

disclose a wonderful contrivance of steel and leather—a gift from London, to the poor old man, who had lost his arm some months before. I conceal my foolishness, and proceed to adjust the straps that attach it to the stump, admiring the polished hook, that is an evolution since the days of "Captain Cuttle." But the old man says, "Nay, nay, Miss, I ain't agoing to wear it every day; 'tis too fine for I;" and controversy proving powerless, off it comes until Sunday, now that he can master its intricacies.

A sweet child face follows: eyes of bright brown, always patient, with the patience of childhood that is so terribly unnatural and pathetic, and the sweet voice, asking so sadly often, "Nurse, am I to be put to sleep to-morrow?" and I say, "Yes, dear," while my heart aches for the sleep that does not mean rest, and that does mean horrible waking pain. Oh, Alice, dear little Alice! with your five wounds, and necrosed bones, what has time done for you, I wonder? Do you still make merry somewhere, over the "places" that must be kept open with little pieces of tissue, and the places that hold "pipes." How I long to take you away, and give you dainty food and hosts of toys. But God knows best; perhaps He has given you something better than ever I could dream, and He has left you always a sweet place in my memory.

There is little Dick, too, who was so very, very naughty; who would not stay in his cot, and who laughed at the sternest scolding; who could be neither led nor driven. I fear I shook Dick once when he was well, but he seemed to like it so much that I desisted, and when he swore—oaths of which he did not know the meaning, and was too young to understand—I had to have him taken home, knowing sorrowfully that "home" meant the father whose voice he copied, and the mother who cared only for his body, but who, I fear, will learn a sorry lesson one day.

Another child face, thin and white, and a piping voice that seems always to be calling a vulgar ditty, beginning with "Guy, Guy." A father and mother come to see him often, and sit each side of the bed, looking at their only child, with real love shining in their eyes; and I feel sad, somehow, that they are not mine, and that there is no one sitting by me. I think I must be ill, too, for "Guy, Guy," seems to make my head ache, and I am sick and hot and still, while many figures flit to and fro with noise that frets me, and in light that seems too strong.

Does not someone say it is Christmas time, and are there not shining balls, and bits of green, high up over my head, and talk of a concert? Surely, this is all a dream that has no retrospect, for the sound of a bird singing breaks in loud and clear.

It must be real, for a voice talks of the canary that someone has given to Sister, and I begin to see a row of beds, where the faces are mostly child faces, and oftener flushed than pale. The forms grow dim and indistinct, the light fades, and this too goes on its way, but faces are crowding still—faces, keen and eager in the search for knowledge, the knowledge that means life. Some look as though they must rise high above their fellows, and some few look a little cruel, though perhaps they are only tired and puzzled; and some—one wonders they ever passed a preliminary examination, with dull, unspeculative eyes, and unintellectual brow. They look very young, some of these faces. Merry boys, it seems almost sad they should learn the secrets of disease and death so soon. How slender is the binding that holds the silver cord, and how easily spilled the elixir of life, that fills the golden bowl!

Faces, faces! how they come! Sweet-looking children, with a small round hole in the trachea, where the tube has been that is no longer needed, for they do not want to breathe now, and instead of hot sponges and steam, they are surrounded with flowers, and have changed from restless babies into a grand and solemn thing. I would selfishly rather they were restless still, and it seems a little cruel, after so much care, to leave them quite alone. Then there are fresh girl faces, with a rosy bloom, determination in the set of the mouth, fighting with a startled shrinking in the eyes, as to what terrible revelations the white covered beds contain; and later I see the same faces—the rosy bloom gone, and in the place of startled speculation, a look of rest and confidence, as of one who knows, while the resolution is there still.

There are faces (if only they would not flit so quickly by) that have been land-marks to me, and some are land-marks now—faces, cheering, approving, helpful in their optimism, vivifying in their love; faces of power, yet wearing traces of the fight preceding victory. A funny little blue boy flits across, quite blue everywhere, and no amount of oxygen makes him red—"something mitral," they tell me: he is very good, and a general favourite. And there is dear little Tommy, who was ill so many months, and passed away so quietly that we scarcely knew when he was gone. His mother seemed as if she could not understand that so much care would not do everything for Tommy. Dick Turpin comes too, but he is late, and ought to have been with the earliest faces; he had a fat puffy neck, that looked as if it must be choking him, as I fancy it did. I think Dick Turpin made me ill, for with the face, the old feeling that I ached and shivered, and was very tired, comes back, and then I did not see

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)