

Our Foreign Letter.

NOTES OF A WAIF AND STRAY.

IN THE HOSPITAL.

Yes, I am a waif and a stray, and there are days when I glory in the fact. To wander at will over this



fair earth, with leisure to examine and admire the arts and artifices of man, and the eternal beauties of Nature. To be untrammelled by ties and duties such

as fall to the lot of the majority of mankind. This is a state of existence which, for a time, is pleasing, and, one would fain hope, beneficial. Sometimes I linger on the mountain heights in the first flush of summer, when the meadows are gay with the bright-hued Alpine flowers, when the woods are sweet with the scent of pines which the sun has kissed, and the great snow peaks stand out, a pure white glitter, against the bright blue sky. Then I descend into the beautiful land of Italy—ever lovely, ever loved. And I dwell in her grand old cities, and try to drink in some of the spirit of the wondrous Renaissance. Again and again I return to Naples, crowned queen of beauty seated on the curve of her glorious bay, to ———.

But I wander from the subject for which I put pen to paper.

The waif is struck down by fever in a strange city—a city of the thousand and one Arabian Nights' fame. Alone and ill, it seems best to follow common sense and the advice of the doctor (you will perceive the two things are not *identical*), so I put my head voluntarily into the lion's mouth, and go into the hospital. Oh! the relief of that cool, quiet room and the spotlessly clean bed in which I laid my aching limbs, after the noise, the glare, the dust and dirt of an Eastern city, and the strain of pulling oneself together and trying to remember not to forget anything! For now I could just lie still and let the doctors and nurses try to get me well again. If they failed—well, it was better to die in the hospital than in an hotel.

My room—ward, one of the nurses of the red-tape kind called it—was charming. The walls were of *eau de nil* colour, the furniture, bed, washing stand, wardrobe, and pretty dressing table all of white enamel.

The Matron, in white gown and white veil, flitted in and out, apologising for the delicious milk and soda-water they gave me. "The doctor's orders were strict," she said; "I must have nothing else to-day." Why, of course not, was my dreamy thought, as I remembered how I had tried to choke down solid food the day before. The doctor asked whether I had ever had typhoid fever. Why, of course I had. Didn't he know? again I vaguely wondered. I wanted nothing but to lie still. If only one's head did not ache so terribly! And if only one could sleep! For the rest, I was very obedient, not being a stranger to illness, though this was my first experience of a hospital *as a patient*, and, ah! well, as I grew better I began to realise the *difference of the point of view!*

The hospital was English, with English doctors and

nurses, only the black faces of the servants reminded one that England was far away. Dear black and brown people—grown-up children, as we Europeans in fancied superiority call them. Their point of view again is quite different, so different that mostly we entirely fail to understand it.

Their favourite attitude of mind expressed by the word *maleesh*, *i.e.*, it does not matter, never mind, hardly commends itself to a vigorous Englishman.

Twin figure to the doctor, perhaps even surpassing him in importance in the eye of the sick man, is the nurse. There were nurses of many types in that hospital. But stay, may a patient criticise in a particular sense his doctor or his nurse? I trow not.

Somehow the night nurses impress themselves most strongly on one's consciousness. The day has many distractions, perhaps one has visitors; at any rate, there is the doctor. But at night the nurse reigns supreme. I was long enough in the hospital to experience several changes of night nurses. How good they all were! There was the dear little Brownie, as I called her, because she did countless little kind offices for me, setting things straight, finding precious objects that no one had time to look for by day! Turning out locusts and other strange insects, and killing mosquitoes. It is a dreadful thing to lie helpless in bed, and to hear the horrid singing of a mosquito *inside* the mosquito curtain, oneself full of blood-thirstiness yet powerless to kill! Then she has clever suggestions for the tempting of reluctant Sleep. She turns and shakes the pillows, and how delicious is the cool of that freshly-turned pillow to the fevered cheek! Then she *redds* the bed. Where is Brownie now, I wonder? Is she still in that hot, dry land, or back in her own bonnie Scotland amongst the blue-bells and the heather? Wherever she is, God bless her! For she possesses the healing touch of sympathy. She belongs to the best type of nurse, but this is not to say that there are not others of the same type in the hospital.

Shall I give a photograph of my doctor? No, it might be dangerous; it will be wiser to draw a portrait. For this may not be a likeness, and it can be idealised, which is sometimes an advantage. He was keen-eyed, skilful, clever, and possessed of a quiet and slightly caustic sense of humour. This latter gift is of immense use to a doctor when dealing with the vagaries of his patient. The mountains which are apt to upheave themselves in the mind of a convalescent, for instance, are soon reduced to molehills by a well-turned phrase of the physician. Even pain can be alleviated by a joke. He was kind and thoughtful for his patients' comfort—very thoughtful. But I must chronicle two habits that amused while they annoyed me. If he did not wish to answer questions, he talked Arabic. Then he never would sit down except once, when the nurse put a chair in the precise spot where he usually stood, and the strategy was effectual—mechanically he sat down.

What has become of that most charming of nurses? She ministered to me for all too short a time. In what quarter of the world has she now alighted, bearing tender mercies on her wings?

My doctor was firmness itself; had he been a woman he might have been accused of obstinacy. By the way, a hospital is a curious mixture of autocracy and democracy. The doctor rules supreme, Matron, nurse, and patient alike bowing to his will. But apart from

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