

HUMOURS OF HOSPITAL LIFE.

By DR. A. E. MOORE.

TO the lay mind there would seem to be no connection between the two. There are those to whom the dread of hospital amounts to an obsession. They are principally those who have never entered one as a patient. Yet a doctor or a nurse bereft of a sense of humour is bereft of a saving grace. There was a picture in *Punch* a little while ago which illustrates my meaning. A picture book nurse and a sister who might have stood for a "picture of Magdalen Graeme in 'The Abbot'" were in the foreground. The face of the one was laughing and dimpled, the face of the other stern and sour. The following had just taken place between the nurse and a wounded "Tommy."

"Nurse, who put the butter on this bread? The Sister—"I did." A pause, as the "Tommy" catches the eye of the Sister. After a moment "Well, then, who took it off?"

Whether one has the gift of humour or not, there are incidents in hospital life that cannot fail to appeal even to those who take their profession most seriously. Often even the most tragic will yield a sense of comedy.

I was House Surgeon in a hospital in the East End of London and on one occasion I was called from my bed, by the clamour of a crowd outside my windows. Arriving at the O. P. I saw a poor woman brought in on an improvised stretcher. A glance showed that the woman was beyond mortal aid. She had fallen from a second story window, having that day been released from an asylum. The majority of the crowd had been kept out by the porter, but one half drunken sailor had made his way into the hospital. I had made my examination and was returning to bed, when he lurched up to me and placed his hand on my shoulder.

"Jes! one moment guv'nor—won't keep yer" punctuating his words with his pipe stem on my coat, there's one thing I would like you to inform me."

"Yes, said I, 'what's that?'"

"Will you please tell me if this female is extinct?"

It is marvellous how much what might be called "inside knowledge" is picked up by confirmed infirmary and hospital patients.

A dishevelled looking tramp came along one day with a pain. Questioned as to its whereabouts he informed the R. R. O. that it was in his pancreas! I once witnessed an excellent example of domestic felicity among the submerged tenth. A boy came out into the O. P. at about 12 p. m. He had a nasty jagged cut across his face.

"Why my boy, how did this happen?" I asked. "Muvver done it" was the reply.

"Mother!" I exclaimed.

"Yus sir. Yer see it bein' Sat'dy night she'd bin in 'avin' a blow out an wen farver come in, she chucked a bottle at im. 'E ducked, an' it 'it me.'"

A man had come in during this conversation with his ear hanging by not much more than a shred. He heard the boy's last words and continued the conversation.

"Quite right guvner, that's 'er. I'm 'er 'usband, she done this too!"

The cheerfulness with which many of the poorest regard their ailments is exemplified by a coster girl, who met the enquiry of the O. P. sister with these words. "Broke me collar bone, me angel."

A boy came into my consulting room on one occasion and placing his hands behind his back as though to repeat a lesson, looked me in the face and said "Mumps."

There wasn't a sign of mumps so that I was somewhat astonished. I informed him that after due consideration I felt that his diagnosis was lacking confirmation. Nothing deterred, he continued his lesson. "Muvver says I got mumps at the back a me 'ed 'an one's broke"! There is a large Jewish community in the East End of London, and a man whose practice is situated there must be a man of parts. Among other things he has to learn that the Semitic races love the superlative, and the Oriental imagination will endow trivial symptoms with alarming importance.

A stout Jewish lady came in one day with a most woe-begone air. Sitting down heavily in the chair she composed herself comfortably to discuss her case with me. I occasionally managed to introduce a monosyllable.

"Oh doctare, doctare, I have ze, painz like ze raw meat," she began "My hands hang down like stones, and ze head feels like ze drunk." Three diagnoses entered my head.

"My feet are shockin' bad, doctare"—"shocking" is a favourite expression "and I can't sleep at nights for ze corf and zechist painz." Two more diagnoses and some mystification.

"And doctare, ze appetite is not," broke in a friend, nodding at the afflicted one as though to say "I'll help you, poor dear," and, "she has the shocking painz."

Here was a case in which according to the evidence, very few of the organs of the body were otherwise than in a very serious condition, a conclusion somewhat modified by the robust appearance of the patient.

At last the problem was solved. "Ze last doctare gave me of cod liver oil and malt and cured me right" said she hopefully, no doubt affected by the despair written on my face.

"Were you as bad as this? I asked.

"Oh yes" was the reply "worsen."

One more story will serve to illustrate the mystification of patients coming for the first time into a large Out Patient Department.

A little bent old lady was seen wandering to and fro glancing anxiously up at the boards bearing the name of the various surgeons and physicians in attendance. Noticing her anxiety a R. R. Officer went up and asked whom she sought. Looking up at him with frightened eyes she said timidly "Sir, I should be so glad if you will tell me where you sit for tumours"!