

'THE NEST'

CLAPTON

When I began to write this book, I determined to set down all things exactly as I saw or heard them. But, although somewhat hardened in such matters by long experience of a very ugly world, I find that there are limits to what can be told of such a place as 'The Nest' in pages which are meant for perusal by the general public. The house itself is charming, with a good garden adorned by beautiful trees. It has every arrangement and comfort possible for the welfare of its child inmates, including an open-air bedroom, cleverly contrived from an old greenhouse for the use of those among them whose lungs are weakly.

But these inmates, these sixty-two children whose ages varied from about four to about sixteen! What can I say of their histories? Only in general language, that more than one half of them have been subject to outrages too terrible to repeat, often enough at the hands of their own fathers! If the reader wishes to learn more, he can apply confidentially to Commissioner Cox, or to Mrs. Bramwell Booth.

Here, however, is a case that I can mention, as although it is dreadful enough, it belongs to a different class. Seeing a child of ten, whose name was Betty, playing about quite happily with the others, I spoke to her, and afterwards asked for the particulars of her story. They were brief. It appears that this poor little thing had actually seen her father murder her mother. I am glad to be able to add that to all appearance she has recovered from the shock of this awful experience.

Indeed, all these little girls, notwithstanding their hideous pasts, seemed, so far as I could judge, to be extremely happy at their childish games in the garden. Except that some were of stunted growth, I noted nothing abnormal about any of them. I was told, however, by the Officer in charge, that occasionally, when they grow older, propensities originally induced in them through no fault of their own will assert themselves.

To lessen this danger, as in the case of the women inebriates, all these children are brought up as vegetarians. Before me, as I write, is the bill of fare for the week, which I tore off a notice board in the house. The breakfast on three days, to take examples, consists of porridge, with boiling milk and sugar, cocoa, brown and white bread and butter. On the other mornings either stewed figs, prunes, or marmalade are added. A sample dinner consists of lentil savoury, baked potatoes, brown gravy and bread; boiled rice with milk and sugar. For tea, bananas, apples, oranges, nuts, jam, brown and white bread and

butter and cocoa are supplied, but tea itself as a beverage is only given on Sundays. A footnote to the bill of fare states that all children over twelve years of age who wish for it, can have bread and butter before going to bed.

Certainly the inmates of 'The Nest,' if any judgment may be formed from their personal appearance, afford a good argument to the advocates of vegetarianism.

It costs £13 a year to endow a bed in this Institution. Amongst others, I saw one which was labelled 'The Band of Helpers' Bed. This is maintained by girls who have passed through the Institution, and are now earning their livelihood in the world, as I thought, a touching and significant testimony. I should add that the children in this Home are educated under the direction of a certificated governess.

My visit to this Refuge made a deep impression on my mind. No person of sense and experience, remembering the nameless outrages to which many of these poor children have been exposed, could witness their present health and happiness without realizing the blessed nature of this work.