

I WONDER.

"You are nearer to God in a garden
Than anywhere else on earth."

Nurse Seymour paused on her way to her work to read this popular quotation, executed in poker work, and hanging up in a small fancy shop among other Christmas "novelties."

She was of a slow and thoughtful mentality and she stood for a few minutes considering the familiar words. "I wonder," she said aloud, not conscious that she was thinking audibly.

A poor woman, also shop-gazing—though, in truth, there was little to attract—turned to stare at the little Nurse in her somewhat shabby uniform. "What are you wondering about?" she asked, not meaning rudeness.

"I'm wondering if that's true," said Nurse Seymour.

"What, that there motter? Well, if Gawd's in the gardens, He stays there seemin'ly. He don't be in these parts anyway."

"I wonder," said Nurse, again unconsciously.

The woman stared at her and went her way. "She's a bit up the pole," she thought.

This Christmas Eve was damp and foggy, the streets were sordid and unattractive, the district bag and the additional bag containing various little gifts were heavy, and Nurse plodded along rather wearily, though her day's work was not yet begun.

She was a bit of a dreamer, this little woman, and her thoughts had wandered off to her home in the comfortable country rectory, surrounded by its beautiful old garden.

The sun, probably, was shining in that favoured spot, and she could picture her pretty young sister in well-cut comfortable tweeds and thick country brogues, digging, pruning and raking together the golden leaves that still remain to vex the sight of this pretty ardent gardener.

She would be cutting the late roses and burnished chrysanthemums still untouched by the frost this mild winter, and finding the early violets in a sheltered spot to adorn the charming drawing-room and well-appointed dinner table.

Humming a carol, possibly out of a heart full of content, whose private opinion was that she, Rosemary Seymour, was specially designed by Providence to luxuriate in peace and beauty. Was any part of this beauty, the lingering sweetness of autumn, designed to be carefully packed, posted and directed to Nurse Margaret Seymour, 3, Slum Terrace, Dockland, where it would have been received with rapture? Not at all. Rosemary was too occupied assuring herself of her nearness to God to bother about her sister toiling in the slums.

Little Nurse did not, of course, put these thoughts into shape; she was far too unselfish for bitterness, but they were somewhere in her sub-conscious mind. Being human, they must have been.

When she had responded to the urge to nurse and had at the conclusion of her training answered an advertisement offering hard work and poor pay in an uninspiring district, her pretty sister and comfortable parents had shrugged their shoulders and left Margaret to be "odd" in her own way.

So she finally left the garden she adored and her dogs and other pleasant things, and "made do" in a bed-sitting room in Slum Terrace.

On this particular morning, the remembrance of her home life became insistent.

Once more she was standing in the drive by the holly tree which stood sentinel by the front door. "You never see holly like that in London," she thought, "fresh, glossy green leaves, with large clusters of brilliant scarlet berries all up the stalk."

Rosemary made a pretty picture cutting sprays here and there for the decoration of the church and house.

During these flights of fancy, nurse's tired feet had automatically carried her in the direction of her first case—an old man with dropsy. She stopped at the door and gave two knocks, the summons for the first floor back.

He was groaning his weary way out of the world, and his old wife waited on Nurse with many sighs and lamentations.

"Bin countin' the hours for you to come, Nurse, and bin prayin' somethin' crool for the Lord to take 'im."

Nurse spent a long time with the old man and left him comforted with a bit of baccy "for his stocking."

The next patient was a small boy with hip disease, where she was greeted with shrill cries of "Nursie, come here quick and see what I done!" Coloured paper chains covered the poor cot where he lay, and his thin little fingers were still busily cutting and pasting the much-admired decoration.

"He's bin that excited, Nurse, waitin' for you. Nothin' wouldn't do but *you* must see them afore we puts 'em up. 'Nurse can't see 'em proplly up there,' 'e ses."

There somehow emerged from Nurse's extra bag a small Father Christmas for the adornment of the mantelshelf, and the child's ecstasy was out of all proportion to its worth.

And so on and so forth, and Christmas Eve sped to its familiar conclusion. The children shouting with excitement and shoppers hastening to secure late bargains in the market—the dreary flute player shrilling out "While Shepherds Watched," to earn perchance a Christmas dinner—the ragged carol singers shouting "Good King Wenceslas" through the keyholes, ending with shouts of laughter and scurrying feet as some irate householder "told them off."

No; Nurse felt thoroughly disillusioned as she retraced her steps to the "bed-sit." She did not feel at all near to God.

No one had asked her out for Christmas. So far her letters and gifts had been few, though it was true she had received many highly-coloured and glazed cards from her slum friends, which she prized. She entered her room, turned on her gas fire, and took herself to task for having the "blues."

A small parcel on the table from home. Anyhow, that was something.

It contained some merino stockings from Rosemary and a Treasury note from "Father and Mother," to "buy yourself something useful."

Rosemary had, she said, been so busy in the garden—you know what it is, old thing—that there had been no time to pack up mince pies, etc., but no doubt dear Meg would have some nice invitations for Christmas.

Dear Meg burst into tears; made herself some tea; filled her rubber bottle and went to bed. She dreamed that night of a garden, where she walked with light heart and glad eye, beholding "the fair beauty of the earth."

She said, "Let me walk in the fields."

God said, "No; walk in the town."

She said, "There are no flowers there."

He said, "No flowers, but a crown."

Then all became confused. Instead of the holly tree—old dropsical Daddy, the early violets were little lame Teddy, the golden glory of the fallen leaves were the old things up and down the parish to whom she ministered daily—waiting, she thought whimsically, to be swept away.

She said, "But the air is thick and fogs are veiling the sun."

He answered, "Yet souls are sick; will you leave the flowers for the crown?"

The same dark stuffy rooms, the same sordid streets, suddenly became more beautiful by far than the sunny

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