



CHAPTER IV

A Ray of Hope

THE first few months of 1889 found Mrs. Booth better, so far as her general health was concerned, than at any time during the previous year. This improvement she attributed to the use of Mattei remedies. The progress of the malady itself was, however, only too certain and too obvious. The medical advisers, in January, intimated that it was extremely improbable that the dear patient would live to the end of the year, and in view of this and her own wish on the subject it was decided that Mrs. Booth-Tucker, who was now in India, should return to England. She came, leaving the Commissioner behind, early in May, and remained till the end of our beloved mother's illness, her constant companion and friend.

It was in this spring that Mrs. Booth's arm began to be seriously involved. The pain and swelling gradually extended to the glands, running into the armpit and thence along the tendons and nerves of the shoulder as well as of the arm itself. From this time she could do little writing, for although she learnt to write quite legibly with her left hand it was always a slow and burdensome process. The pain was gradually increasing, though compared with what was to come it was still but trifling. The steady progress of fever, and the loss of flesh which now began to be manifest, were also symptoms indicating, only too well, the advancing inroads of the disease.

In April, attention was called in the 'British Medical Journal' to a new method of treating cancer. The Founder had already had put before him some hundreds of different curatives, all claiming to be successful. Mrs. Booth was deeply anxious that her case, even if it was itself a hopeless one, might be the means of obtaining some new light on the treatment of the malady, and no effort was spared, either in this or other countries, to discover any authenticated cure. Among all the suggestions made, none, alas! seemed able to stand the test of personal inquiry and investigation which, by our Officers and friends in various parts of the world, we were able to bring to bear upon it. The Mattei system approached nearer than any other to the conditions which had been laid down, but even here the cases of alleged cure were very few, and were, from one cause or another not necessary now to enter into, of an unsatisfactory type. Still, these medicines and treatment, in her own opinion, did help Mrs. Booth, and were the only things that



did.

The method of electrical treatment described, however, in the medical journal referred to, had without doubt some well-accredited and remarkable cases of apparent and, for all that is even now known, of actual cure to recommend it. Some eight or ten were examined individually, and seemed satisfactory. With regard to several of them, there was undoubted evidence of the existence of cancer. Eminent physicians had so pronounced, and those who conducted the investigations were sufficiently convinced of the importance of the treatment to strongly recommend it to the Founder's attention. At first Mrs. Booth was very nervous about it. Any sort of operation, even the comparatively simple method adopted in this case, was to her objectionable. She consented, however, to meet the physician best able to advise in the matter. The interview impressed her favourably, and, after much deliberation and prayer, she decided to submit to be operated upon. The operation took place on May 7, 1889, and was followed, largely owing to the effect of the anaesthetic upon Mrs. Booth, by a fortnight of the most dreadful exhaustion and suffering. At the expiration of that time, the doctors, who expressed themselves as fairly satisfied with the result of the treatment so far, strongly urged a further application of the electricity, which, it may be interesting to state here, was applied in what is called an interrupted current, of very high power, by the insertion of needles under the skin.

A third operation took place at Barnet, where the Founder was then living, on June 25th. Mrs. Booth was quite prostrate, but in the course of two or three weeks the immediate effects of the shock passed away, and for a time it seemed probable that if the cancer itself was not destroyed, its growth was, at any rate, arrested.

The dear patient's calmness and nerve at this time were an amazement to every one who knew anything at all of what she was passing through. The operating physician – a man of wide experience and practice – spoke with feeling of the impression made upon him when Mrs. Booth said, just before the first operation, 'Well, doctor, if you fail with me I shall not be altogether disappointed if you are only successful in obtaining some information which will help you to relieve the sufferings of others.' In the weary days of awful depression that followed the operations she was wonderfully comforted by the presence of Mrs. Booth-Tucker, who had just



arrived from India, and was no doubt cheered by the hope – only, alas! too soon to be destroyed – that she might after all return to the fight she loved so well.

About the middle of July there was a change for the worse, and at the time of the London Anniversary gathering of that year, at the Alexandra Palace, it became lamentably apparent that the electrical operations had failed.