

the pretty carolling of a mule canary, whose cage was standing close by.

"I hope you admire my canary," said Miss DE PLEDGE, smiling. "He was born and bred in the Wards. One of the men-patients is a bird fancier, and has been most successful with these canaries—their song is not too loud."

"How nice for the inmates to be allowed their amusements. Sick hours to a working man must be so long and tedious."

"Yes, I like them to be bright and happy, and try to let them have anything that is possible to help to pass the time pleasantly. I believe that our Poor Law Infirmaries have a great future before them, and will, in time, supersede Hospitals, because the public will refuse to give large voluntary contributions and be taxed at the same time. I am writing a paper on the subject for the Chicago Exhibition."

"When were Poor Law Infirmaries first instituted?" I asked.

"As separate buildings, not till 1867. In the metropolis they now number about 24, and most of them can accommodate about six or seven hundred patients. Ours is not so large. We have eleven wards, each containing 36 beds. Our number of inmates averages from 280 in summer to 400 in winter. Our children's ward, of which we are very proud, contains 40 beds."

"Are all Poor Law Infirmaries worked upon the same system as this?" I asked.

"More or less. I believe there are 10 or 12 Matrons who have received Hospital training. We all are subject to visits of the Local Government Board Inspector at any moment. We never know when to expect him, and he may demand to see any and everything—cupboards, beds, nothing escapes him. The system is excellent, and helps to keep everyone up to the mark. I, as Matron, superintend the cutting out of all the garments for the inmates, and account for every inch of calico and flannel that is used."

"Oh, then you clothe the patients as well?"

"Yes, during their stay here they are entirely dressed in the clothes made in the Infirmary. The arranging of this department requires the greatest exactness. The garments are given out and collected on certain days in each week, and the mending is done by the patients who are able to do it."

"Have you any incurables in the wards?"

"A great number: some have even been here eight or ten years. We have our own Chaplain, and services are held in the wards, but there is no chapel at present."

I asked Miss DE PLEDGE what her opinion was about the advisability of soft music as a means of soothing the sick and dying?"

"That would of course depend on the wish of the patient. As a rule, if no wish were expressed, I should say it would be best avoided. Music has frequently anything but a calming effect."

We then drifted into talking of the vexed question of woman and woman's rights. I found that Miss DE PLEDGE was not a suffragist, and while thoroughly desiring that all advantages of education and all branches of work, for which she is adapted, should be thrown open to woman, she disapproves entirely of anything that would make her mannish. "Woman is *not* inferior, only different, to man," she said, "and it is in virtue of her filling her own sphere rightly that her true influence really lies. All great men have had good mothers. Not mothers who have been engaged in a hundred and one public ways while they should have been forming the minds of their children. Let a woman extend her sympathies as widely as possible, let her be as many-sided and accomplished as her capabilities admit, but in no way let her seek to copy man. Woman's is the elevating, the purifying, the refining part in life, and she has a wide field for her energies."

As we left the pretty little sanctum to have a glimpse at the Wards, I gave a parting glance at its warm harmonious colouring, the bright cheery fire, and the little bird still softly singing in the window. Randy, or more correctly speaking Randolph, Miss DE PLEDGE's Irish terrier, bustled up from his place on the hearthrug to follow us.

"He always accompanies me on my rounds," she explained, "and is an immense favourite with everyone, especially the children."

On our way to the Wards Miss DE PLEDGE took me into her store-room, and showed me the cupboard full of calico, flannel, towelling, &c., some piles of garments already made and neatly folded—others in the course of construction—some Nurses caps with double frills, and pretty little baby bed-gowns. Everything spoke of neatness, order, and comfort. The first ward we visited was one of the women's, and I was much impressed with the pleasant cheerfulness of it. The walls are the same shade of pale green as the corridors, and each spotlessly white bed has a bright crimson rug across the foot. Down the centre are tables and stands of flowers, palms, &c., and attached to each ward is a comfortable little sitting-room for the Nurses, and a neat kitchen where the teas and breakfasts are prepared. Some of the patients were working, some reading, some sleeping, and

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