

A DEATH IN A HOSPITAL.

"Have not you got any of your friends coming to see you to-day, David?" I asked one Sunday afternoon of an old man who lay at the far-away end of a long surgical ward, and by whose side I still sat solitary, long after every other bed had its complement of outer-world faces gathered around it.

No churchgoing had there been for me that calm bright day of rest, for the wards were full of critical cases, not to be safely left, even for an hour. And yet, though I felt the deprivation with regret, I was not sad; for I too had had my holy work to do, and was satisfied. What better can any of us wish for. Sunday or weekday, than just the particular task to do that God gives us, each at its own particular hour? The old man whom I now spoke to was one of the critical cases. A very old man he was, over whose white head had passed the successes, the disappointments, the disasters of eighty-seven years,—doing their work, in that he was not dismayed at death, nor unprepared to meet it. He had been brought to us a few days since, suffering from a severe accident, one of the frequent mischances of infirm old age in the hurry of the crowded streets, and from the want of vitality in the patient's system, there had been from the first but little hope of his ultimate recovery. Secondary hæmorrhage had since come on, and it was now only a question of a day more or less as to the old man's life. A daughter, a son-in-law, and a couple of neighbours had been to see him several times since his admission, but to-day—just when he seemed most sinking—I waited for them in vain; and thus it was that I asked him:—

"Have not you got any of your friends coming to see you to-day, David?"

The old man turned his blue eyes upon me with a smile. Clear blue eyes they were, which seemed to fight off the dimness of approaching death to the last, with their frank, childlike brightness.

"Yes,—I've got a Friend,—has come to see me," he said, and his low, slow utterance betrayed his rapidly increasing feebleness;—"has come to see me—every day—this eighty years past and more—

The oldest Friend I've got, and the truest. Comes to me to-day, and says, 'Henceforth there is laid up for thee, a crown.' Thank the blessed God, I was never separated from Him one whole day, though I've often fallen away from Him for a bit,—never He from me."

He paused, while that same happy, confident smile again lit up his whole face.—Then his manner changed slightly, and took a benign, almost patriarchal, air as he turned to me. "And I pray that He may be your friend, lassie, too, as He has been mine. You've been very kind to me, my dear, an old man and a stranger. I pray that He may lay up a crown for you, and be your friend now and for ever. I can't wish you better. The best friend,—with us every day. Yes, yes, my dear, I've had my friend come to see me."

As I made some reply—I do not now remember what—his face took yet another change; he sank back exhausted with the effort he had made, and presently began in very, very feeble tones to talk in a wandering way of his Canadian experiences. For it seemed that he had lived during the greatest part of his life in Upper Canada, and had undertaken the voyage to England,—a long expedition for a man of his age,—to see once again his youngest and favourite child, Canadian-born, but now married and settled in London.

Later in the afternoon she came in, having been delayed by some trivial domestic accident, with her husband and child; superior people all of them, like the old man, and in speech and manner more refined and educated than most of my patients. But the old man, though he quite knew her, could not again gather up his failing powers for any connected effort of thought or speech.

And so we all sat, awed and quiet, through that long Sunday afternoon. The chaplain came, after he had concluded his usual ministrations in the wards to those unable to quit their beds, to see old David, to whom at his own request he had the previous day given the Holy Communion.—But the old man, unconscious of the realities immediately surrounding him, was absorbed in past recollections; lost in his own happy, childlike thoughts, and listening above all, through all his wandering