

A MORNING'S ROUND.



Nine o'clock—and I stood in the parlor of the humble little house, 76 Hayter street; the modest sign, "Nursing-at-Home Mission," above the door being the only indication that this was the headquarters of one of the finest benevolences in the philanthropic city of Toronto.

The nurses—there are six of them—were packing hand-satchels and donning their simple grey cloaks and bonnets, which con-



"OUR NURSES."

stitute their outdoor uniforms. The nurse in charge stood chatting with me and giving occasional directions to her subordinates.

Nine-thirty o'clock,—and the nurses had started out in various directions, covering the sections of the city from Parkdale to beyond the Don, each upon her angel mission.

I glanced at my companion. The sweet, strong, bright face of her beneath the simple bonnet of grey stuff; the hair banded smoothly back; the soft grey ribbon ties cosied beneath the chin; the grey double cloak, revealing a glimpse of white apron and girdle; the hand-satchel, with its store of nursing essentials,—she made a restful picture of ideal womanhood.

"I have a case on Mission avenue first," she said; "then we will go east."

Ten o'clock,—and we were in a box of a house, and beside the bed of a woman suffering—nay, dying, from cancer, caused by her husband throwing her over a flight of steps, when under the influence of liquor.

She was alone in the house—this mere shadow of a woman. Her small boy worried her, she said, and "she couldn't abide him around."

We laid aside our wraps, and with deft fingers the nurse began her work, lifting the frail body into an easier position; dressing the ugly swelling; bathing face and hands; chatting brightly the while.

"Mrs. B. needs so much white cotton," as she tore some fresh bandages. "See this nice absorbent cotton Dr. Macdonald sent her. He is very kind, and comes to visit her once in a while, doesn't he, Mrs. B.?" She was to undergo an operation last June,

but the trouble was too near a vital part, and the doctors were afraid to touch it."

The woman murmured something about "didn't believe in doctors nor hospitals"; then the lids dropped over the great dark eyes, in utter weakness.

She was of the lower class, but all coarseness had been refined away by sickness, and the brown curling hair gave softness to her face.

"She wasn't in pain," she said, "and she didn't mind being alone. She was just so tired. She would try to sleep a little when we were gone. Perhaps the leddy could lift her easily."

We lifted the frail, light weight upon the couch, tucked the purse with its five-dollar bill, "for the landlord, when he came," under the pillow, raised the narrow window a few inches, and left her in the box of a house alone."

"How long?" I queried, as we walked away.

"I cannot tell; she is very low," answered the nurse.

And up and down the streets the air was gay with holiday mirth.

Eleven o'clock: We had taken the car across the city, and were now on Sackville street, and in the center of the working class homes.

Walking through a corner butcher shop, we came into a room where the wife, a bright-looking young woman, was bending over a wash-tub.

She had been sick, but was now better. This was chiefly a visit of inquiry and a loan of medical appliances, necessary, yet too expensive for the woman to purchase. She thanked the grey-gowned nurse, and promised to follow her directions; and after a few minutes' pleasant talk we came away.

Eleven-thirty,—and we were in the bedroom of a woman in an advance stage of consumption.

An intelligent-looking woman, of refined face, with great blue eyes and brown hair, speech and voice both indicated that she had been accustomed to better surroundings. Yet the room was not devoid of comfort; there was no lack of essentials.

She welcomed the nurse and received the visitor courteously, looking out at me from the dark-blue eyes, and talking a little between the difficult breaths.

It was a long process, the bathing and brushing and the rubbing of the tender skin with alcohol. She was so weary, so utterly weary, when it was finished.

She wished us a "Happy New Year" in faint voice, and with eyes looking through the leafless tree-boughs outside the little window, wondered "whether she would live to see the spring."

Then, being very weak, almost while her fingers lay in ours, she, too, fell asleep.

Twelve-thirty,—and we were standing in the most pitiful of all the homes in our morning round. The nurse had told me the circumstances on our way. The husband is in the insane asylum, the two-year-old baby in the Sick Children's Hospital, with no hope of its little life. The wife, a refined woman of superior birth, struggling for three years to keep the poor home together and support the two remaining children, and finally succumbing through sheer overwork, worry and lack of food.

"I called at the house by mere accident a few days ago and found her prostrated, without a cent, no fuel, no food, and her two children playing about her," said the nurse.

She opened the door of the shabby cottage as she finished, and we entered into a room cold, disorderly, chilly, yet with simple home belongings and home trinkets all about it.

A pretty golden-haired little maiden of five or six looked up at us.

"I'm Mabel," she said. "Willie isn't dressed yet. Mamma went out this morning to do some work, and she told us to be good till she come home. Here's our dinner!" She pointed to two slices of bread and butter upon the table. "She said she'd come home pretty early, 'cause it's the day before Sunday. Willie wouldn't let me dress him."

There was no fire in the stove, and the baby boy of four was snuggling under the quilts. The nurse coaxed him into his clothes, and then we all searched about the rooms for a missing stocking to cover one little bare, fat foot.

They were such pretty children, with a wealth of yellow tangled hair that shone like sunshine in the dreary rooms.

"I am surprised that the mother has gone out," said the nurse, a little anxiously; "she was so utterly weak yesterday. But I suppose she had the chance to earn a little money, and needed it for food and fire."

"Why does she not leave the little ones at the day nursery?" I asked.

"The charge is ten cents a day per child, and she cannot pay it."

It was dreadful. The desolate, chill rooms; the weather-stained walls; this poor bit of a home, which a woman had struggled in vain to keep; the insane father and sick baby; and these pretty little ones playing about so uncomprehending of their mother's sorrow and weakness.

"The Mission is looking after them now," said the nurse. "The mother is to go into the Convalescent Home for the winter, in order to rest and get her strength up. These little ones will go into one of the Homes, the baby will die, and the father will probably die in the asylum, as he is a consumptive."

It was hard to come away and leave those fair little babies alone in the chilly, desolate rooms, waiting the weary mother's homecoming. But there were other calls to make.

One o'clock,—and now we were in a tidy home in a rear, one of a row of innumerable small cottages.

Here the case was one of watching and expectancy, that of a bright young woman whose baby girl of two clung to her gown.

She looked impatiently forward to the time when she would be able to turn in and do something, since "Jim was out of work, and there wasn't a cent in the house."

She did not speak fretfully, but with a matter of fact air, more sadly expressive than any complaining. A few words of encouragement and patience and a picture-book for baby sufficed here.

One-thirty: Another home spoiled by drink, another husband out of work, and another woman with body and mind weakened by ill-treatment. Her big fawn-like eyes looked timidly at us; yet she was glad to welcome the nurse and tell of her sickness.

Here, too, the satchel was opened, and discovered something for children and mother.

"That finishes the list for the morning," said the little grey-gowned nurse. And we stepped out into the gay streets, so full of holiday cheer, and took swift passage across the city to the homely little headquarters of this most blessed mission.