

## The Nursing Record "At Homes."

MISS VACHER, MATRON POPLAR HOSPITAL FOR ACCIDENTS.

I CANNOT imagine that Poplar would look cheerful under any circumstances, but with a cold drizzling rain and a gusty wind, driving the pitiless, drenching mist along in blinding scuds, Poplar looked more miserable and depressing than any place I had visited, as I walked up the long street which leads to the Hospital, on my way to seek an interview with the Matron, Miss Vacher. There was an unmistakable air of poverty, and worse than poverty, on the faces of women and children who stood in idle groups at every street corner. The men looked gaunt and woe-begone, but the women and the little ones looked half-starved, shoeless, and ragged. Some of the tiny mites had, I believe, no other garment than a thin cotton to protect them from the wind and rain which I found keen. The great Docks loomed out in the mist, the tall masts of the vessels could be dimly seen in the fog-laden air, but judging from the number of men loitering round the public-houses, business was slack, and "no work" had thrown hundreds out of employment. I was glad, indeed, to find myself at the door of the Hospital which stands facing the Docks, and still more content to enter the cosy sitting room of the Matron, where Miss Vacher was waiting to receive me.

Poplar Hospital, situated as it is in the midst of the poorest quarters of London, is by no means one of our grand Hospitals with all the latest improvements and well-filled coffers. It is supported entirely and solely by voluntary contributions, the inmates are admitted free at an instant's notice, they are nearly all dock labourers, injured at their work, and injured, alas! more often than not, because they are not sufficiently sober to exercise the requisite care. The house has always been a makeshift, it is exceedingly old, extremely uncomfortable, and what is worse, excessively unsanitary in every way. It was formerly a Custom House, and was turned into a Hospital in 1854. How the doctors, matron, and nurses have managed to get on so long is a matter of astonishment to everyone, but not only have they succeeded in their work, but the Hospital and the whole of the wards are most exquisitely clean; everything is in apple-pie order. Miss Vacher's own room is a great contrast to some of the luxurious commodious sitting-rooms of other matrons, but inconvenient as it is, outwardly, she has, by her artistic taste, managed to make it a

very cosy, homelike sanctum, in which to receive her friends and visitors. What struck me here and also in the wards, was the quantity of flowers—lovely tulips, crocuses, snowdrops, and other familiar spring heralds—which gave a delightful sense of freshness and hope in marked contrast to the murky gloom and depressing misery outside. What a sense of comfort and rest these poor half-starved men must experience when they find themselves laid in the soft beds with the delicious snowy linen, after having, perhaps, been exposed for days and weeks to the hard dock-labour in all weathers.

Miss Vacher, whose portrait I am able to reproduce, has a singularly taking face and kindly manner. The Nurse's quiet dress, with white apron, cap, collars, and cuffs, which is so becoming to most women, suits her admirably. She has a great love for animals; in her room were several pets. Jacko, a particularly intelligent, amiable monkey, who delights to visit the wards every evening, and is especially a pet with the children. He was a present from a sailor, many of whom find a haven of rest in Poplar Hospital, when laid up from accidents. A parrot was, I expect, another present from a grateful patient, while in the window a sweet little canary poured forth his song in grateful melody of coming spring.

I asked Miss Vacher the cause of the crowds at the street corners, thinking there might be some unusual circumstance to cause the gathering.

"It is always so in Poplar," she answered, "the women are inclined to idle their time thus in gossip. Just now there is much distress and poverty from want of employment. Poplar, you know, was the scene of the terrible dock strike some three or four years ago. It was before my time, but I have been told that the scenes were terrible: men fought with each other like wild beasts, they were mad with hunger and distress, and enraged at the employment of outsiders. Another strike is feared, but I sincerely trust it may be averted."

"I came here from the North two years ago. I trained at the London Hospital for two years, and after that I was Matron at the Eccles Hospital for three years. I was only twenty when I entered the "London," but I always longed to be a Nurse. I applied first when I was fifteen, but was told to go away and come again in ten years' time."

"Did you find the London Hospital training very severe? You know there are grave charges at present made against its management and system. I should like your opinion on the subject."

"The training there is undoubtedly *very* severe and hard, but I consider it excellent and very

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