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'LIVES O' MEN.'

The stranger who sails for the first time up the Firth of Forth must be struck with the numerous villages that stud its picturesque shores. These for the most part are fishing-villages, inhabited by a race of hardy men, who at times run fearful risks at sea. Though the morning may look settled, and the prospects of a good 'take' induce the boats to venture forth far out to sea, the afternoon may prove so boisterous that all hands are glad to beat a retreat, and leaving lines or nets to look after themselves, make for some harbour of refuge. Sometimes, as was prominently the case last year, the weather may come on so suddenly violent that the best appointed boats, handled by experienced men, run dreadful risks, and reach the sheltering haven only by a hair's-breadth. At times no skill can avail, and wives and mothers – and as we had occasion to shew in a recent article on the Hebrides, sweethearts – are left lamenting. It is unfortunate that many of the harbours on the Firth of Forth are dry or nearly so at low-water, so that a boat at sea *must* wait outside before the crew can venture in; for thus are doubtless lost many boats and their hapless crews that otherwise might 'make the run' and be out of danger. Unable to make harbour from want of water, there is no alternative but to lie off under close-reefed sail till the tide makes, or be dashed to splinters on a lee-shore. This will assist the reader of the following story in understanding the anxiety felt by those on shore for the boats at sea, even when the boats appeared in sight. Having braved the open sea in all its fury, the attempt to take the harbour at the ebb might have been disastrous to all.

With this preface we offer to our readers a description of such a scene as witnessed by one who has kindly placed it at our disposal. His story runs as follows:

'It's a sair, sair nicht, sir. God help them out on the sea!' With these words was I greeted as, through the darkness of that awful night of the 3d of August last, I groped my way to the harbour of the small fishing-village on the east coast of Scotland where I was then staying, being interested in the herring-fishing there.

On the evening of the night above mentioned a number of the boats had gone to sea, even though the weather (to say the least of it) looked threatening. The fishing up to this date had been a comparative failure; but signs of herring on the coast had been met with on the previous night; and with time wearing on, little doing, and a number of mouths to fill, the hardy weather-beaten fishermen were loath to lose a chance; so to sea they went, some few boats being providentially kept on shore.

The night, from being threatening, grew bad, with gathering clouds and rain, and gusts of wind from the sea. Wives kept up good fires against their husbands' return, as all expected the boats back. The *last* boat that went out *did* return, but no others; and the fishermen on shore were of opinion that with the wind they had had, the boats would be 'weel at sea an' sweer' (unwilling) 'to turn!'

Eleven o'clock comes, and the weather not much worse. Opinions are hazarded that it will 'maybe tak aff wi' the tide;' and I turn in and am soon asleep. Not to sleep long, however. One o'clock, and I am awakened with the howling wind, blast after blast, battering the rain against the windows, and rattling and banging windows and doors; and the noise of that dread continuous, seething, inexpressible *hus-sh* from the now storm-tossed angry sea. Out of bed at once, and into clothes and oilskins, then out into the night. Dark? Yes; black! Wind like to tear you off your legs, and rain blinding; but worst of all, that raging sea outside.

I struggle down to the harbour; and there, under the lee of an old boat, I find two or three fishermen, and am greeted with the words I commenced with. I could merely make out the indistinct forms of the men, but I knew the voice of the one who spoke. He was an old man now, past going to sea; but out there, somewhere in the darkness, were two sturdy young men, his sons, for whom he had worked in their childhood, and who now worked for him in his old age. Well might he pray: 'God help them out on the sea!' A month or two later than this, last year, his youngest, bonnie son was one of a crew of five drowned in that very sea, before his old father's eyes.

During temporary lulls, we could hear that there were others about; and often a sad pent-up wail, choked with a sob, told of 'wives and mithers maist despairin'' wandering past through the darkness and rain.

The cold gray dawn comes at last, only to shew us a widespread army of fighting waves dashing wildly on to the shore, and making a clean breach over the protection breakwater of the little harbour; plainly shewing the impossibility of any of the boats taking *that* harbour, even should they make shoreward. The safety of the boats inside the very harbour even has to be looked after, for when the tide makes, the run will be likely to snap everything.

As the morning advances and no boats heave in sight, the question arises, Where will they be? Some say they will make this or that harbour farther north; while others say they will be riding out the storm at sea, 'hanging by'[1] their nets. Already, by break of day, between twenty and thirty dripping half-clad women have started to walk along the coast to the next fishing-ports. They cannot wait here till the telegraph opens; and when it does open it finds plenty of work without them.

Some men have taken the road also, promising to telegraph back, should they find any tidings of friends or neighbours. Those of us left here gather together at sheltered corners and peer out to sea and hazard an opinion now and then. The old man before spoken of tells how he was at sea the night of the great loss twenty-nine years ago, but doubts if it was as bad a night as this has been. Another – even older-looking – tells how that night is as fresh in his memory as yesterday, for, as he said, he had then thought his last night on land or sea had come. He too is sure this has been a wilder night; but then he hopefully adds: 'Look at the boats they've got to work wi' noo!' Then with a sigh: 'But a' will no tell their tale o' this nicht.'

Morning grows into noon, and the rain has now settled down into a dark drizzle, occasionally clearing a little and allowing at times a better look-out to sea.

During one of these breaks a boat heaves in sight, evidently making straight for the harbour, under a small patch of sail, and labouring heavily in the trough of the sea. Instantly the village is in a commotion, for well do all know what will be the fate of that boat and crew should they get too far in-shore. The cries of the poor women are heart-rending as they rush hither and thither through cold and wet clasping their bewildered little bairnies to their breasts. Away there goes a stalwart young fellow with a tar-barrel on his shoulder, followed by others carrying wood and shavings; and in a few minutes a warning flame bursts from the hillside; up goes a white flag on the end of the pier, a signal of too much sea on for taking the harbour; and there also from a schooner inside the harbour waves the Union-jack half-mast high, with ensign reversed – a world-wide understood signal of danger. Soon also another fire blazes from another point higher up, from where it is considered it will be better seen by those in the boat; and the old boat-builder (from whose yard the barrel, chips, and shavings have been got) stands by with a flagon of oil, from which, from time to time, he pours a little over the fire, making it shoot forth a flashing, brighter flame.

Now all has been done that can at the moment be thought of, and it only remains to wait. The boat still seems to be making for the shore; and from that it is surmised that those on board of her are strange to this part of the coast. 'He's keepin' her awa.' 'Na; he's only jibing her end-on to the seas.'

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[1] Herring boats frequently ride out a gale at sea by being made fast by stout ropes to the nets, which answer the purpose of an anchor. In this position the boat is said to be 'hanging by' the net.

'She's gaun aboot.' 'Na, na; the Lord hae mercy on them; he's gaun to try the harbour!' Such are a few of the exclamations from the anxious group round, or rather behind that danger-fire; and there also from the lips of a bonnie fisher lass about fifteen or sixteen I hear the earnest muttered prayer: 'The Lord be at the helm. O Lord, be at the helm!' Her father and three of her brothers went to sea last night in the same boat, and strange to say – though not known to her or any on shore at the time – that boat for whose guidance she prayed *was* her father's. Still the boat holds on – until again, and this time almost with a shout, it is announced that 'she's gaun aboot' (shifting her course). Yes, and this time it is right. She *is* about. There is a sigh of relief from all, and many a hearty 'Thank God.' Tongues seem loosened now, and criticisms are passed on how 'she's behavin',' and how 'he' (the steersman) 'works her.' All agree that those in the boat will make for a port about fifteen miles farther north, which it is thought will be possible to be entered with safety. At least all are relieved that for the present the boat seems out of danger.

The Telegraph Office immediately on its being opened, and ever since, has been completely besieged. What a picture, and how impossible to picture it! A little wayside railway office crushed full of dripping, crying women, with a sad-faced man here and there. Not a sound, except occasionally a smothered sob or whisper, and the tic-tic-tic of the instrument, meaning joy or grief perhaps to some of these poor women, all eagerly watching that lad, or rather boy, the only one there who understands that tic-tic-tic.

Then when news *does* come of this or that boat's safety, watch the brightening faces of those to whom it is good news; their long-drawn thankful sigh of relief, and their again saddening look as they think of others around them who have got no news yet. Quietly they pull their shawls over their heads and slip out, only to make room for others who have been standing outside in the rain waiting their turn.

But hollo! There goes the fire on the hill again. What does it mean? Another boat? No; but the same one is about. Again all is consternation and wonder, until the old boat-builder says quietly: 'He's weel acquaint. It's ane o' oor ain folk, an' he's gaun to dodge aboot expeck'n the wind to tak aff.' And he is right too; for the boat only comes near enough not to be *too* near, then 'bout ship and out again. After a time another boat heaves in sight, then another, until, by about five o'clock in the evening, there are eleven boats tossing about out there on that wild sea, in sight of home, waiting for the storm to abate and the sea go down. News has also come to hand of the safety of other six of the thirty boats that went out from here last night, so that there is still about half of them to be heard of yet, should those in the offing turn out to belong to the place.

Well, it did 'tak aff;' and by nine o'clock that night fourteen boats managed to get safely into the harbour, though with great difficulty and danger.

What a sight was that also! A well-manned salmon coble kept afloat in the fairway ready for an emergency, and at the same time giving confidence to those in the boats taking the harbour. The pier crowded with men, women, and children, anxiously, silently, watching each boat through the peril. Then the greetings and questionings of the tired, starving fishermen, whom the sea seems to have given up.

Still lots of the boats have yet to be heard of, and many a one wanders the whole night through, unable to rest in his anxiety for the missing ones. Next day, however, all are accounted for. All safe, except one boat with a crew of five, swamped out at sea, in that dreadful August storm, and all hands drowned; and it has proved a 'sair, sair nicht' for the poor old fisherman with whose words I began this sketch, for one of his stalwart sons was one of that crew of five, who leave four widows and thirteen 'faitherless bairns;' proving how appropriate it is in regard to the pursuit of the 'caller herrin'' that

Wives and mithers maist despairin'
Ca' them *lives o' men*.

A MORNING IN A LONDON HOSPITAL

'If you will meet me at – Hospital at half-past ten on Monday morning, I shall be happy to shew you anything in my power.' So ran a note I received some little time since from a privileged visitor at one of the largest London hospitals. An hour's ride brought me to the gates of the institution, which is in the very heart of busy London, and yet, as far as noise goes, might be miles away from all its life and bustle. A little world by itself it stands, having its own laws and customs, its chiefs and subordinates, and certainly its own joys and sorrows. Crossing a stone yard and up a flight of steps, the first obstacle presented itself in the shape of an ever-watchful porter; but the name of my correspondent had a magical effect in quieting his fears. Friends of the patients are allowed to visit them on three days in the week at stated hours; but beyond this, without private interest, it is by no means easy to obtain admission to any hospital.

Passing through the porter's gate, I found myself in a stone hall, where my friend joined me; and opening a door at one end, she led me into the accident ward. Down each side of the long room were arranged beds at short intervals, each with its coverlet of blue check and curtains to match. Yet there was little monotony in the appearance of the whole, each bed taking different shapes according to the nature of its inmate's accident. Skilled hands know how to place sufferers in the position that causes least pain; and light frames are fixed over injured limbs to prevent contact with the bed-clothes. Each bed too has a chain suspended from the top, with a handle attached; by which simple contrivance patients are enabled to raise and in some measure help themselves much sooner than would otherwise be possible. Some of the worst 'cases' are too ill to notice us as we go round; but from the greater number we get something of a smile.

Our next step was to mount the stairs on the other side of the hall. We now came to a large male surgical ward, holding about fifty beds arranged as before described. Here the dressers or house-surgeons were beginning their duties. The first bed at which we paused was tenanted by a boy of twelve or fourteen years old, with a bright and not unhealthy looking face; but a terrible abscess had formed on the calf of the leg, so affecting the bone that a serious operation was necessary to prevent amputation. This had been performed a few days before our visit; but useful as chloroform is at the time of an operation, it by no means saves all the pain. The first dressing is much dreaded, and even in the case of which I write the poor boy's sufferings were very great; but he was a true Briton as to endurance. I did not know which to admire most, his bravery or the steady hand and eye of the surgeon, who did not shrink from inflicting necessary pain, whilst with bright words of encouragement he helped his poor patient to 'be a man.' The air of cheerfulness about the ward was surprising; round the fireplaces were groups of patients, just well enough to be up. Gaunt and ill they looked, but as ready as possible for a bit of fun. The Sister of the ward comes out of her cheery little room just as we turn to go away, so we stop for a few minutes' chat with her. She tells us that in addition to the services of Chaplain and Scripture-readers, each ward is visited once a week by ladies, who talk to the patients one by one, reading to them, and trying to shew sisterly sympathy with their sorrows. Sister says that the patients look forward to the visiting afternoon with great pleasure, and my friend remarks: 'No wonder; poor things! They must find it very dull lying here day after day and week after week.'

Sister breaks into a merry laugh, and utterly scouts the notion that her ward could be anything but bright and pleasant. 'You see,' she said, 'mine are surgical cases. It may be dull perhaps on the medical side; but here the patients are well as a rule, except in one particular thing.'

To our inexperienced minds 'one particular thing' seemed quite enough. Asking the same Sister whether she found it difficult to obtain permission from one of the authorities to do something she wished, she answered with an amused smile: 'I never have any difficulty in getting anything for anybody.' It certainly would be difficult to refuse anything to such a bonnie face and pleasant manner.

One could not but be thankful that she and others like her shed their sunshine where there must of necessity be so much shadow.

In the next ward (female) we had a few words with a motherly night-nurse. She goes to bed after dinner (about 1 P.M.), and comes on duty again at nine in the evening; but turning night into day seems to agree capitally with her. Seeing several cots with tiny inmates, we ask her whether they give her much trouble: her prompt answer is: 'Not a bit; not half so much as some of the grown-ups.'

'And the medicine; have you difficulty with that?'

'Never; however nasty it is, they drink it up without a word.'

One case of a poor woman is both medical and surgical – a terrible string of maladies; but another nurse, in answer to the question, 'Can she recover?' answers heartily and with real interest: 'Indeed, we hope she will.' She certainly would not without great care and the best of nursing. Near her is a cot, and my friend asks the four-year-old inmate what is the matter. A tiny voice pipes out in the very highest of high trebles: 'I'se here tawse I tarn't walt.' A dislocated thigh will prevent the poor baby from walking for several weeks. In the next cot is a girl of five, injured in the same way. 'Run over,' nurse tells us; and adds: 'Half of them are.'

A few more visits on the surgical side, and we come down-stairs again, and go through a door at the opposite end of the hall from the porter's lodge. The medical cases are in a block of buildings quite distinct from the surgical. The first ward we entered was chiefly occupied by consumptive patients. On opening the door, a most pitiful wail greeted us. Going up to the cot from whence it proceeded, we found a tiny child lying with its eyes fixed on the ceiling and giving utterance to the most heart-rending cries. The Sister, nurses, and patients were alike almost in despair about her. One nurse told us that little Jessie was eighteen months old, though not so big as some children of as many days. She had been brought to the hospital a week before, *starved*. Her limbs were so rigid that they could scarcely bend them. A patient told us that she nearly *bit through* the spoon when first fed. The doctor considered her much better; but she cried or rather wailed the whole night and all day, unless nursed or fed. Nurse had taken her into her own bed for three nights with little avail; and all the inmates of the ward were feeling worn out with worry and want of sleep. At a subsequent visit I found her still wailing, and tried the experiment of nursing her for some hours. She was perfectly good in my lap, and went to sleep. Flattering myself that I had done a good work in securing a quiet morning for the other patients, I put my lady down in her cot. She lay for just one minute, and then opened her eyes with a shriek that made me glad to bundle her up and quiet her at any cost. At my last visit I found that Sister had been obliged to send her away, after trying what having the mother in at night would do, and finding it of no use. One poor woman, very ill in the next bed, said to me: 'I do love little children, and I have a baby of my own, so I don't mind some crying; but it was dreadful to hear that child cry day and night, and no sleep for any of us.'

There seems to be no special ward set apart for children; but cots are sprinkled about in the female wards for those under the age of seven. As a rule, the patients like this, and the little ones get a good deal of notice and petting; but I am afraid no one regretted poor Jessie excepting a deaf and dumb boy in a cot near, who could not hear her cries, and delighted in clapping his hands at her. He was a handsome child of five, with a wonderfully bright smile, and very quick at catching the meaning of the slightest sign. At this first visit, his only amusement was to fold up the bed-clothes and throw them on the rod over his crib. His little tray had no toys on it; and notwithstanding his sunny face, one could not but fancy the days must have been very long and uninteresting. The last time I saw him he was rejoicing over some bright pictures, pointing out their beauties to his kind nurse, and making all sorts of inarticulate sounds of joy. One nurse had a rather quaint idea of the use of pictures. In answer to my question, 'Would No. 7 understand these?' she said: 'O yes; he'd know how to tear them up!'

After speaking to several of the patients, our attention was drawn to a woman, who looked so much a picture of health, that it needed quite an effort of faith to believe her when she said that, two or three weeks before, she had been so dangerously ill that she scarcely expected to leave the hospital

alive; but under treatment she had improved so rapidly that she was hoping to go to a Convalescent Home in a few days. Several of the patients were well enough to be about. Whenever this is the case, they take what share they can in waiting on those too ill to help themselves. One or two are so ill that they cannot put a foot to the ground, need to be lifted in and out of bed and waited on like children. The Sister of this ward is most admirably suited to her post. She has the gift of governing, and nurses, as well as patients, are completely under her control. One of her duties is to go round the ward administering medicine to each patient (the medicine is kept on a shelf over the bed); and certainly the way they took it bore out the statement of the nurse spoken of at the first: however disagreeable, it was swallowed at once without the shadow of a grimace. Sister too presides over the distribution of the smaller articles of food, kept in little movable cupboards, of which there is one to each bed. The bread is baked in small tempting loaves, and brought into the ward in what looks likes a clothes-basket. Two patients carry this up the middle, whilst Sister asks each in turn how much they feel equal to. The amount they then receive lasts them till the following morning. A stated allowance of butter is given in the same way. A bill of fare hangs over each bed; eggs and all other extras being only given under the doctor's orders. In addition to this diet-card, a form is suspended from the bed's head, filled in with the name, age, address, and disease of the patient, together with the names of his or her doctor and house-surgeon, also the date of admission.

Going up another flight of stairs, we entered a ward for what a nurse called 'difficult cases;' by which she meant diseases that require special attention, and that do not shew themselves so decidedly as to leave no doubt of their nature. The ward is large, holding about fifty beds; but evidently it was not built originally for an hospital. Several rooms seem to have been thrown into one by removing the doors; but the projections of the division walls remain and serve to break the monotony of appearance. Of the same size and build was the next we entered, which was privileged in possessing the society of two cats as pets. Here we found another baby of the same age as Jessie, and like her, *starved*; but here the likeness ended. This little creature seemed the darling of the ward; nurses and patients vied with each other as to who should nurse her, and all declared 'she never cries, and gets *so*

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