



## THE STRANGE CASE AT ST. ALBAN'S.

BY WINIFRED SMITH.

We were very busy at St. Alban's Hospital. Nurses and doctors were hard at work from morning till night, and from night till morning again. The severe winter was bringing its usual accompaniments of starvation and sickness. Hard times and bad living were working havoc among the poor; the hospital was full to overflowing. An unusual number of casualties, at the same time, brought stretchers after stretchers to the accident room.

The great clock over the entrance was just striking six as I threw my shawl round me and hastened off across the grounds to the dispensary. Running quickly through the snow, I soon arrived at the door, and was greeted by the customary growl which awaited late comers.

"I am sorry I am late in coming for the stimulants," I said, as soon as I could get my breath. "I could not leave the ward before. Let me see, six ounces of brandy for No. 20 and little No. 16's port wine. That is all, I think."

"Anything fresh this afternoon, Nurse Deaton?" inquired the dispenser, as I busily packed the bottles into my apron-pocket, in order to leave my hands free for my shawl.

"Nothing for us," I answered. "A bad case has just gone up to 'Mary' Ward. A poor young fellow was brought in this afternoon, found dead in the snow;—good evening, and I set off again across the white ground."

"Off duty at six," I said to myself, as I went. "I would not go off, only I am so tired, and Sister says I must."

At the ward door I encountered Nurse Flemming, my chum and fellow-nurse, just emerging from the ward, accompanied by two women, one of whom was weeping bitterly.

"Oh, dearie, exclaimed Nurse, as soon as she saw me, 'I am so glad you are come. This is the wife of poor No. 12, who died this morning; she wishes to see him. I know you are off duty, dear, but do you mind taking her? I've just got a fracture in, and Mr. Hooper is waiting to attend to it; thank you.' I nodded a cheerful acquiescence, and she turned back to attend to her many duties."

Taking the women with me, I went to the room of the porter, who kept the mortuary keys. With many growls he lighted his lantern and prepared to accompany us, as he was in duty bound to do. He was one of the many male officials of St. Alban's who considered it right to be as disagreeable as possible to the nurses whenever they required his services, so I took no notice of his murmurings, but devoted my attention to the poor woman at my side. While she was telling me of the many virtues of her late husband, and of the dark future in store for herself and her eight children, we arrived at the door of the mortuary. Leaving us standing there, under a lamp which projected from the wall and which the porter lit from the flame of his lantern, the man entered alone, in order that he might bring forward from the large mortuary the particular body we wished to see; presently he opened the door again to admit us.

The door by which we entered led into a tiny chapel. It was here that the relatives of the deceased looked their last upon the pale, set faces of their departed friends. The body about to be visited was wheeled on a light trolley into the chapel, which was kept very clean, and daily redecked with white flowers.

As we entered, the porter stepped outside to do something to the lamp, which did not burn properly, while I went forward with the women and gently turned back the sheet from the poor, dead face.

The two women were too much absorbed—the one with her grief, and the other with her sympathy—to take any notice of me; so I, remembering a poor little waif who had died in my arms a day or two before, and thinking I should like to see him again, for I had grown to love the little, motherless creature, picked up the lantern from the floor, and went in search of my little patient. It was some time before I found him, and after imprinting a kiss on the small, pitiful face, I went to look at the new post-mortem room, which had lately been finished and which I had not seen. I was walking round, the light of the lantern gleaming weirdly on the whitewashed walls and floor, when I suddenly heard a door bang. Without knowing exactly what had happened, I shivered with apprehension and my flesh crept uneasily. In a moment I had flown through the mortuary and into the chapel. Too late! The door was shut, and all was in darkness!

In a moment I knew what had happened: the porter, supposing that I had gone and left the visitors to him, had turned out the gas, locked the door, and gone away with them. Oh, it was too horrible! I beat on the door with both my fists! I raised my voice in a fearful scream, but that was worse than the awful silence, for the hollow walls took up the sound, and the mocking echo came back to me, as if the dead were shrieking in their places! I sank on my knees on the damp stones and covered my face with my hands.

The building stood far away from any other: the blustering wind would prevent my voice being heard even had I the courage to shout again, which I had not; no one would be in the grounds in such weather as this; I should not be missed. In the ward I should be supposed, being off duty, to be in my own room. Nurse Flemming, missing me from the supper-table, would imagine that I had gone to bed, and would probably retire without, as she thought, disturbing me. What should I do? What could I do? To remain there all night seemed impossible, yet how much more impossible to get away. I had always been accounted among my fellow-nurses as the most courageous, and I fear I had been wont to boast that nothing could frighten me, but I had never dreamed of anything like this. To sit among friendly faces in the daylight, or beside a cheery fire, was one thing. To be forced to spend a night alone with the dead, was another.

At length I gathered sufficient courage to turn round and try to realize my position. Oh, how I envied those fortunate mortals who, in moments of danger and dread, can quietly faint away into calm unconsciousness, to recover their senses only when the horror is past. If I could only lie down on that cold floor and sleep. Aye! even if it was the sleep that knows no waking, how gladly would I have done so. Anything rather than remain terror-stricken with these dreadful companions. I glanced at the lantern: how long would it burn? Could I depend on its light lasting till dawn? I looked at the trolley, with its cold, still burden, then, with a mighty effort, I crossed the chapel, and, seizing the end of the ghastly carriage, whirled it quickly into the large mortuary. With as much strength as my arms still possessed, I sent it into the darkness, and flew back into the dimly-lighted chapel, closing the door behind me.

Now at least I was alone, with nothing more unearthly than white flowers, and a large ebony cross which hung against the wall. Sinking down into the corner most remote from the inner door, wrapping my shawl closely round my shivering shoulders, I placed the lantern beside me, and strove vainly to think of pleasant things. I tried to think of the ward, with its cheerful fire and rows of beds with their cosy red rugs; of the fun we had had at Christmas with the children and the Christmas tree; of home, with the dear faces I hoped to see when the summer came, and with it the long-anticipated holiday. But all in vain! My eyes would keep glancing round at the horrible door. My ears would strain themselves to listen for sounds from that silent room. Oh! I should go mad! I could

not bear it! How wicked! how cruel! that no one came to seek me! What was that? The great clock at the entrance was striking. One! two!—but, no, seven! eight! then silence. Only eight o'clock! Only two hours since I ran through the garden to fetch the stimulants!

Almost involuntarily I slipped my hand into my apron-pocket. Yes, there were the two bottles, carefully wrapped round with my handkerchief, as I had put them. For a moment a ray of hope darted across my mind; surely, when the bottles were missed from their place, inquiry would be made, and I should be sought for. But a moment's reflection brought back the old despair. It was not an unheard-of thing in those busy times for the dispensary to be forgotten until the door was locked and the dispenser gone. Mixtures and medicines would be left on the little shelf outside, but not the stimulants—and Sister, with a sigh at the forgetfulness of her nurses, would serve the patients from the stock bottles, and no thought would be directed to me.

Whether I fell asleep or not I have never since been able to determine, but when I roused from the semi-consciousness into which I had fallen, several hours appeared to have elapsed. Instead of the dim light of the lantern at my side, the chapel was flooded with silver moonlight. In spite of my thick shawl, I was fearfully cold and cramped with leaning so long against the chilly stones. I was aware that something had roused me; something besides moonlight and discomfort. A glance at the skylight overhead showed me the moon sailing calmly through the dark, blue vault of heaven, surrounded by fleecy clouds; and even as I looked and listened, the great clock struck for nearly six hours I had lain unconscious in that awful place. The fact did not tend to bring me comfort; I felt sick and ill, my limbs ached; the black cross, touched by the moon-beams, loomed dark and awful against the white wall. Oh, to die and forget everything! What was that? A sound!—a groan! Oh, Heaven! coming from the other side of that inner door!

I had risen to my feet, but now I sank back, frozen with horror, into the sheltering corner. For a few moments, silence; then it came again. I listened—a low, long moan—but to my confused brain it was not the hollow, unearthly groan of the stage ghost such as we are wont to associate with rattling chains and lurid blue fire, but rather the groan of a human creature in pain. As soon as this idea took possession of my weakened mind, my courage returned. All my nurse-like instincts came to my aid.

The thought that a living human being was near, much more a fellow-creature who needed help, niled me with new energy, and I rose and took up my lantern. What I expected to find I hardly know: perhaps some workman who had been assisting with the new building had fallen asleep, or been overcome with drink, and shut in, like myself, through misadventure. How improbable a theory this was did not, fortunately, occur to me until long afterwards, and I opened the door and looked into the dark interior. At the sound of the opening door the groaning ceased, and for awhile I stood uncertain which direction to take.

Presently a movement at the further end decided me, and I made my way slowly round the stone ledges, casting the light of the lantern on the ground as I went. No sign of a human figure could I see. No British workman's recumbent form gladdened my eyes. I stood still, in perplexity. Oh, heavens! what was that? Close beside me, not yet placed in a shell, but lying on the stone slab, lay a long, still figure. Still! Oh, horror! As I looked, unable to stir, I saw the white sheet that covered it move—a long, thin hand pushed itself from beneath and almost touched me. All my former experience was nothing to this. In a moment the fingers had pulled the sheet from the face, and a pair of dark eyes gazed into mine!

How long I stood thus I shall never know. At length, a long, quivering sigh from the white lips called me to myself, and I gathered courage to bend over and touch the shivering feet. "Enough! The spell was broken! I knew then that this was no time to hesitate—no time to give way to womanish fears. I took the cold hand in mine."

"Do not fear," I said, in as calm a voice as I could command, "I will do all I can for you"; and, taking the shawl from my shoulders, I folded it round the shivering form. Instinctively I remembered the bottles in my pocket, and, drawing them forth, dropped a little brandy between the shivering feet. After a while the returning color in the lips, the increasing warmth of the limbs, told me that my efforts had not been in vain. Oh, if I could only summon aid; but that was impossible! If I could keep life in my companion, my patient, until help arrived. Fortunately, my shawl was a large, warm one; fortunately, old No. 20 had not got his brandy, but I had it safely here!

"Where am I?" asked the man, as he looked round the dim place, his face full of surprise—and no wonder, for his surroundings had, so say the least, an unusual appearance. I did not think it wise or necessary to explain matters more than to tell him he was in St. Alban's Hospital, and would soon, doubtless, be well. He told me what I had already guessed, that in travelling on foot through the snow he had been overtaken by intense fatigue, and being unable to overcome the drowsiness he knew well might be fatal, he had fallen asleep. "It's a wonder I'm not dead," he concluded, and I had no answer.

I had been so absorbed in my work that I had taken no account of the hours as they went by, until now I heard the clock ring out six! Oh, the joy of that sound! We kept early hours at St. Alban's, and at six o'clock we were expected to rise. I should be missed, sought for, and found!

I was shivering and sick. The man had fallen into a doze, from which I could not find it in my heart to rouse him, lonely and miserable as I felt. Oh, how cold it was! My thin cotton dress was scanty covering from the icy air. How long would it be before they found me?

Would they seek long before they thought of the mortuary? Would they think of the mortuary at all? How all these thoughts tormented me, chasing each other through my aching brain until, at last, a sound of a key turning in the lock—the voice of my dear nurse companion saying, in bewildered tones, "She cannot be here, porter. Then the whole place spun round, and I saw and heard no more."

It was long before I returned to my work. Pneumonia set in, and for weeks I was too ill to leave my bed.

Tenderly was I nursed, and much was I praised for what they were pleased to call my bravery. My patient, I learned, had recovered and was full of gratitude for his strange rescue from an untimely end. The case of "suspended animation" was much talked of among the doctors, and the medical papers took it up with interest. "You saved his life, you know," said the nurses to me, apparently to console me for my unpleasant experience; and the patient himself has told me the same thing a hundred times since that day, for I am now his wife.

Willie M., an Ayrshire farmer, was somewhat remiss in attending divine service, and his parish minister, on one of his pastoral visits, took occasion to refer to it in rather a pointed manner. Willie excused himself on the score of advancing years, but his spiritual guide would not condone the offence on that ground. "That will scarcely do, William, for I observe you are very regular in your attendance at market every Friday." "Oh, ay, sir," replied Willie, "but that's easy explained! You see, when we gang tae the toon, we can get what we like; but, when we gang tae the kirk, we hae just to tak' what thou likes to gie us!"

## THE QUIET HOUR.

## The Changed Cross.

It was a time of sadness, and my heart, Although it knew and loved the better part, Felt wearied with the conflict and the strife, And all the needful discipline of life.

And while I thought on these, as given to me, My trial tests of faith and love to be, It seemed as if I never could be sure That faithful to the end I should endure.

And thus, no longer trusting to His might Who says, "We walk by faith and not by sight," Doubting—and almost yielding to despair,— The thought arose: *My cross I cannot bear!*

Far heavier its weight must surely be Than the-e of others which I daily see; Oh, if I might another burden choose, Methinks I should not fear my crown to lose.

A solemn silence reigned on all around, Even Nature's voice uttered not a sound; The evening shadows seemed of peace to tell, And sleep upon my weary spirit fell.

A moment's pause, and then a heavenly light Beamed full upon my wondering, raptur'd sight; Angels on silvery wings seemed every where, And angels' music thrilled the balmy air.

Then one, more fair than all the rest to see, One, to whom all the others bowed the knee, Came gently to me as I trembling lay, And, "Follow Me," he said, "I am the Way."

Then, speaking thus, He led me far above, And there, beneath a canopy of love, Crosses of divers shape and size were seen, Larger and smaller than mine own had been.

And one there was most beautiful to behold, A little one, with jewels set in gold— Ah! this, methought, I can with comfort wear, For it will be an easy one to bear.

And so the little cross I quickly took, But all at once my frame beneath it shook; The sparkling jewels, fair were they to see, But far too heavy was their weight for me.

This may not be, I cried; and looked again To see if any there could ease my pain; But, one by one, I passed them slowly by, Till on a lovely one I cast my eye.

Fair flowers around its sculptur'd form entwined, And grace and beauty seemed in it combined; Wondering, I gazed, and still I wondered more, To think so many should have pass'd it o'er.

But, oh! that form so beautiful to see, Soon made its hidden sorrows known to me; Thorns lay beneath those flowers and colors fair— Sorrowing, I said, "This cross I may not bear."

And so it was with each and all around; Not one to suit my need could there be found; Weeping, I laid each heavy burden down, As my Guide gently said, "No cross—no crown."

At length to Him I raised my sadden'd heart; He knew its sorrows, bade its doubts depart,— "Be not afraid," he said, "but trust in Me; My perfect love shall now be shown to thee."

And then, with lighted eyes and willing feet, Again I turned my earthly cross to meet; With forward footsteps turning not aside, For fear some hidden evil might betide.

And there, in the pre-ordained way, Listening to hear, and ready to obey, A cross I quickly found of plainest form, With only words of love inscribed thereon.

With thankfulness I raised it from the rest, And joyfully acknowledged it the best; The only one of all the many there, That I could feel was good for me to bear.

And while I thus my chosen one confess'd, I saw a heavenly brightness on it rest; And as I bent, my burden to sustain, I recognized my own old cross again!

But, oh! how different did it seem to be, Now I had learned its preciousness to see; No longer could I unbelieve say,— "Perhaps another is a better way."

Ah! no; henceforth my one desire shall be, That He who knows me best shall choose for me; And so, whate'er His love sees good to send, I'll trust it's best—because He knows the end.

—L. P. W.

## Royal Pathway of the Holy Cross.

The cross, is always ready, and at every turn awaits you. Run where you please, you cannot shun it; for everywhere you take yourself along with you, and you shall always find yourself; you shall always find the cross,—above, below, within, without, turn where you will. You must needs be patient if you would have peace within and gain the everlasting crown. Bear the cross willingly, and it will carry you, and lead you to the longed-for goal, where there shall be an end of suffering—though it will not be here. Bear it *unwillingly*, you make a burden for yourself, loading yourself the more—and you must bear it still. Throw it away, and you will find another, perhaps a heavier one.—*Thomas A. Kempis.*

"Of all trouble it is perhaps true," says Dr. Robertson Nicoll in his volume, "Ten-minute Sermons," "that it is best, even for ourselves, not to speak much of it. This is so true of the greater griefs that an almost certain gauge of the depth to which pain has sunk is the measure of its repression. The more real the pain, the greater is the anxiety the world should ignore it. Only inexperienced sufferers are voluble. Those familiar with the secrets of anguish are silent. They do their best to hide from the outer world the consciousness, the memory, and the expectation of their suffering. They make much of alleviations, and eagerly welcome whatever soothes and distracts; they know that expression reacts upon emotion, and makes the burden heavier."