

hardship. In a well-known passage of the *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, De Quincey relates that he was once told by a near relative that "having in her childhood (aged 9) fallen into a river, and being on the very verge of death but for the assistance which reached her at the last critical moment, she saw in a moment her whole life, clothed in its forgotten incidents, arrayed before her as in a mirror, not successively but simultaneously, and she had a faculty developed as suddenly, for comprehending the whole and every part." An American gentleman, Mr. C. A. Hartley,<sup>3</sup> has recently given an interesting account of his sensations when drowning. He lay at the bottom of a river in a state of semiconsciousness, in which he saw his relatives and friends all about them with their eyes full of tears. All the events of his life, from infancy upwards, passed slowly before his mental vision; he felt that he was drowning, and he remembers thinking, unlike Clarence, that it was not pain to drown. He was able even to speculate whether his body would be found, and he pictured his own funeral, and fancied he could hear the earth thrown on his coffin. He had sensations of the nature of tinnitus (ringing of bells, etc.) in his ears, and he had visual perceptions of the most marvellous combinations of colours. Next all was peace around him; he had a peculiar feeling of well-being in a medium of a temperature neither too hot nor too cold. Then he felt himself as if raised from the earth, and floating in space, and looking down on the world spread out at his feet. Lastly came mere darkness and oblivion till he found himself stretched on the river bank and being subjected to the disagreeable process of restoration to life. It will be noted that all these accounts agree in two points, namely, the apocalypse of the past life even in its minute details, and the absence of any unpleasant sensation. On the whole, the popular idea (which in such matters is never wholly wrong) that drowning is a pleasant form of death is confirmed by the testimony of the few who have practically reached the bourne of the undiscovered country and yet returned to tell the tale.

### HOSPITALS IN FACT AND FICTION.

It is sometimes useful, though perhaps not always agreeable, to see ourselves as others see us, and although imaginative writers may claim some licence in dealing with their facts, and may urge that they should not be too closely criticised as to their accuracy, yet on the other hand it must not be forgotten that a large portion of the public are apt, in the absence of the opportunity for more reliable information upon a point, to take their impressions from what they read, and are very prone to forget the source of the idea which they retain.

Hence it is not always a trifling matter that an authoress so popular as Mme. Sarah Grand should dilate upon the manner in which unnecessary suffering is inflicted upon the poor who are treated in our hospitals, and it seems, therefore, quite worth while to quote in these pages what is said in a recent collection of short stories entitled "Our Manifold Life," one of which is devoted to an account of a girl in many ways admirable, one Janey, who is a sufferer from hysterical loss of power in her lower limbs, brought on, it is said, by a fall downstairs, in which she injured her back.

Here is an account of her experience in hospital: "I was gettin' on well enough, until one night when there was a great storm; and me bed was under a window, an' it blowed in, an' I called an' called, but the nurse didn't come; an' I could not move myself, nor not another in the ward could move me, for we was all on us 'elpless. And the rain blew in on me all night, and no nurse came till seven next morning, an' then one come for something, an' I ses to her, 'O, nurse, it's bin rainin' on me, an' I'm all cold an' wet!' 'You just wait till your betters 'as breakfasted,' she ses, 'an' off she goes; an' it was 'alf-past eight an' more before she comed to move me, an' me teeth chatterin' that 'ard you could 'ear 'em. An' one of the women in the ward, she said it was shameful neglec,' an' she'd tell the doctor; an' the nurse said, threatenin' like, 'You'd better!' But she did, an' oh my, 'e did go on that nurse awful, he *was* vexed! An' she did treat that poor woman cruel afterwards. She'd do nothing for 'er; I've 'eard her call an' call, for she was 'elpless too;

an' nurse 'ud come back an' look at 'er, an' laugh, an' she in that pain; an' the nurse would say, 'You tell tales of me again, will you?' They isn't lady nurses they 'as 'ere, you know," and so on for another page, in which we are told that her mother used to slip in regularly to make her comfortable, her visits being winked at by the nurses to save themselves trouble.

A few pages further on we are treated to a glimpse of a dental hospital. "It's a kind of charity. You don't pay. I think young gents goes there to learn the dentistry business, an' my! they do torture you. I didn't know it was, else I'd not 'ave gone; not was it ever so. 'Im as did my teeth used to get my 'ead fast in a chair, an' put a thing in me mouth to 'old it open, an' then 'e'd leave me like that an' go an' laugh with the other young gents; an' when 'e 'urt me an' I'd make a noise 'e used to say 'Now then, jest you shut up; you know you are a pauper an' gets all this 'endance for nothin'; an' good dentistry too."

"This casual glimpse of the price the unfortunates who have to rely upon 'charity' pay for the same is the kind of thing which makes one long to visit such young 'gents' with a big stick while one's blood is boiling;" but Janey was not by way of complaining. However, Janey had had enough of hospitals, and begged for some creasote, which, by some occult process, destroyed all her remaining teeth.

All this would be beneath criticism were it not that the talented authoress has won for herself a wide public, and therefore, surely, has incurred an obligation that her writings should not be such as to do mischief.

In the days of Sarah Gamp such things may, perhaps, have been, but at what hospital would a nurse who had been found out in gross neglect have been left for a day to wreak her vengeance upon her patients? And does the writer suppose that at any dental hospital the dressers are allowed to deal with the patients as they choose, without supervision, putting aside for the moment the improbability of their inhumanity?

Of course it can never be that the hospital patient can have all the comforts of a well-to-do patient in his own house; the exigencies of hospital work both in respect of expense, the number of patients to be treated, and the like difficulties, must prevent this; but on the other hand the hospital patient has his material well-being cared for in a degree little, and often not at all, short of the care secured by the richest in the land, and in so far as essentials go, the hour of sickness brings to the poor hospital patient an amount of kindly care and consideration, and in many particulars almost of luxury, such as he can never attain to at any other period of his life. Indeed the most advanced socialist, whose programme involves the despoiling of the wealthier classes to increase the comforts of the poorer, would probably not propose to amend in any material respect the administration of our hospitals, of which we may already be proud.

It seems, therefore, a matter for much regret that any writer of position should, for the purpose of literary effect, put forth statements which are misleading, which bear upon the face of them internal evidence that the writer knows nothing of the administration of these great charities, and which, if believed, as they are sure to be by some at all events of her readers, tend to stop the flow of donations which are at all times sorely needed, and which bear such useful fruit in providing for the poor the benefits of such medical skill as they could by no other means attain.

Of all this the writer probably never thought; local colour and literary effect were her aim, and she perhaps attained it, though we do not think this particular story by any means one of her best; and we have little doubt that, if it be pointed out, no one will regret more than its author the tendency of such writing.

CONGRESSES AT BORDEAUX.—An international exhibition is to be held at Bordeaux in 1895. This event is to be made the occasion of a Congress of Pædiatrics and Gynæcology, under the presidency of Professors Tarnier and Lannelongue, and of a Congress of Hygiene, to be held under the auspices of the Society of Hygiene. In addition to these gatherings, the surgeons of Bordeaux are making strenuous efforts to secure the acceptance of their city as the place of meeting for the French Surgical Congress in 1895.

<sup>3</sup> Reproduced, from some source unnamed, in the *Revue Scientifique*, June 2nd, 1894.