

A FALLEN SPARROW.

"Nurse, 'ere I wants yer."

"What is it, Billy. Aren't you comfortable?" said the staff nurse, as she bent over the accumulation of splints, cradles and bandages that an hour or so before had been an active, sturdy, mischievous little boy.

"'Course I ain't comforable, I feels sick, I can't move meself, and me legs 'as pails 'angin' on 'em, an' I wants muvver. Where is she?"

"You must try to be a good boy and lie still, and I promise you shall see mother as soon as she comes."

"Will she bring my baby?"

"Yes, I am sure she will if you are good."

"Well, you wouldn't be no gooder if you was me."

"Now, I don't expect I should" she said.

"But why can't I go 'ome?"

"Now, Billy, listen to me. Don't you remember this afternoon you were playing in the street, when a great big motor car came along and hurt your poor little legs and a big policeman brought you here. Don't you remember it?"

"No—why did he cop me? I didn't do nothin'."

"I know you didn't, but it was a *kind* policeman who carried you here, so that we can make you better."

"When will muvver come?"

The nurse's face grew anxious, as she noted the glazed look in the blue eyes, the flush on the rounded cheek and the restlessness of the little hands.

"Try to go to sleep, sonny, and when you wake up perhaps she will be here."

"She *must* come, to bring me my Christmas. She was goin' to buy it this 'evenin'."

"Well now, I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll bring some work and sit by you till she comes."

She disappeared outside the screen and returned with her hands full of bright paper and tinsel.

"Wots that for?"

"It's for the Christmas Tree to-morrow. Don't talk any more now."

The narcotic was beginning to take effect, and as the heavy eyelids drooped a vision of undreamed-of beauty unfolded before those hidden eyes.

Through the opening of the screen the ward had looked, with its coloured balls and gay festoons, like fairyland to the little boy—but now it appeared transfigured. The glass balls became myriads of stars and the festoons like angels' wings.

Nurse watching closely saw a smile creep over the bruised little face, and she bent over him to catch the muttered words:

"It ain't 'arf grand, all them angels. Are you there, muvver. Can you see 'em?"

A white-coated young doctor appeared by the bedside, felt the child's pulse, shrugged his shoulders.

"Poor little beggar. What a shame. Nice little chap too. Has his mother come?" and departed as silently as he had come.

Nurse looked anxiously at the door from time to time expecting and longing to see a shabby figure of the type so familiar to that part of London, representative of the "muvvers" of her little patients.

The low muttering began again:

"'Aint the music lovely? There must be 'undreds and 'undreds of organs. Come lets us 'dore 'im. Can you 'ear, muvver?"

Then with a partial return to consciousness he cried fretfully: "Why don't muvver come?"

The subdued chatter of the other children in the ward penetrated his fast-clouding brain.

"Can't them other children see? Let 'em see, nurse!"

He lay peacefully for a time, then suddenly tried to raise himself in bed, his eyes fixed on the opening in the screen.

"Muvver," he called. "Muvver you 'ave been a long time. I thought you wasn't never comin', but you do look 'ansome in that blue gownd, 'an you've brought my baby and 'es all shiny like and 'oldin out 'is little 'ands to 'is Billy."

Then with a weary smile: "Put your other arm round me, muvver—that's prime."

Very tenderly the nurse laid the little body back on the pillow.

"Did you see mother and your baby then after all, little Billy?"

The answer to her mute question came floating in from the ward where the children were singing softly:

"Mary was that Mother mild

Jesus Christ her little Child."

An hour later a toilworn woman carrying a baby knelt beside Billy's bed, where the little maimed body lay so peacefully.

"I couldn't come before, Billy," she sobbed, "I was out doin' me bit of shoppin' when they came. Muvver's bought what you wanted, duck." Out of the shopping bag she produced a cheap pocket-knife and placed it in the little hands, folded on the quiet breast. "Muvver's little Billy-boy," she said, and silently left the ward.

In quite another part of London, where slums and such things are forgotten whenever possible, Lady Smith sat sipping her tea in her luxurious drawing-room. A frown crossed her face from time to time and she gave absent answers to the child on the hearthrug at her feet.

"Margaret," she said to the maid who came in to remove the tea things. "'Phone up the Children's Hospital and enquire about that child the car knocked down this afternoon."

The maid returned in a few moments.

"The little boy died about an hour ago my Lady."

"These children should be stopped playing in the streets," she said irritably—"I expect the woman has dozens more."

But she pondered uneasily: "What will John say, he told me never to drive the car in town."

The "woman" in her poor home, washing "my baby," let her tears mingle with the soapy water as she glanced round the room garlanded with the paper chains that Billy's grubby little fingers had made.

"She was awful kind, that nurse, Gawd bless her. I'll fetch her in a bunch of flowers to-morrer."

"With the poor and mean and lowly,

Lived on earth our Saviour holy."

H. H.

WHAT TO READ.

BIOGRAPHY AND MEMOIRS.

- "The Story of Stafford House," Duke of Sutherland.
- "The Letters of John Keats," Maurice Buxton Forman.
- "The Wynne Diaries," edited by Anne Fremantle.
- "The Truth about a Journalist," Sydney A. Moseley.
- "The Tumult and the Shouting," George Slocombe.
- "Memoirs of a Royal Detective," Herbert T. Fitch.

FICTION.

- "The Pineapple Garden," Dorothy Black.
- "See How They Run," Jerrard Tickell.
- "The Glass House," M. Barnard Eldershaw.
- "The A.B.C. Murders," Agatha Christie.
- "Freedom Farewell," Phyllis Bentley.

HISTORY.

- "The History of the Foundling Hospital," R. H. Nichols and F. A. Wray.
- "The Crusades," G. A. Campbell.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)