

Memories from a Women's Workhouse

I first entered upon my duties in January, 1856, in the Old Strand Workhouse. Then there was hardly a paid nurse in any workhouse in London, the duties being performed by more or less infirm, drunken, and generally profligate inmates of the House. It was a miracle to find an honest one among them. I would like to tell about the scenes of untold misery which I have witnessed.

5 This place was an utter disgrace. It was a wretched, damp and miserable room, nearly always overcrowded with young mothers and their infant children. That death relieved these young women of their illegitimate offspring was only what was to be expected, and that frequently the mothers followed in the same direction was only too true.

10 I used to dread to go there, it was so depressing. Scores and scores of deaths of both mothers and children could have been prevented hadn't they been located in this horrible den.

Now and then a decent widow with an infant came in, and became an inmate of the Workhouse, there being no other place for her to go to. What her feelings must have been when forced into day and night companionship with some of the most abandoned women in this miserable hell, I will not attempt to portray, and yet the majority of the legislators looked upon this den as a perfect paradise.

15 About some two years after my appointment a woman, extremely ill, was brought from Vine Street Police Station. She was an unfortunate, as it is called, who had been arrested. Repeated requests from her for attendance met with no attention from the police. At last, her condition appearing desperate even to the constables, a doctor was sent for, who directed that she should at once be sent to the Workhouse. She was brought in on a stretcher, and I was summoned to attend her without delay. I found that she was dying, and not
20 a long while afterwards she succumbed. I then made a post mortem, when I found that she had died from the rupture on an aneurism of the abdominal aorta. There is no doubt that this rupture had been precipitated by the violence attending her arrest. At first I complained of this to the inspectors, but it led to no result.

Adapted from Joseph Rogers, *Reminiscences of a Workhouse Medical Officer*, 1887