

**OCCUPATION FOR THE SICK;
OR, PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS
TO INVALIDS, AND THOSE
WHO HAVE THE CARE OF THEM**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649363025

Occupation for the sick; or, Practical suggestions to invalids, and those who have the care of them by Ellice Hopkins

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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ELLICE HOPKINS

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BY
ELLICE HOPKINS,
AUTHOR OF 'CHRIST THE CONSOLER,' 'LIFE AND LETTERS OF JAMES KILTON,'
ETC.

'Occupy till I come.'



LONDON:
HATCHARDS, PICCADILLY.
1879.

151. o. 541.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY STRANGEWAYS AND SONS,
Lower Street, Upper St. Martin's Lane.

OCCUPATION FOR THE SICK.

I.

THOSE who have known what it is to be numbered for long with the sick, who have once broken with them the bread of tears, and drunk of their water of affliction, will never forget that sacred fellowship. However much they may have regained the shining uplands of health, their heart will linger in that low valley where 'the sun' of this world is 'silent,'* but where the Light indeed often spreads eternal day; and sweetest of all sweet service will it be to them if their words can find entrance into some dim curtained room and bring if it be but passing help and strength to some heart well-nigh fainting under its burden, the weight of which only those who have shared it know.

* 'Là dove il sol tace.'—Dante's *Inf.* canto i.

This joy my book for the sick and suffering, 'Christ the Consoler' * has amply brought me,—a book that has proved itself able to comfort even cancer in the face, that ultimatum of human misery. But the form of personal communion with the Redeemer which I chose for the book, feeling that good advice is too often irritating to sick nerves, whilst the language of devotion is always calming and elevating, has this one disadvantage, that it involves only religious consolation being given, whereas there are many practical suggestions which may be useful to the sick, and especially to those who have the care of them, and whose burden in the spectacle of their constant suffering or helplessness is often scarcely less heavy. Perhaps it is one who has come out of sickness and resumed active life who is best fitted to offer these suggestions. Looking back on it as a whole, that dark world 'orbs into the perfect star,' we emphatically 'saw not when we moved therein.' We see its Divine uses; we see that after all it was bright with love; above all, we see where we failed and erred, where we made things so much harder than they need be. If I cannot help you

* *Christ the Consoler; a Book of Comfort for the Sick.* With a Preface by the Bishop of Carlisle. Second edition, price 2s. 6d. London: Longmans.

as our beloved German sister Christine * has helped the sick and the strong alike out of the depths of her faithfulness unto death, her obedience unto pain, I may be able to help you a little by my own failures and shortcomings in a long illness, and by the fruit of hard-earned experience, which cost me a weary climb of years to gain, but which I would fain drop ripe and golden into your lap.

Now the first thing I would say to any whose sickness is likely to last for some months, perhaps for longer, is—accept it as your Father's will for you for the present, trying neither to look back nor to look forward. Do not do as I did, spend seven years in ceaseless and ingenious efforts to get out of it, but spend some of that ingenuity and energy in seeing what you can do in it. Restless trying to get well is the greatest enemy there is to really getting well. There is a verse which became a whole Bible in itself to me; a verse which, if I may use the expression, our Lord worked out for Himself in that narrow, hedged-in village life of Nazareth in which He must have known so many of the trials that come to us in the limitations of sickness, a verse He took as one of

* See *Day of Rest* for July, 1878.

the basic principles of life : 'Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thy heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments or no. And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, that He might make thee to know that man doth not live by bread alone,'—no, not by what seems to you in your sickness like the very bread of life, without which you cannot live,—'but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Most High doth man live,'—the great Father guiding His erring child, day by day, whose true life is in dependence on Him. This sickness is your Father's word to you by the mere fact that it has happened to you. Suppose, if instead of trying to get rid of it, instead of grumbling at it, despairing by it, you were to try *living* by it, believing that your real life is in it, and just taking it, and seeing what you can make out of it. Don't falsify it by making out that your sickness is going to last for ever, and so lose hope ; nor curtail it by making out that you are going to get well immediately, and so encounter the bitterness of hope deferred ; but take it just as it is, His *present* word to you ; and let your chief energy and contrivance go in

laying hold of every little help you can to enable you to know it as a word of life to all that needs strengthening in you, and only a word of death to your self-will, your pride. Only think what men have done with far greater limitations than even yours, when once they have set themselves to make the best out of them; how men shut up through all the best years of life in loathsome dungeons have written memoirs without pen, ink, or paper; what exquisite works of art have been wrought with the rudest, self-made tools; what marvels have been accomplished by the blind and the maimed, from the man whose hands were amputated and who learned to paint excellently with his toes, to Laura Bridgeman, who, with only the sense of touch to connect her with the outer world, learned to speak, love, worship, and be a happy and useful woman. Do you not think that if instead of constantly regretting the lost capabilities of health, and mourning over your broken days, you were to set to work and gather up the fragments that remain, you could, with a little ingenuity, make something out of them; not very much perhaps, but still enough to be a great help to you in your real work of learning obedience to God's will by the things that you suffer?

In looking back, here I feel is one great mistake we