoes and meat added. On Friday we have meat again, and on Saturday one pound of suet pudding, with treacle, but no soup or meat. On Sunday we have bacon and greens and potatoes." The old man's eyes glistened as he spoke of the added delicacy of the cabbage.

"We have tea at five, with bread and butter. The men who are in for a short time get skilly instead of tea, which is only for the regulars. The short-timers have their skilly with salt in another hall. We have to pick oakum, and if we don't do our right amount we are put on bread and water. Between breakfast and dinner some go into the oakum shed, others go to tailoring or boot repairing. The place in which we dwell is really a beautiful mansion, but I cannot be happy there. One not only thinks of his past losses, but has to be too jealous about one's comrades. Some are very greedy, and we have to 'come the old soldier' and hide things. I used to go to church, but some would sneer and say, 'Here comes one of the chaplain's pupils!' The regular chaplain comes round and speaks kindly to us all, but some don't seem to appreciate his kindness as they should.

"I sleep in a ward with about forty men. Some of them snore terribly. When they do so, the next-door neighbour will catch hold of their clothes and pull them off, and at this there will be some hard words muttered. You can go to bed directly after tea. Those wake up the earliest who go soonest to bed, but they are not allowed to leave the ward. At

five they will be seated on the edge of their beds, ready for a leap, and will rush like a lot of wild race-horses down-stairs directly the signal is given. Officers try to stop us from being aroused. If any attempt to go down before time, they have their cards taken away for a month, or perhaps three. If it is taken away, it takes three months to get another.

"We go to bed at eight o'clock, and some get tired of bed. The officers come round at half-past eight, and turn the gas low: they keep it burning all night. . . . Very few persons have been ill since we have been at the new place. Most of them are aged men. They are not too affable. If in the grounds you take the seat of one of them, he takes you by the collar of your coat, and out you come in no time. Places to which they have been accustomed they regard as their own. 'Why, I have had that seat nineteen years, and you have only just come into the house: how dare you take it!' said one of my fellows to a new-comer to old St. Pancras one day in my hearing. The persons who complain of the workhouse authorities are persons who are the most undeserving. The master over the wall said to me one day, 'Here's some plums: some of my own growing.' I took them, but it soon went over the whole building. I gave one each to the men as far as they would go, and then the mean grumblers only said, 'Can't you get any more?' Jealousy is our great bother.

"When you come out you have to ask the master for leave. You hand him your card, and he puts his initials on it. Directly some get out, they will go among their friends. They get asked to drink, and so eager are they, that they will almost 'bite the beer.'



Waiting for
Dinner

They know the public-houses where their friends go, and some find them out to get treated.

"I have to pick oakum all the afternoon; I cannot do much. After tea we walk, or lounge, or go to the service. We have no prayers regular, only on Wednesday and once on Sunday. Sometimes ladies come on Sunday evening and sing, and bring tracts, and give us a little talk before the regular service. One lady has more and more people to listen to her each time she comes. I saw one man crying like a child—and not crocodile tears, sir. They don't know the good that a little human sympathy does to us poor cast-off hulks. We used to have an entertainment in St. Pancras, but we get none now. Sometimes we hear the music of the Salvation Army, and that is a pleasure to us for a time, as it passes; and even they don't know the cheer they give us poor fellows inside.

"When we are out some of the people look at us as if we were carrion. Some of the residents think our place lets down the value of their property.

"I got new clothes when I left the old workhouse. I thought I should get a better fit in the old workhouse than in the new. You see, sir, there's pride in the cobbler's dog yet." The old man tipped his hat, and lifted his eye, and looked somewhat like his old self.

"A parcel of young fellows are there who are strong, but who won't work. They will go out and get a drop of beer, and back they come again. They have always lived in the workhouse, were born there, and have grown up there, and some of them will say, 'We would not go out of the workhouse for a pension.' They don't care so long as they can eat and drink and sleep; they are happy at other people's expense. When asleep, they won't be disturbed if possible. 'If you wake me up again I'll punch your head,' said one to me when I nudged him to tell him a friend wanted him. It pains me to see how greedy some are. One man often has three men's dinners, for some are too old to eat much. That man keeps back generally, and peeps into every vessel to see if anything is left. He will drink up that which is left by the others. Another will always finish early, and be on the lookout for that which another can't eat. This is not because he doesn't get enough, but it is only gluttony. But there, sir, one has to live among such and make the best of it. It do seem hard after my life as a tradesman to find I have to be shut up with some of them. Still, I am thankful I have such a place to rest in instead of wandering—dirty, hungry, shelterless—through the streets of this great city."



"'Why, I've had that seat nineteen years!'"—p. 264.

I knew the old man was a teetotaler, and so I could trust him not to go and get intoxicated with that which was given him. Lunch was just on the table, and I asked him to come in and have some. He looked at me unbelievably, and then said, "No, sir, I can't come in to eat with you in this coat. No, sir, I am too full to eat more. The cakes were as much as I could manage." Away he went. I watched him down the square with pitying eye, mingled with some amusement at the alacrity with which stumpy legs carried a heavy body.

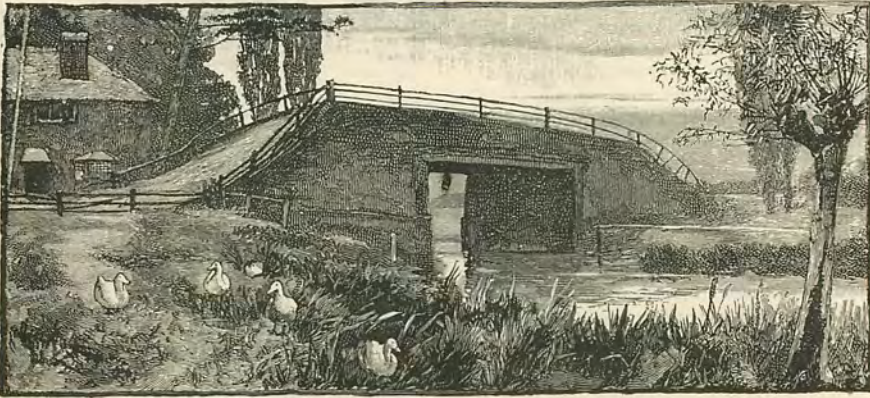
I have often been in the wards of various workhouses: have visited the lunatic wards, and those set apart for the aged and infirm. I have seen painful sights of men lying in cribs, because too infirm or childish to be trusted in a bed without sides up to keep them from falling out. I have talked with many, and have done my best to cheer them when taking my turn in the religious service, but I never met with any who gave me such a clear glimpse of the worries of a workhouse from the pauper's standpoint as the poor old decayed tradesman to whom I have just said "Good-bye."

The worries are not confined to the men's wards. Those old ladies who move in blue cotton dresses, with little red plaid shawls over their shoulders, white caps on when indoors, and plain straw bonnets with single ribbon when out—have their worries too. "Don't let the others see you give me anything," said one to whom I always gave a trifle; "they will be so jealous. I have to keep to myself, or I could not live. You don't know how they can talk." I could hear them, and could imagine how, in a large ward, with little variety of things to engage their thoughts,

trifles would be magnified, and every word and movement bitterly criticised. The attendants have to be very firm sometimes in suppressing the bitterness of the inmates towards one another. Ah! as you go by a great building like that in St. Pancras Road—a building with its two hundred windows beautifully arranged in bays—and as you see the placid faces of the old dames who dwell there at the public expense, you little know how much of sorrow and bitterness can be hidden beneath those cleanly white caps. And you can can little imagine, also, how much of deep piety some of them possess. Here is one. She is feeble, beyond threescore and ten. She staggers almost from one place to another. A little assistance to her place brings warm blessings. "Ah, sir! I have no one to care for me now. I have buried my husband two years ago. He died in the men's ward. I have also lost nine children. Haven't a relative to

wish me well, or when I die to close my eyes. It is hard to bear, but God helps me. He, too, will bring me to that world where I shall see my dear ones again."

One is thankful to know that never were the poor stranded mortals better treated in our workhouses than at present. The attendants really are very kind. Considering the trying nature of their work, in bearing with all the unattractiveness, pettiness, fretfulness, and selfishness of many who are placed under their care, they discharge their duties with an alacrity and thoughtfulness that are really delightful to witness. Those who have spare periodicals, magazines, books, and chess-boards might help to greatly lessen the worries and weariness of many of the unfortunate inmates of our workhouses by sending them. They will not know how thankful many will feel, but they may rest assured that they have done a good work.



THE LOVE-DREAM OF GATTY FENNING.

BY SARAH DOUDNEY, AUTHOR OF "MISS WILLOWBURN'S OFFER," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

WHERE SHE LIVED.

GATTY FENNING was born in the Meon country, under the shelter of the steep chalk downs, where the "Men of the Meon" had lived their independent life, and worshipped their idols, twelve hundred years ago. They must have been a stubborn race, those Meonwaras of South Hants, for long after the kingdoms on each side of them had embraced Christianity, they continued stiff-necked idolaters, and were not converted until the good Wilfrid found them out among their breezy hills, and preached to them the Gospel of peace.

The old house, where the Fennings had dwelt from generation to generation, stood in a lonely part of the Meon Valley, and did not pretend to be anything but

a farmhouse of the simplest description. It had darkened in the suns and rains of a century, and yet its walls were sound and solid still. Every owner had added something; Gibbon Fenning's father had built the rustic verandah on the west side of the house, and Gibbon himself had made another window in the east side, when his widowed sister came to live with him.

But although brotherly love had brightened up the old home for her coming, Anne Fenning did not live many years within its hospitable walls. Her father had not been without his misgivings when he had consented to her marriage with her handsome cousin, William Fenning; but she was the only daughter, and the household pet, and no one could ever resist her coaxing. So William carried her off to his Sussex farm, and nearly broke her heart before their brief wedded life came to an end.

After three years of troubled wifehood, Anne returned, a desolate widow, to the old house among the