

"OH, NOT MYSELF; NOT ME!"

"There never was such affliction as mine," said a poor sufferer, restlessly tossing in her bed in one of the wards of an hospital. "I don't think there ever was such racking pain.

"Once," was faintly uttered from the next bed.

The first speaker paused for a moment; and then, in a still more impatient tone, resumed her complaint.

"Nobody knows what I pass through. Nobody ever suffered more pain."

"Once," was again whispered from the same direction.

"I take it you mean yourself, poor soul! but"—

"Oh, not myself; not me!" exclaimed the other; and her pale face flushed up to the very temples, as if some wrong had been offered not to herself, but to another.

She spoke with such earnestness that her restless companion lay still for several seconds, and gazed intently on her face.—It was a young face scarcely more than nineteen, and, not very long ago, it had been round and ruddy. But the cheeks now wan, were sunken, and the parched lips were drawn back from the mouth, as if by pain. Yet there dwelt an extraordinary sweetness in the clear grey eyes, and a refinement on the placid brow, such as can only be imparted by a heart-acquaintance with him who is "*full of grace and truth.*"

"Oh, not myself; not me!" she repeated, deprecatingly.

There was a short pause; and then the following words, uttered in the same low key, slowly and solemnly broke the midnight silence of the place,—

"*And when they had platted a crown of thorns they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand, and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him saying, Hail King of the Jews! And they spit upon him and took the reed, and smote him upon the head. . . . And when they were come to a place called Golgotha, they gave him vinegar to drink, mingled with gall. And then crucified him. . . . And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads. . . . And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with*

*a loud voice, saying, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"*

The voice ceased, and for several minutes not a syllable was spoken. The night nurse rose from her chair by the fire, and mechanically handed a cup of barley-water, flavoured with lemon-juice and sugar, to the lips of both sufferers.

"Thank you, nurse," said the last speaker. "They gave him gall for his meat; and in his thirst they gave him vinegar to drink."

"She is talking about Jesus Christ," said the other woman, already beginning to toss less restlessly from side to side.—"But," added she, "talking about his sufferings can't mend ours—at least not mine."

"But it lightens hers," said the nurse. "I wonder how."

"Hush!"

And the gentle voice again took up the strain:

"*Surely he had borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. . . . He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.*"

"Healed! That's a blessed word. I wish I were healed," sighed the restless invalid.

The two fellow-sufferers of whom we are speaking had never met till they found themselves side by side in the Infirmary. Barbara, the elder, had been a servant in a wealthy family, where she had no spiritual advantages, and few aspirations beyond "the life that now is." She was bound to her employers by no band except good service on the one side, and liberal wages on the other. So that, when her health gave way beneath a disabling and painful malady, it was no wonder that her placed was soon filled by a more profitable servant, and that Barbara was consigned to the refuge for the sick poor.

Lucy Fletcher, the youngest of the two, had become its inmate in consequence of a fall down the trap-door of a warehouse, left carelessly insecure. She knew that her injuries were considered hopeless; and that, if she ever left the friendly walls of the hospital, it would be as a life-long cripple.