

Hospital Portraits.

HOT CROSS BUNS IN HOSPITAL.

The occupant of number seven bed in Alice Ward of the Royal Central West Hospital is named Elizabeth and she will be eleven years old should she live to see the dawn of her next birthday anniversary. She has had a troublesome illness and her diet is still of the "pap" order. In these circumstances she is worrying over a question which is far removed from the remotest corner of the brains of countless other little boys and girls, who are, happily, strong and well and about the workaday world. While Elizabeth is pondering long and earnestly as to the possibility of receiving one bun on Good Friday, the others are merely concerned with the probable number of buns, both hot and cold, which will come into their eager hands.

Elizabeth had three buns last Good Friday, she tells me. Her home (let it be described as a *home* for the sake of brevity, albeit it is one room, with occasional use of a scullery, on a "third floor back" in a narrow street in Finsbury, shared with her mother and her tiny brother, Ben), is only two doors from a baker's shop, and she was lucky enough to secure the post of bun-carrier in the day's early hours, for which she was recompensed by six large, crossed, sticky, and shining buns. But this Eastertide she will not be able to go errands for anybody, and Ben and she will certainly not divide spoils between them. Ben is only eight, yet he has had the most careful coaching from Elizabeth as to the manner in which he is to approach the baker with a view to discharging the commission carried out by his sister last Easter. Elizabeth does not know that baker's character, or she would not lead her little brother to be so hopeful. The baker does not trust boys aged eight with buns.

Last Sunday afternoon between two and four o'clock, when each hospital in-patient is "at home," Elizabeth went over her instructions to Ben again and again. Ben stood at his sister's bedside very humbly and very nervously fingering his round serge cap into all sorts of impossible shapes. It was then that Elizabeth first thought of how really and truly she would miss her liberty. Previous to this talk about her experience of last Good Friday she had, despite her long illness, been quietly happy in her strange surroundings. The recollection of returning home with half a dozen big buns in one big paper bag had stirred her heart, and all the kindnesses and comforts to be had in the ward were a long way behind the tide of eager memory waves associated with her very own earnings twelve months ago.

All the children in the hospital are not in Elizabeth's plight with regard to Good Friday buns. There is Tommie, aged eight, in Victor Ward. He is a surgical "case" and his digestion is unimpaired. He will get his bun, and, in all probability, one or two besides. If he follows the wrong example of other small boys, who were bedridden at this time last year, he will awake at least an hour earlier than usual, and he will pester the busy nurses with questions as to the length of time he will be kept waiting for his breakfast. A bun and pieces of bread and butter will be handed to him in due course, and he will lovingly fondle the glossy surface of the confectioner's handiwork as if it were a priceless thing, not dreaming that the exact cost is sixteen a shilling. The bread and butter will be pushed aside to the extreme edge of the plate in order to make the position of the bun all the more dignified, and it will remain there untouched for so long as there remains any chance of the advent of another bun. After all, why should boys in hospital eat common bread and butter when there are beautiful buns about?

Then there is George, aged five, who will also get a bun. He will, however, have to submit to receiving it in two portions—one half for breakfast and the other half for tea. He will not grumble, his appetite being poor. If you were to see him with his half bun you would wish him well quickly. Even a half bun has as many currants embedded in it as he appears to wish for. As he picks out the currants his face bears the "crucified expression" assumed by some public speakers. George is not in pain (as the public speakers are) he is "wasting" and cream is an item of his diet. He does not know that cream contains fat; he imagines he gets it as a favour, just as he gets his bun, and just because he is little George, whom the physician smiles upon so indulgently.

Down in the accident ward, where the patients are mostly men in the prime of life, who are laid aside for a few weeks, the Easter buns are looked upon as if they came of their own sweet will every Good Friday, as if they were dragon-flies on a glorious day in June. The man in four bed will casually offer his bun to the chap in three bed (who is known to have been recently presented with a fresh ounce of tobacco), and will hand it over with no more sentiment than he would handle a waistcoat button. Later in the day, when these ward neighbours are permitted to get up for a spell and hobble about the quadrangle in their splints, number three will tender number four a pipe of shag, and the bargain begun at the breakfast hour will have been completely sealed.

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