THE STORY OF A BEAUTIFUL THING.

By Frances Hodgson Burnett.

They are all beautiful things, these efforts to help, however simple they are, with or without they are to aid—men, women, or children—whether men or women who are sinners and maimed of nature; children who are wronged by the ill fates which have made them vicious instead of innocent; or men and women who are broken by poverty, weakness, or malady; and children whose first years rob them of youth and health and food for body and mind. And there are millions of each of these—millions! When one realizes this one stands aghast before it. Is there one of the whole world of us who, realizing it, does not cry with desperation in one’s soul, “What can be done? What can I do?” But it must be realized first, and the sad truth is that perhaps also, there exist a million good and most kind souls whose lives pass gently and unfruitfully, because the truth of the stranger without their gates is not brought home to them by some chance incident which gives color and solid form to the before unmaterialized suffering they have heard of and pitied with tender vagueness. The stranger within one’s gates comes under one’s eye, his wounds are seen, his cries are heard. Having oil and wine, it seems only common nature that one should bind up his wounds and soothe him. But without the gates there are so many whose cries are not heard, and of whom one cannot know whether it is oil and wine they need, or only encouragement and staff and scrip to help them on their onward way. “If I had known! If I had only known!” one says so often.

It was one of these chance incidents which make a man know which gave to the founder of the Invalid Children’s Aid Association the idea of that little charity which has become the beautiful thing I wish to write about. He was an English gentleman, of quiet tastes and small independent means. He was not a rich man, but his time was at his own disposal, and he had the inclination to employ his leisure in some way which would be useful to those who needed help. What his work should be he had not quite been able to decide when the incident decided for him.

Everyone knows how the poorest streets of every city seem to swarm with children. Where there is the least food, these small things, whose growing years make them the hungriest of human things, seem to produce themselves in the greatest numbers. And this, in the great English towns and cities, is more noticeable, one thinks, than it can be anywhere else. The streets of a poor quarter in London suggest a rabbit warren. “How do they live?” one says in passing through them. “How can they live?”

There are people who know how they
live, and it is not a thing to contemplate with composure. The only thought one can console one's self with is the recollection of what the child mind is—of what treasures it finds in strangely simple things—of its hopeful endurance and sanguine fashion. But when one remembers at the same time its sensitiveness, its innocent longings, and its disproportionate despairs, one loses the consolation again.

It is easy to imagine how among these ill-fed, ill-clothed, almost utterly uncared-for ones, there is lack of stamina, and that there is also disease and casualty. Of all these there is much, and the marvel is that there is no more. But it is probably only those who have studied the "Submerged Tenth" of childhood who know that there is one chronic ailment which among these children seems like a sort of epidemic.

And it is not scarlet fever, not typhoid, not diphtheria, though it might so easily be any of them, or all three combined in some hideous form. It is spinal and hip disease.

This is so prevalent that one finds one's self searching for some reason for it. It seems as if there must be one. It may be that generations of insufficient nutrition result in feebleness of structure and weakness of bone; it may be that the nursing of countless babies by tiny brothers and sisters, who stagger beneath their burdens as they drag them from door-step to door-step, naturally results in jerks, stumbles, and falls which injure one small body or the other, or perhaps both. This last seems perhaps a cause more probable than any other. Healthy babies, with adult nurses, have been crippled for life by falls which were the consequence of a mere misstep or careless movement; then how much more possible that a frail mite, dragged hither and thither by an overloaded child sister or brother, should be exposed to the jolt, or blow, or fall which deforms it for the rest of its life, developing into a chronic disease which entails suffering and helplessness at the same time.

But whatever the cause, the fact of the prevalence of hip and spinal disease impresses itself at once on those who interest themselves in the children of the London poor.

"What is the matter with this little fellow?" one asks, and hears again and again in different places the same answer:

"Hip disease, ma'am," or "spinal disease, ma'am. He's been in the orphanal, but they discharged him, 'cos he can't be cured."

This is woful, but it is inevitable. There are hospitals for all sorts of diseases, but they must keep their beds and comforts for those who may be benefited by them, and sent again into the world sound. It is tragic for the poor little child, man or woman, who, after a few weeks or months of care and warmth, and the comfort of cleanliness and regular meals, is sent back still helpless, and with pain to bear, to the poor, comfortless, perhaps unclean garret or cellar, in some back court or alley—but it must be so. With all one's pity one sees the reason and necessity that make it unavoidable. I do not know whether Mr. Allen Graham's attention had been called to this depressing truth before his incident came to decide him, or whether the workings of the Beautiful Thing, which was the result of the incident, brought it home to him. But it was known among his friends and acquaintances that he was always ready to do any deed of helpful kindness which presented itself to him. So he was asked one day by a friend to go in search of a case of child illness in some poor place, into which it would be well to inquire. The place—he found, after some difficulties—was a cellar. It was ill-smelling, and bare, and hideous. There were some wretched children playing near the door, but there seemed to be no adults about.

This being the case, he questioned the children.

"Have you a sister who is ill?" he asked at last, having discovered that there was no older person from whom he could obtain information.

"Yes," said one of them, unconcernedly.

The visitor had looked into the cellar, thinking that he should see some excuse for a bed, however tumble-down it might be. He saw nothing of the sort, however. There was no more to be seen than a broken chair or two, and a
rough sort of table on which a dog seemed lying, covered with a filthy piece of sacking. At least, he could only imagine it was a dog, as he saw what he thought the hair of some animal coming from beneath the sacking.

"Where is your sister?" he asked the children. "I hear she is very ill, and I thought perhaps I could do something to help her."

"She's in there," was the answer, with a careless gesture toward the inside of the cellar.

"But where?"

"There."

She pointed to the table. The dog under the gruesome sacking was a child.

I do not know the actual details of this incident. I wish I did. It was told me quite briefly by Mr. Graham himself—the man who visited the cellar, and who founded afterward, in consequence of that visit, the touching little charity known as The Invalid Children's Aid Association.

All the detail that I know is that a man with a kind heart, going to try to give aid to an almost dying child, found in a dirty cellar, where ill-kempt children were clamoring and playing, a small heap of uncleanness which he thought must be a dog, as it lay on the rough boards under its filthy cover of sacking. And it was a desolate child. This is all. But it seems enough.

The visitor could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses. He went to the table and drew the sacking away from the place where the animal-like hair was to be seen. And what he saw so struck him to the heart that it fixed the tenor of his life.

We, who have only seen little flushed or pale faces lying softly on fresh white linen, with all comforts near them that passionate, heart-broken care can give, in an atmosphere laden with tenderness, surrounded by every pretty lure to beguile an easier hour—we can scarcely imagine what he saw in all its sadness. A little face marred with pain a little body worn with it, and burned with wearying fever, matted hair, unwashed, fevered skin, uncleanness, torture, helplessness, left quite alone. The most tragic and unbeautiful thing one can imagine in a century of highest civilization, in the richest city in the world; and yet its sorrowful hideousness brought forth a thing most beautiful.

There is one thought which has done more to discourage those who wish to help than any other. It is an old saying one finds one's self so often using when one stands on the shore looking out on the vast sea of human want.

"Whatsoever I do—if I do all it is in me to do—if I give my very life itself, it will only be a drop in the ocean."

It is quite true—but until each one of us is willing to give that drop, willing that it should count as no more than a drop, the problem will never be solved. This one man was willing to give his drop. He was not, as I have said, a rich man, but his energy, his tenderness, his practical ability made the drop a larger, purer, and more helpful one than most of us could aid with.

He gathered all the information possible concerning the methods of relief for the children of the poor. He found numberless hospitals, wards, homes, orphanages, asylums, and training-schools, but all of them were bound by the stern necessity of caring for those whose cases were hopeful, at least, and there always arose the obstacle of this necessity in the case of incurables. Then he was led to realize how many incurables there were, and how many lingering cases which would seem incurable. Spinal and hip diseases are by no means invariably fatal, but they almost invariably result in helplessness, and it is often helplessness accompanied by acute suffering.

So the little incurables given up as hopeless by hospitals generously willing to help them if it had been possible, are returned to the miserable cellars, or attics, or overcrowded rooms that represent all they can call home. Instead of light and nourishing food, chosen with regard to their maladies, they must eat what the chances of good or bad luck bring to them—dry bread, unsound vegetables, or nothing at all, if luck is bad; greasy slabs of fried fish, strange things from the cook-shops, with sips of gin or beer, if luck is good.
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They must sleep on vermin-infested rags or bare boards, shiver with cold, or stifle with foul air. If they cannot move and wait upon themselves, and their parents are decent enough to earn briefly told in one of the pamphlets which the Charity publishes yearly as reports of its work.

It is the picture of a narrow, dirty staircase in a house in a London slum. At the top of it sits a forlorn little figure—a little deformed figure with its tired head supported by a surgical apparatus of iron and leather straps. Such a pale, tired little head! It belonged to a little boy of about seven, and when the hospital had adjusted his surgical appliance it had done all it could for him.

It was a sunny day in the slum, and the children were playing and shouting below as all children do. And at the top of the staircase the "spinal case" leaned wearily against the wall and listened to them. It was a lady who found him there. She was one of the visitors of the Invalid Children's Aid. One cannot help wondering what the poor mite thought when he saw a lady coming up to him. She spoke to him gently and began a little talk with him.

"Where is your mother?"
"she asked.
"Gone to work, ma'am."
"When did she go?"
"She went at eight this morning. She won't be back till ten."
"Are you quite alone all day?"
"Yes, ma'am."
"What do you do all the time?"
"Nothing."
"Have you nothing to play with?"
"No, ma'am."
"Do you never get out?"
"Can't, ma'am."
"But have you nothing to do?"
"No, ma'am."

The tired little body aching through all those hours which he dragged through alone with no one to speak to, nothing to play with, nothing to do, nothing to eat but a bit of bread or
coarse food—and the sounds of the children shouting at their play, if the day was a good one, mocking him! And there he sat at seven years old, being so mocked and leaning his head against the dirty wall!

It was the prevalence of such cases as these which impressed Mr. Graham when he began to gather practical information. He took one small room for his headquarters in a building full of offices, in Buckingham Street, off the Strand. For a year he worked almost alone, bearing all expense and responsibility himself. It was hard work, and must have been full of heartache and discouragement. With limited resources there were so many cases it was impossible to help.

Among the poor, the little Aid became quickly known. It tried to care for those who had no other refuge. One visiting nurse was its whole force at first. But her heart was so touched by what she saw when she went her rounds, that she did the work of four. She bound poor little limbs, dressed wounds, poulticed and cared for the terrible strumous abscesses which were so frequent. The mothers who were respectable relied on her for help and instruction; those who were not had a vague respect for her cleverness and power. The children looked forward to her visits as to a strange new element of pleasure in their dreary young lives.

In the building which the Aid’s little office occupied there were the offices of some other charities. One of them, called, I think, “The Young Servants’ Friendly Aid,” had for its object the attaching of each of its lady members to some young servant girl taking to domestic service for the first time in the big city, inexperienced and without friends. Each member was the friend and adviser of such a girl, saw her occasionally, wrote to her sometimes, befriended her if necessary in other ways. Through his knowledge of the workings of this kind and womanly plan, Mr. Graham conceived a new idea for

And at the top of the staircase the “spinal case” leaned wearily against the wall.—Page 726.
the further development of his own work.

This was his argument:

"In London there are thousands of women who make thousands of calls each day—some of them calls of mere ceremony. If I could connect even one thousand of them with a thousand children whose lives are dreary, and each one would constitute herself the 'friend' of the child connected with her, and make it an occasional friendly call, if only to talk to it and cheer it, or do it some little service when she could, how each child would feel its life brighter for the existence of that friend! And how much help might come of it!"

Much help did come of it. Once having conceived the idea, he worked with unfailing interest and energy until he was able to engage attention with it; and hearts being touched, he was able to feel that his plan began to be carried into execution.

The "friends" found themselves moved by what they saw, as the nurse had been. They became fond of their children, and did more than merely visit them. It is so easy to give them pleasure and novelty. Everything is new to them but pain and poverty. One need not be rich to bring delight into a bare, wretched room where a child has lain for months—perhaps years—flat upon its back, scarcely or entirely unable to move, and with nothing to do but stare at the dingy walls and ceiling, and listen to the discords about it. There is not a crowded street in London where one cannot buy from some hawker, for a few pennies, something which will make it smile and seem a treasure to it. A "lady" with a soft voice, pure enunciation, and quiet, fresh attire is a dramatic element in herself; but with a plaything in her hand, an orange, a sponge-cake, or a penny bunch of flowers bought at a street corner, she is a fairy to be thought of as a consolation for hours, and her visits are things to be looked forward to as possible, joyful surprises.

When one walks through the streets of Paris, London, and Berlin, looking hungrily into every shop window for something which will seem new to a clever invalid boy who has had every wish gratified since he was born, one becomes beset in time by a sense of despair. By the time he is too old for childish tops and soldiers, an adored enfant du siècle (one who is an American, at least) has owned everything from models of vertical and horizontal engines and Remington typewriters, to photographic apparatus and Edison's talking-doll, purchased that he may extract the internal phonograph. What is there he has not possessed and become familiar with?

But the Lowther Arcade, with its stalls piled with sixpenny toys, where half a crown will purchase splendor, presents a boundless area when one stands within it, buying pleasures for children whose short lives have held nothing of pleasure, who do not know what birthday presents and Christmas gifts mean. A sixpenny tea-set represents countless festivities, a splendid cart and horse may be bought for a shilling, a painted tin railroad train for eightpence, gorgeous picture-books, containing Mother Goose, and Cinderella, and other classic wonders, sometimes go as low as a penny, and the grandest ones may be bought for threepence or fourpence. There are Noah's arks, chairs and tables, donkeys with panniers and nodding heads; there are skittles and marbles and balls; there are even brilliantly artistic wooden dinners on tiny platters, with very green vegetables, very bright fruit, and very juicy wooden rounds of beef. And for three and elevenpence half-penny one can buy a resplendent doll, on whose blue or scarlet bodice is pinned a paper with the announcement, "My clothes can be taken off." One can spend a rapturous hour among them, making new discoveries every minute, and go away with one's brougham piled with packages of delight.

Women with a nursery full of beloved small creatures and their ever-renewed picture-books and toys, will be touched as one of the "Friends" was, by a discovery she made on her first visit to a poor little "spinal case." She was one of the more fortunate ones, it is true. Her mother was a decent woman who tried to keep her clean, but they were very poor, the
living-room was small and bare, and Rosie lay by a window in a surgical appliance. She had existed in it for three of her six years of life, and she looked as if she were lying alive in her tiny coffin. She had a little pale blond face, with the old look of endurance so often seen in the faces of spinal cases. A little doll and a doll’s tea-set brought such a quaint smile to her small face that the sight of it was a thing to touch one’s heart, but it was through a picture-book that the strange illustrative fact revealed itself.

"Here is Little Boy Blue," said the visitor, showing her a picture of that world-renowned person. "Look at him blowing his horn."

Rosie looked with serious interest. She was a pathetically serious little person.

"He’s very pretty," she said. "What is his name, ma’am?"

"It is Little Boy Blue," the visitor answered, with cheerful confidence.

"You know Little Boy Blue."

"No, ma’am," said Rosie, quite simply. "Who is he?"

It seemed almost incredible. The visitor doubted her ears.

"Haven’t you heard about him?" she said. "Don’t you know, ‘Little Boy Blue, come blow your horn, The sheep’s in the meadow, the cow’s in the corn’?"

"No," said Rosie. "I never heard about him, ma’am."

She had lived six years, three of them in a surgical box, and she had never heard of Little Boy Blue.

What would not a threepenny picture-book telling of Cinderella, contain for a child like that? What a new world of strange joys could be brought into her bare room by the story of a fairy godmother whose hand changed pumpkins into golden coaches, rats into long-tailed horses, mice into coachmen, and cindery rags into beautiful dresses! One might imagine such a child making the brilliantly colored pictures of these splendors a resource and comfort for weeks, turning to them again and again, and living through them a new life.
It was a curious thing to contemplate in so young a thing the perfect mental unaccustomedness to anything like fancy. Life had been so unadorned and hard a fact to her. Her visitor felt that her small, serious mind would have to learn to adjust itself to the lightness of situation in the irresponsible comedy of Little Boy Blue, and the unpractical drama of Pussy in the Well, thrown there apparently without sufficient motive by Little Johnny Green, and rescued without utilitarian purpose by Little Tommy Stout at once. There was nothing fanciful in the story of a boy who was ill, and who had been ill for months. She understood being ill, and there seemed to be for her the pleasure of a fairy story in hearing that this boy could have everything he liked and was taken from one beautiful country to another. Her visitor felt that this story appealed to her, and so she went on with it. It interested her greatly to be told of the bright French city where there were shops full of wonderful toys which one could see through their windows,

Her pale little smile, as she listened, had a curious suggestiveness. Its pleasure was that of a traveller led into a new country and somewhat bewildered at each step.

When her visitor told her of a real thing she seemed to grasp its meaning where in the broad, gay avenue shaded by trees there were marionette shows and little booths, and children rode up and down in pretty carriages drawn by goats. This was fairyland to her, but she could realize it, because in this city the boy who was ill lay upon his bed as
she lay on hers, not playing in the Champs-Élysées or riding about in the goat carriages. Paris with only brightness in it might have seemed incredible, but Paris with pain in it could be believed in.

The young suffering, also made real to her the strange country where the invalid was to be taken when the weather became colder—the country where there was no winter, where oranges and lemons grow on trees in the open air, where there were white houses with roses and all sorts of flowers growing in their gardens, and where there was a shining, sunlit, blue sea. Knowing only London winters, with fogs which shut her in drearily day after day, it is probable that this land might have seemed too bright a thing to be real, but that she could comprehend the reality of malady seeking relief, if it belonged to the wonderful world where relief could be sought for.

How she listened to all that was told her of this companion in pain, whom she had never seen and never would see, because he was passing into another land, though this last she was not told. And how she seemed to feel the fairy world draw near when she was told that flowers and oranges would come to her little room—flowers and oranges grown in the open air, near the blue, shining sea, while in London people stifled in yellow fog.

"She will remember this visit and talk of it for a year," the nurse said to the visitor when they went away together. "They remember things so long."

It is interesting to discover that these small feminine creatures receive with the intensest pleasure anything like a doll, and that above all things they desire a doll dressed as a baby. At Christmas there were sent from Paris certain boxes of things useful to the Aid. Among them were toys for the children and two dolls, who looked wonderfully like babies in their long, lace-trimmed petticoats and pretty
cloaks and caps. One was taken to the small room where Rosie lay in her box. She looked at it in wonder and clasped it in her arms. Perhaps it seemed too good to be true, for it was a very pretty baby.

Tell the lady and the boy,” she said to the nurse who had brought it to her, “tell them I will keep her just as clean as I can—and I will try to be a mother to her.”

One can imagine what this mother-
hood might mean to her lonely childhood.

The offices of the Aid at 18 Buckingham Street consist of three very plain rooms. One is a good-sized one, where the ordinary business is transacted. The next room, a smaller and still plainer one, is the private office of Mr. Graham himself, where cases are studied in detail and decided upon. Mr. Graham contents himself with a table to work upon among his papers and books, and a chair to sit in. There is a Spartan simplicity in his appurtenances which speaks of the practical seriousness of his labors and intentions. At one side of the room there are several spinal carriages—the long perambulators in which a "spinal case" may take the fresh air while still retaining the necessary recumbent position.

"These we find very useful," Mr. Graham explains. "We have a number of them, and they are greatly in demand. They are light and can be folded up into such shape as makes it possible for them to be carried up and down narrow staircases, and they are so much more comfortable than anything the poor children have in their homes, that they often sleep in them at night. They make it possible for a child, who would otherwise breathe nothing but foul air, to be taken out of doors and up and down the street. If the parents are in work we charge them twopence a week, but if they have no resources we lend them for nothing. We find that the decent ones like the idea of paying a trifle, and the carriage seems more valuable if they are paying something for it."

In the still smaller room beyond these are shelves with labelled boxes upon them. These contain such articles of clothing, lint, bandages, etc., as the "Friends" have given to the Aid, and represent the Lending Department. The visiting nurse has constantly cases which require bandaging or dressing, limbs which must be held straight and quiet, wounds which are slow in healing or which, having healed slowly, have a habit of breaking out afresh. A little old, clean night-gown, or a clean old sheet cast aside in a comfortable home, are inexpressible boons in places where cleanliness is an unattainable luxury. Does anyone ever realize that there are circumstances under which it may be impossible to keep clean, where people may not change clothes to change while those they wear are washed, or money to buy the soap and the coal to heat the water to wash with.

A decent laborer in Kent once said to two little fellows, who had made friends with him during their summer holiday, and to whom he confided his troubles:

"The hardest thing for us is to get soap and soda enough to keep clean. There's nine of us, and I have eleven shillings a week. We have our rent to pay, and we have to keep seven children fed and tidy. My wife's a good, hard-working girl, but it goes hard with her just to pinch out enough to buy the soap and soda she needs to do her washing."

This was in the green hop district of Kent, where the air was fresh and pure, and there was none of the smoke and filth of town. The Children's Aid works in London, where, in a large house in the West End, only a corps of servants can do battle with the consequences of fog and falling soot. It may be judged, then, what a boon the Lending Department is to the slums.

When one hears the whole story of the tender, helpful little charity—of its beginning—of the poor little animal-looking thing mistaken for a dog as it lay upon the wooden table beneath its piece of dirty sacking—of the modest way in which the one small room was taken, the kindly energy with which the work was begun—how the mothers of suffering children heard of the place in Buckingham Street, and came one after another with piteous pleas for help and piteous gratitude when the help was given—one feels with all one's heart that this thing is a beautiful one.

Great London is full of charities. The time has gone by, surely, when the rich can be accused of being careless of the poor. At least one thinks so when one reflects on the great institutions whose wards are so perfectly kept, whose nurses are so perfectly trained, whose patients are so kindly treated. And there are so many of them, for so
many diseases and calamities—for so many different kinds of people, for old and young, for widows and orphans, for the infirm and invalided of so many different professions. In visiting them one feels that the busy, hard-working world is not so unkind after all, and that there must be many warm hearts in it. Yet it is saddening to realize that there is always room for one more such charity.

There was plenty of room for the Beautiful Thing which began so simply and modestly through the kind thought of one kind heart. It had plenty of room to grow, and it grew and spread itself like a beautiful vine clothing hideous things with its leaves and tendrils, or a beautiful tree shading them.

“Some of the parents are quite worthless,” Mr. Graham confesses, “we are obliged to admit that sometimes. Some of them are idle, and drink, and thieve, and neglect their children and their homes. But we don’t refuse to care for the children of the undeserving. We think they need help, poor little things, even more than those whose people do their best by them. A suffering child in a filthy cellar, whose father is a thief and whose mother is a drunkard, needs comfort more than the one who has only poverty to contend with. We try to do something for all who need us. What we wish is that each child who needs one shall feel that it has a friend.”

And the help does not end here, if it can be carried farther. Where it is possible to use influence which will enable a child to enter a hospital or a home where it will be surrounded by good influences, or given a chance to learn such work as its weakness is equal to, this is always done. And there are many such cases.

A little fellow to whom an accident had left only the stump of one leg, lived in a small room with six or seven sisters or brothers, a mother, and a drunken father. How horrible the atmosphere, both physical and moral, of this rabbit-hutch must have been, it is almost impossible to conceive. When the father was drunk he was violent, and a dipsomaniac run mad in a small den full of children presents to the mind possibilities which are conceivable.

One day he gave himself up to chasing round this confined place—with an iron fork as a weapon—the little fellow with the stump of a leg. The mother, after desperate effort, rescued the small maimed creature and bore him away to comparative safety. The next day she presented herself at the Children’s Aid, a piteous object, cut and bruised and battered with the beating with which she had paid for the life of her child. She had heard they were so kind at this place, she explained; she had been told about the things they did for children. Could they do anything for hers? Could they put him into a home somewhere that he might be safe from his father? He could not defend himself by running away, with his one poor little stump of a leg. He could not run fast enough.

It chanced that at this time there was an opportunity to send him to a temporary refuge, and he was sent. But the monetary resources of the Aid are extremely limited. Sometimes Mr. Graham finds he must withdraw a child from a place where it gains morally and physically every hour, merely because he cannot afford to continue to pay its small expenses. It is necessary to make, at nearly all the homes, a charge of a few shillings a week. A home for whose comforts one pays for a child five or six shillings a week is among the most expensive. For this trifle the patient has a comfortable cot in an airy, exquisitely clean room, abundance of well-chosen, well-prepared food, the constant attendance of gentle, perfectly trained nurses, an atmosphere of purest cleanliness, ever-watchful medical supervision, and a number of childish pleasures and invalid amusements. One can scarcely realize what the change must be from filth, hunger, and squalor, to such a paradise as this.

The child was put in such a place, but as it was at a time of one of the numerous money struggles of the Aid, he could not be left there. When his physical condition had improved it was unavoidable that he should be sent
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home. When this was done a Friend was detailed to watch over him as far as possible. The Friend reported from time to time. It was apparent that all that had been gained, mentally and physically, at the place where he had been cared for, would quickly be lost in the wretched home to which he had been returned. What was to be done? In a certain home for crippled boys he could be cared for, given the simple comforts a child requires, and be trained to such work as a cripple may support himself with. But to so place him a yearly sum of money would be necessary. It was only a small one—fifteen or twenty pounds and his first outfit—and if he had been only one case of a score the Aid might have undertaken it. But he was one case of hundreds, and the Aid was so poor.

How many times Mr. Graham, as he sat in his plain, little, back room surrounded by charitable flotsam and jetsam and spinal carriages, said to himself, "What can be done?" it would be hard to tell. How often he finds himself saying the same words day after day concerning other cases as urgent, it would be impossible to say. In this case chance brought the answer, as he says it frequently does when he is dismayed totally. One of the Friends—a mother who had lost a son—came to him to try to find comfort in giving help to other children, not safe from all the world's hurts as her own was.

"What can I do?" she said. "Have you some special case needing help?"

"Yes," he answered, "here is one which lies very heavy on my mind at this moment. It is not only the life or death of a body—it seems to mean the life or death of a soul." Then he told her the whole story and read the Friend's report.

"He is only a little fellow," he said. "He is bright and full of spirit, and intelligent enough to be fearfully harmed by the atmosphere around him. If he is allowed to struggle through his maimed childish life in such a place, if he is not physically killed he will be destroyed in every other sense."

"He shall not be," said the visitor. "My own boy shall be his 'Friend.'"

And so the little fellow was cared for and became an inmate of the Home for Crippled Boys, with a prospect of a decent life before him.

There is at Brondesbury Park, Kilburn, London, a lovely little place called St. Monica's Home, which often receives waifs and strays sent by the Children's Aid, and which in a certain boys' ward has a pretty corner whose memorial bed has been placed at the Aid's disposal. This perfect little Home was founded by two tender and generous women who were Friends. They were unmarried, and having experience in nursing and the care of children, chose to devote themselves to this most gentle work. The picturesque house is far enough in the suburbs to breathe clean air, there are pleasant tree-shaded grounds about it, and the wards look like cheery, well-cared-for nurseries with their fresh little beds, flowers, and toys, and bright open fires behind the high wire fenders. One can spend a wonderful afternoon there. When one enters the ward of St. Christopher or of the Good Shepherd with one's arms full of packages with flowers nodding over them, and sees the little heads begin to turn on their pillows, or lift themselves to look and smile at the "lady," even the keenest sorrow seems to lift its dark wings for flight for a little while. They are such poor little souls, and yet—being kindly cared for—they seem actually to find life a thing to be enjoyed. In spite of wooden boxes and iron frame-works, in spite of paralyzed limbs and marred little faces, a "lady" who is a Friend, they know, can set up among them the prettiest nursery clamor in the world.

"Good-afternoon, ma'am," they all chant in childish chorus as she enters the room; "Good-afternoon, ma'am," they chant again with a tone of affectionate regret when she goes away.

It is so pretty to see how they at once adopt the gentle, well-bred manners of the place.

"It is strange, perhaps," said one of the lady founders, "but we never have trouble with them. They may be brought to us from the lowest place, from hearing constantly the vilest language, but it seems as if they forgot it all as soon as they come."
There are so many dear little faces, and some so stamped with pain and death.

"They are so patient," one of the ladies says, "one cannot help but wonder at it sometimes."

But some of them have never known anything but pain. They have had time even, in their short lives, to learn patience. The most brilliantly beaming little face I ever beheld I saw at St. Monica's, lying with its small head held in place by a surgical collar. The first time I saw him he lay in a corner cot and so beamed at me that he drew me over to his side.

He was a pretty, neat-featured creature about six years of age, his cheeks were brilliantly pink—perhaps with a little fever—and his laughing, dancing-eyed look could only have been justified by absolute bliss.

Each child has on its bed a light invalid table, on which its possessions can be placed. On his there was an extremely battered little pink tin pig, evidently a remnant of some larger stock-yard, whether his own or that of some other child in the ward did not appear. He had never seen me before, but evidently I represented to him a delightful novelty. He lay and looked up at me with those eyes with which a child makes it almost impossible for one to resist the impulse to take him to one's arms.

"What is your name?" I asked.

"'Arry," he answered, as if the reply were a delightful joke in itself.

He was a delicious little Cockney, without an "h" in his possession. When I knelt by his cot to tell him a story of the adventures of the pink pig, he chuckled and giggled with rapture.

"Laidy," he would shout, when he thought I was going to stop, "Laidy, tell it agine, tell it agine!"

After that he felt me a special possession of his own. It is a beautiful and significant thing that, howsoever hard and uncared for their lives have been, they adjust themselves quite simply to kindness and petting and the privileges which belong by right to a child. In such a short time they find it perfectly natural that "a lady" should bring them flowers and toys, and tell them stories, and that a Royal Duchess and her pretty Princess daughter should bring playthings to their bedsides.

In the same ward with "'Arry," I saw the face the most piteous. It should have been a very pretty face, but its four-year-old owner was so far diseased that abscess after abscess had drawn, and scarred, and disfigured him until he was piteous to look upon. Even his long-lashed harebell blue eyes were distorted, and looked vacant through the very ceaselessness of his suffering.

When I went round the ward giving toys to all the children, he lay still staring listlessly, and seeming to take no interest. But later, as I was playing with "'Arry," I saw him rub a poor, little bandaged hand pitifully across his eyes.

He did not seem to be interested when I took him a toy, and I thought, when I spoke caressingly to him, he did not appear to comprehend.

"He does not seem to understand," I said to a pretty young nurse, standing by. "Is he an English child?"

She smiled pityingly, and bent over, petting and soothing him.

"Yes, he is English," she answered me in a low voice, "but he has been so ill all his life that it has made him backward. Sometimes he does not seem even to understand the nurses."

It seemed so cruel that the body of such a tiny thing had been so given up to pain that his mind could not grow.

Of all things, it always seems that these little creatures of the slums like best the flowers one takes them. They have ceased to be hungry and cold, and their starved child souls see in them the beauty they have never known. When the flowers are laid upon the table, and one begins to make them into little bunches, the happy nursery clamor begins.

"Laidy—Laidy, please give me one; please give me a pink one, Laidy," they call out, stretching little hands on every side.

On the day I first saw Georgie I had a great many flowers. Among them were violets, and specially beautiful pink hyacinths. Everyone wanted a pink one, until one framed and bandaged little girl saw the violets. There
THE STORY OF A BEAUTIFUL THING.

was, it appears, a sort of legend that she had once been in the country.

"Those is vilets!" she called out. "Will you give me some vilets, Laidy?"

But though she seemed to set the fashion of taste for "vilets" in her corner, the pink hyacinths were the favorites. I had given them nearly all away when I heard some curious little inarticulate sounds from Georgie's cot. I turned to look at him with a strange feeling. He had been so listlessly uninterested in the toys that it was almost uncanny to see that he was observing. His little, piteous, distorted face was turned toward me, his eyes had a light in them, and a small bandaged hand was held out imploringly and the vague, inarticulate sounds were clearly meant to convey that something in his poor little being wanted these beautiful pink things too. I carried over to him several of the prettiest ones, I touched his cheek with their coolness, and spoke to him about them. When I left them held on his breast by his bandaged hand, I had a curious fancy that perhaps, as he lay breathing in their perfume, he might almost be breathing in something like a soul. The next time I went to the Home I carried a pink azalea growing in a pretty pot and full of radiant rosy bloom. I wondered if he had ever seen anything like it.

When the door of St. Christopher's ward opened and the "laidy" entered with this lovely delicately burning bush in her arms, he lay and watched her. Perhaps his undeveloped intelligence was stirred by the fair brightness sufficiently to wonder what the visitor was going to do. She came direct to his cot and knelt down, holding the flowerpot in her arms so that the pink bloom was quite close to him.

"This is for Georgie," she said. "It is Georgie's own flower."

He made one of the inarticulate sounds and looked at her with vague, pleased questioning.

"Do you want to touch it?" she said. She thought he might want to be sure that it was real. He put out his hand and made the queer little sound again.

"Do you want one to hold?" she said. And she broke off a blossom and gave it to him. Who can say what his vague mind felt or thought?

"This is Georgie's flower," she said again. "I will put it on the little table close to him. He can look at it and talk to it all day. When he is asleep it will still be there watching him. And when he wakes it will look at him and say, 'Good-morning.'"

And he looked at her and actually, slowly, faintly smiled. Those two little fellows in the same ward one would always remember. One, this sad thing, seemingly the cruelest injustice of Nature; the other, cruelly treated too, but given with the injustice at the same time a strange gift of bright spirit, making him almost a joyous thing.

Sometimes one goes into a ward where the children are full of their usual simple enjoyments, where Noah's arks are being arranged and dolls dressed and undressed, where the summer air and sunshine come through the open windows. And round one cot a screen is drawn. I stopped near one in a ward one day, hearing a faint brief, whimpering sound. A nurse was sitting at the cot's side watching what lay in it. The careful tenderness of her face was not merely professional, but loving.

"Is he very ill?" I said, softly. She bent her head and answered, in a whisper as low,

"It will soon be over," she said.

I stood still a moment. It seemed as though there was a hush over everything—even though the children played just as before on the other side of the screen. The little fellow lay with closed eyes, there was a tired look on his childish forehead, and at rare intervals he moved and made the faint whimpering sound. I don't quite know what tender and caressing thing my heart seemed to be saying to him, but the meaning of it was somehow this:

"Never mind, little man—poor little man—happy little man—it will soon be over."

And as I stood still for a few moments, it seemed as if the hush I felt upon the ward was such a hush as might fall upon a crowd, waiting for the coming of a King.
All through that afternoon the children would dress and undress their dolls and look at their picture-books, only hearing now and then the faint whimper, and knowing Johnny was “not so well to-day.” They would be put into their small beds in the usual way, and would fall asleep quietly. And in the morning the screen would be moved away and the sun would look in on a neat, freshly made little cot that was empty.

This lovely and most lovable Home, of which one could relate endless stories to touch the heart, is one to which the Children’s Aid is always more than happy to send its little ones when it is possible. Most of the wards are filled with children so young that it is not necessary that the boys and girls should be separated. But there is a boys’ ward which is called St. Alban’s. It is occupied by boys who are generally under fifteen years old. It is a very touching ward and full of stories. One can have most loving friends there. In the wards of the Good Shepherd and St. Christopher one is happy with small things not much more than babies, but in St. Alban’s the life of forming thought has begun.

At one end of this ward there is a Memorial corner. It contains two cots, one endowed in the name of a boy whose life on earth ended on the threshold, but the fittings and surroundings of both beds are alike. The intention of the giver was to make a bright corner which all the boys would find pleasure in, and which would surround the occupants with pleasures to beguile them through such dreary hours as come to all young suffering things.

The two little beds are blue and brass. They are covered with light, bright Como blankets and gay flowered duvets; between the two cots stands an invalid table which can be adjusted to any height, and whose leaf passes over the bed at will; over it there hangs a Japanese cabinet which holds ornaments and a set of books. The ornaments and the pictures upon the walls were chosen with a view to their suggesting the novelty which might attract a child’s eye and lead him on a sort of voyage of discovery. He might care to

look—if he had an imagination—at the figure of a foreign baby in its curious swaddling clothes, at a tiny East Indian in turban and native costume, at the trifles standing upon the step-like ledges of a little painted half-moon bracket, at the picture of some fairy scene in Venice—a city whose streets are the blue sea—or at a photograph of a peasant leading a Riviera donkey with a straw hat quaintly shading its head from the burning sun.

Each of these things, simple as they are, might give him new things to think of as he lay looking at them—perhaps discovering them one after another. At the foot of each bed is a bamboo stand holding a blue pot containing a palm; at the head of one hangs the portrait of a boy with brown eyes, and on the frame beneath it is written the good-night he heard at the close of each day through eight months of illness. It is a good-night which might be said with fitting tenderness to any child who lives—or dies.

“Good-night—sleep well—wake up refreshed. God bless you, dear.”

The brown eyes seem to look down as if they themselves said the words with boyish kindness to the less happy boy who may need their cheering for many a night.

A music-box with many tunes which may be adjusted and changed is one of the accompaniments to this corner. It was found in Germany in dreary days of travel, and gave such pleasure to the boy, who beguiled many a fading hour with it, that it seemed to be the most fitting thing that other boys should find it a pleasure. This cot has been placed at the disposal of the Children’s Aid, and when this was done Mr. Graham suggested a plan whose thoughtful considerateness might well emanate from the kind heart which planned the workings of the little charity which is so beautiful a thing.

“Would it not be a good idea,” he said, “that this corner, which is a sort of little drawing-room of the ward, should be reserved as a special comfort for the child who needs comfort most? The child who is most suffering might always be given that pretty place. If the child I send is not very ill he can
be given another cot, and the greatest invalid can be put in the Lionel corner."

And the thought seemed so kind and wise that it was so arranged. So the Children's Aid has always at its disposal a bed at St. Monica's Home, but it is the boy whose hours are made longest and dreariest by fatigue and pain, who lies in the bright little bed of blue and brass, looks at the books and trifles on the cabinet, amuses himself with the musical box, and is watched over by the young brown eyes which seem to say, "Good-night—sleep well—wake up refreshed. God bless you, dear."

The Princess Mary Victoria of Teck (now Duchess of York) consented to become the patroness of the Aid. She was then known to the people as the Princess May, and was, I believe, the only young and unmarried princess who had so far occupied this position in connection with a charity.

It seems a specially charming and fitting thing that these little creatures, who are so sadly placed, should have for their friend a young girl—a young princess who is much beloved. This seems to give the situation a touch of the fairy story. One can easily imagine how pretty a story it would seem to a worn, squalid little being, in a bare and squalid room, that a young princess was his or her friend—one whose very name has somehow a suggestion of the golden-haired princess in the fairy story—the one whom all the princes loved and tried to solve impossible riddles for.

"She is called the Princess May and everybody loves her. She is always doing kind things, and she is the Friend of all your little ones who are cold or hungry or in pain."

What a picture this might call up in a little starved soul. One might imagine his lying awake in the dark in his wretched room, and making the gloom bright with his fancied image of her—adorning her fairness with strange, rich royal robes, and surrounding her with story-book splendors—if he has heard stories, or has been given the imagination which itself may make them in the darkest hour in the world. To such a child mind we may be sure that one of the many charms of this Beautiful Thing would be the final touch given to it by this "Princess May," who wandered forth from her fairyland regions to hold out to them in pitying tenderness her fair young hand.

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**LIFE.**

*By Edith Wharton.*

Life, like a marble block, is given to all,
A blank, inchoate mass of years and days,
Whence one with ardent chisel swift essays
Some shape of strength or symmetry to call;
One shatters it in bits to mend a wall;
One in a cradler hand the chisel lays,
And one, to wake the mirth in Lesbia's gaze,
Carves it apace in toys fantastical.

But least is he who, with enchanted eyes
Filled with high visions of fair shapes to be,
Muses which god he shall immortalize
In the proud Parian's perpetuity,
Till twilight warns him from the punctual skies
That the night cometh wherein none shall see.