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Once It Might Have Been.

By X.

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“Once it might have been.”

“WILL you try and say a few words to a new little patient of mine, before you leave the ward this afternoon?”

It was the head nurse, in one of the large wards of a city hospital, who spoke, and her manner was peculiarly grave and thoughtful, so much so, that I asked at once, “Is there anything special in the case, nurse?”

“It is as sad a one as I have seen since I have been in this hospital, and that is many years now,” she said; and the tears stood in her eyes.

It was a rare thing to see Nurse K. so moved. She was a bright, cheery woman, universally liked and respected by the patients, to whose wants and comforts she attended with unwearied patience. Every one of them seemed to cling to her as to a tower of strength. The ward was a different place if Nurse K. were out for a holiday. She knew me well, and often gave me hints as to the actual state of the sufferers, which helped me greatly in seeking to say a few words to them of Jesus the Saviour.

“What is wrong with your new patient, nurse?” I asked.

“Consumption, ma’am. She will not last more than forty-eight hours, if she does that; but, poor child, what is so sad is she is only

seventeen, and she is a wife, and has been a mother. She lost her little baby some months since, and from that time has just pined away, so they tell me. Her husband brought her in last night. He would not part with her till now it is too late; the doctors can do nothing for her. If they had only brought her in sooner!" the kind woman added, "and she is such a pretty young thing to die,—and the worst of it is, I am sure she is not prepared to die. Maybe she would listen to you if you would speak a few words to her. She is in the bed at the right hand corner, the other end of the ward."

Nurse K.'s words thrilled me with deepest interest. I did not wonder that the tears stood in the kindly-hearted woman's eyes. Only seventeen, a wife, and a mother, beautiful, dying fast, and *Christless*, or "not prepared to die," as she expressed it. My own heart was full, as I walked down the ward to the bed indicated.

When I reached it, my interest deepened in the young sufferer. She looked almost a child, and so lovely. Never had I seen so fair a face. She was propped up in bed, nearly in a sitting posture, and was gasping for breath. Large drops stood on her white brow, and trickled slowly down her face. A bright colour was on her cheek, which looked

almost transparent; a still brighter light in her eye; but it was very evident that grim monster, Death, had laid his cold, iron hand remorselessly on this young and beautiful and beloved one, and was hurrying away with his prey.

I have hardly ever felt as awe-stricken. It seemed as if no words, almost no prayer would come. She looked, as Nurse K. said, too fair to die; and yet we both knew surely she was dying fast, and dying without Christ. Eternity just a hand's breadth in front of her, and she not ready to meet God!

She looked up as I came close to the bed, and smiled sadly. It was a bright day in early summer, and I had in my hand some lovely roses and ferns. She looked longingly at the flowers, and I said, "Would you like to have some of them?"

"Oh, so much," she answered, "they are so beautiful."

She spoke with difficulty, but showed great interest as I placed the flowers on her bed, and began to arrange the finest of them in a little vase to stand by her side.

"It is so kind of you. I am so fond of flowers," she said.

"So am I," I answered, "they are some of God's own handiwork; the God who seeks us to be His children, that He may show us

a Father's heart; the God who gave His own Son, Jesus our Lord, to die for us, to save us. "Do you know Jesus?" I whispered.

Never shall I forget how that young face changed. Her brow darkened, and a look of thorough hatred gleamed from her eyes. Only once before in all my life had I ever seen a look like that, in a woman's face. It was not weariness or indifference, it was hatred to the very name of Jesus.

In a moment I was silenced, the shock was so great of seeing a dying girl turn so decidedly from the fountain of life. Then, I thought—I hoped—perhaps it was only a look of pain, and stooping down, I repeated in a low voice, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Would you not like to possess this everlasting life?" I asked her.

Again that terrible look of deliberate rejection. "I do not want to hear of these things," she said; "I am too weak."

"I know you are very weak, too weak to talk," I answered; "but you will let me read to you a verse or two of God's own Word. I will not tire you."

"I do not want to hear," she said; "it is too late now. Once I might have listened,

and believed. Now it is too late. I am dying, and I do not want to hear.” And she closed her eyes, as much as to say, “You may as well leave me, my decision is final.”

Horror stricken, I stood as though rooted to the spot. She was so young, so interesting; it seemed too awful to think she was just about to lose this life, and the next too. I could not leave her thus; and when I could speak, I said, “It is never too late to trust Jesus. He says, ‘Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.’ He would not cast you out; He would receive you and take you to Himself. Come and try Him.”

Once more her brow darkened. “You are kind,” she said, “but I do not want to hear: it is too late. I know I am dying. Once it might have been. Not now.”

Nurse K., who had followed me down to the bed, and heard all that passed, looked greatly distressed, and said, “Listen to the words of Jesus, dear. You know you are very ill; turn your thoughts to God.”

“I do not want to hear,” was the only answer, and she turned her head back from us to the wall. The nurse and I looked sorrowfully at each other. I had no resource but to leave, but before I did, I repeated three verses of Scripture, in as clear a tone as I could command:

"The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son cleanseth us from all sin."

"He that believeth on the Son hath life; he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

"Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."

There was no response,—no movement even of a muscle of the face, and sadly I turned away. "She has been like that ever since she came in," Nurse K. said. "I tried to read a hymn to her, but she would not listen. She said always, 'Once it might have been, but now it is too late.'"

Never did I leave a hospital ward so sick at heart. Never had I seen exemplified quite so plainly our enmity by nature to God. Here was one dying, and knowing it, with nothing left on earth, and yet unwilling to have Jesus and His glory.

That fair young face, with its expression of hatred to the Son of God, haunted me. I could not rest for it, and longed to see her again, hoping some ray of light might have entered her soul. But no; twenty-four hours after she had told me so decidedly she did not want to hear Jesus, she was in eternity.

"How did she die?" I asked Nurse K.

“As you saw her,” she said: “she seemed to have no fear of death, but to the last she refused to listen to the Bible, or anything sacred. I never saw the like since I have been a nurse.”

“Once it might have been, once I might have listened and believed. Now it is too late.” The words ring in my ears yet, though months have rolled by since they were uttered by those dying lips.

Once, before then, she had heard of Jesus; once she had been inclined to listen; once she had been near salvation,—near it, but missed it, and missed it for ever.

Has this been your case, my reader? Have you once listened, and almost believed? Have you once been near salvation, but missed it hitherto? If so, may the Lord make this poor girl's case a warning voice from the dead to you, lest the devil tempt you to put off decision for Christ till another day, and lead you, as he did her, on and on towards eternity, blind-folded, and even on the very brink of that awful eternity lull you still, so that no warning cry of danger reach you or rouse you,—lest God leave you alone, and you wake up and find yourself shut out from Him for ever and ever.

“My Spirit shall not always strive.”