

Derelicts.

Nurses during their training see much of the seamy side of life, but it often seems to me that we see the brightest aspect of that seamy stratum, only you must adjust the focus of your mind in accordance with the character on which your judgment is brought to bear. You must not judge a poacher, for instance, by the same standard as that you would apply to the behaviour of an archdeacon, nor a woman from the streets by that of a Sister of Mercy. If you weigh the relative conditions of life it is extremely likely that the poacher would come out far above the archdeacon in his behaviour as a patient at any rate. Life's flotsam and jetsam always holds a pitiful interest for me; it should do for every woman who has the true spirit of healing within her.

One of the most courageous patients I have ever nursed was a man who, according to police and neighbours, bore a terrible character—poacher, burglar, and worse. He was known by the ominous nickname of "Gallows." One night he was brought to the hospital by the police and the ambulance with a gash across his head, and a terrible compound fracture of one wrist. He had been thrown into a quarry in the darkness, by whom was never discovered. Our hospital being only small, we had no resident surgeon or porter, and the police were very loathe to leave a gentleman of poor B.'s lurid character alone with unprotected females.

"Suppose he got violent or went off in the jim-jams—might easy happen," said the inspector anxiously. "Why, where'd you ladies be then?" We said we were sure that we could manage all right, and if we wanted assistance we would ring up the police station. B. on his part was very apologetic for giving trouble, and helped us in every possible way, so the representatives of law and order departed, doubting and unwilling.

B. proved a most delightful patient. He was a big, powerful fellow, very grateful for everything done for him, simple and confiding as a child in very striking contrast to his most ruffianly appearance, and rather to the surprise of every one he did not develop D.T. Poor fellow, worse than that was in store for him.

The wound on his arm gave trouble, but save for that for a day or two he went on well, then suddenly one night came a rigor, and B. developed tetanus. Everything possible was done, serum administered, &c., and B.'s patient courage was marvellous. "Stick to it, missie!" he muttered to me between his clenched jaws as he gradually came out of one of the terrible contractions when his back

arched, and the great muscles of his straining throat stood out like cords, but he never lost heart, always tried to smile. For four days we fought the dreadful poison in his system, and at last the tetanus seemed conquered. The spasms got weaker and weaker, and finally for nearly six hours they completely ceased. B., who could not bear me away from his side, fell into peaceful sleep, his big, rough hand in mine. Suddenly in the street outside a child gave a quick shout, B.'s eyes opened with a start, he gave me a gentle smile and then closed his eyes quietly as if going to sleep again. It was some moments before I realised that he was dead. The sudden awakening had been too much for the over-strained heart.

Another piece of human wreckage who stands out vividly in my mind, was a young fellow who was brought in in the small hours one morning with a throat which he had cut in a drunken freak. Poor Harry: At first he was sullen, bitter, and I think at heart ashamed, but he gave us no trouble whatever. He paid dearly for his drinking bout for the police who brought him up to us, found that he was "wanted" on a variety of serious charges.

By degrees he found that we made no difference between him and the other patients, and at last one day when I was making his bed he growled something which expressed his wonder thereat. I told him that as long as he behaved himself in the hospital, we had no concern with his doings and misdeeds outside. Harry stared, but from that day his dourness vanished. The other men took the cue from us, and instead of lying all day long with his face to the wall, Harry would find convalescents who would beguile the long hours with conversation or games at draughts. One of the policemen in charge of him was an excellent player, and he and his prisoner had very close and exciting matches. Poor Harry! The tears ran down his face as the kindly policeman put him into Black Maria to take him to his trial, and we shook hands with him at parting. We heard that he got five years' imprisonment. Doubtless he was a very black sheep and deserved it, but he was not all black, and a most good and grateful patient.

Gratitude, indeed, seems to me to be the rule rather than the exception which some would make it out; gratitude out of all proportion to the services which have been rendered. One friend of mine, a wandering gipsy knife-grinder insists upon grinding gratis all the knives and scissors I have at hand. When I chance to meet him, he never forgets that once upon a

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)