

On the staff of Moorfields Eye Hospital at that time was William Bowman. These three great men who were destined to revolutionise the knowledge of eye diseases met for the first time at "Moorfields." Donders has described how, after he and Graefe had taken their modest breakfasts in Oxford Street among the working men, they went on to "Moorfields" and spent the rest of the day until late at night discussing with Bowman matters of mutual interest. The general topics of discussion were the wonderful discovery of Graefe's fellow countryman in Konisberg of the possibility of seeing into the back of the eye, Donders' methods of scientific sight testing and Bowman's investigations in the minute structure of the eye with the microscope. Neither Babbage nor Helmholtz at first realised the possibilities of their great discovery. Graefe, a practical surgeon, recognised them at once. It is recorded that when he looked into the back of the eye with an ophthalmoscope and saw for the first time the optic nerve, the retina and its blood vessels, his cheeks reddened and he jumped up and cried out excitedly, "Helmholtz has discovered for us a new world, what is there left to be done?" It was true that Helmholtz had discovered a new world, but it was not true that nothing further was left to be done. In that new world, not only Graefe himself, but many of the surgeons at "Moorfields" have made experiments and discoveries of the greatest importance and practical utility. At the instigation of Bowman, pathology of the eye was started, microscopic investigations being conducted on the tissues of eyes which had had to be removed, a line of research which forms the basis of many new discoveries and fresh methods of treatment.

Side by side with the scientific progress that was made, it was inevitable that the work of the hospital steadily increased, necessitating increased accommodation. In 1821 it was removed to Moorfields where it remained until 1899 when the present hospital in City Road was built. Although a Royal Charter had been granted and the official title of the hospital changed to the "Royal London Ophthalmic Hospital," it was by the name of "Moorfields" that the institution was more generally known.

It is here that our story touches the fringe of our present generation. "Moorfields" continued its steady progress, its patients increasing in numbers, and the reputation of the hospital as a teaching centre becoming world wide. Certain definite steps forward were made in the realm of ophthalmology. The X-ray Department was opened and the knowledge of the exact position of a foreign body in the eye made possible the use of powerful electro-magnets for the extraction of deeply embedded pieces of metal. The Bacteriological Laboratory came into being as an essential part of ophthalmology. A word too must be added about ophthalmic nursing. We read that when the hospital was first opened, one Sarah Clark was appointed nurse and housekeeper, being allowed coals and candles and a gratuity at the end of the year "such as the Committee may deem proportionate to her service." It has long been recognised that the nursing of eye diseases successfully requires special training and "Moorfields" became the leading centre for the training of ophthalmic nurses.

For about thirty years the hospital in City Road was able to deal with the patients who attended it, but when the in-patients were well over 3,000 a year and the annual out-patient attendance reached the figure of 150,000, it was obvious that extra accommodation would have to be provided. A comprehensive scheme was successfully carried out comprising the provision of pay wards, new quarters for the nursing staff and a new out-patient department. An additional floor was added to the existing building and a new wing, the King George V Extension, was erected. Over the entrance porch there

is a stone plaque, carved by Eric Gill, of Christ giving sight to blind Bartimaeus. The completion of the extension enabled "Moorfields," under the patronage of His Majesty the King and of Her Majesty Queen Mary, to settle down to its work, leaving us only with the problem of raising sufficient funds for its maintenance.

In the autumn of the year 1938, European events cast their shadow over normal affairs and the seriousness of the situation was brought home to us by our receiving instructions as to the part the hospital was to play in the event of hostilities. The coming of war did not, therefore, find us entirely unprepared and in accordance with prior arrangements eighty-two beds were immediately reserved for the reception of air-raid and Service casualties. In the unavoidable reorganisation of the medical service, the problem of the civilian sick presented several difficulties, the chief of which was the danger of a rapidly growing "waiting list."

When the first shock had passed we had to consider how best "Moorfields" could play its part in the new order of things. It is never easy to make decisions when facing a situation containing several unknown factors. As far as our own problem went, two facts cleared themselves from the background of "ifs and buts." The first was that we could not make much headway with our greatly reduced bed complement and the second was that the hospital was in a vulnerable area. Both these facts pointed to the advisability of finding a temporary hospital outside London to supplement the work that could be done at "Moorfields." We were fortunate in being able to take over a small institution at Edgware and as early as October 1939 we had converted it into a fifty-bed ophthalmic hospital, complete with an operating theatre. This country branch was able to deal adequately with cataracts, detached retinas, glaucomas and squints, leaving the eighty "eye" beds that we were able to keep at the main building to deal with accident and emergency cases. The out-patient attendances temporarily dropped during the uncertain days immediately following the outbreak of war, but in the absence of air raids, the numbers steadily increased. In those early days of the war we were thus able to carry on a hospital service which, although inevitably to some extent a compromise, was nevertheless very satisfactory. Some sense of security was given by the providing in the basement of a specially constructed air-raid shelter with an air-conditioning apparatus and auxiliary lighting plant.

On a sunny Saturday afternoon in September, 1940, the Luftwaffe succeeded in firing the dockside district of London. In the evening the red fires of destruction could be seen from the roof of "Moorfields" as a terrifying spectacle. During the night the bombs came closer and nearby buildings were hit. Within three nights, two neighbouring hospitals received direct hits. It became necessary to reduce the number of beds at "Moorfields"; for it was evident that only that number of in-patients could be admitted which, together with the required nursing staff, could be housed each night in the air-raid shelter, and so, in the winter of 1940-41 we settled down to a routine underground night life.

So the work went on, the nightly air-raid warning sounding as a matter of course. On the 11th January, 1941, "Moorfields" was badly damaged by blast. It is an astonishing sight to see blast damage on a large scale. That which has stood in its customary place for years is shattered in the twinkling of an eye. Rooms and corridors throughout the hospital were strewn with splintered wood and glass. The patients were safely below in the air-raid shelter. "First Aid" repairs were started immediately. After ensuring that the work of "Moorfields" could still go on, we put back the front door and drew up a rough priority

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)