

WHO WAS TODDLE-BEN ?

AN HOSPITAL SKETCH.

A GROUP gathered round a narrow hospital bed, consisting of a nurse, a female assistant, Sallie Burgess by name, and the doctor in charge of the institution. The latter is holding his watch in his hand. A baby feebly wailing, swathed in charity's garments, a life just opened, and sad to say, a life just closing. Scene first in the life of Toddle-Ben. Who was Toddle-Ben ?

No one knew, there lay the trouble.

After the feeble spark of life had flickered out, and the mother of the wailing infant lay dead, the poor, cold, grey face looking so pinched and drawn, the morsel of humanity who owed its life to the unknown, wept on, as if conscious of its utter abandonment in the world.

Well it might wail ; no one wanted it ; no one owned it—a waif, a nobody.

"Pity the youngster ain't dead too," said the nurse, as she turned away.

To be sure, she wiped away a tear, as she turned from the bed-side, but the tear was not for the living, but for the dead. All the time she laid there dying, she had tried so hard to tell them something, but the cough, that seemed to rack the feeble frame, would commence, and the Angel of Death sealed the trembling lips with his icy touch, leaving the words forever unspoken. "So young, so pretty like," said the old nurse, as she wiped the unaccustomed tear away with the corner of her voluminous apron.

"Gentle born, too," said Sallie Burgess, snivelling audibly, as she slipped into her pocket a soiled envelope she had managed to possess herself of unseen by the other woman.