

Captain Coram's Kind Idea



Thomas Coram was a sea captain. He had not had much time in school when he was young. He did not speak with a very polite voice because he was a rough sailor but he knew what was right and he stuck to it. He may not have spent long in school but he worked hard as a sea captain. He earned quite a lot of money. He decided to put it to good use. The idea he had needed a great deal of money, more than he could find on his own. So, at the age of 70 he went walking round London. He called at all the grand houses where rich people lived and told the people about his idea. Often he walked twelve miles in a day doing this. He asked the rich people to help him by giving money to pay for his idea.

And what was that idea? It was to make a home for children who had been left on the streets to die as babies. How sad! God sees these things. He sent Captain Coram to help.

At first it was hard to get people to give any money. Then the Queen heard about it. Her name was Queen Caroline and she was a kind lady. When the Queen gave some money all the rich ladies wanted to give some too. Then a great lady called the Duchess of Somerset gave some money. She was a writer. Everyone wanted to do what she was doing!

Captain Coram could not speak very well but that did not stop him. He did not worry that people would make fun of his plain way of speaking. He sent petitions to the king. Do you know what a petition is? It is a letter asking for something to be done. At the bottom of the letter is a long list of the names of the people who want the thing done. You know what Captain Coram wanted the King to do! He got all sorts of important people to put their names at the bottom of his petition. Some were great lords. Some were judges, some owned lands and grand houses, some were rich merchants. They did not mind that Captain Coram was only a sailor. They thought his idea was a good one.

The king thought about the petition. He signed a royal charter for the "Education and Maintenance of Exposed and Deserted Young Children." That means he wanted Captain Coram's idea to go ahead. There should be a place where the poor babies

could have a home.

The home was going to be called the Foundling Hospital. Did you think a hospital was a place to go to if you are ill? That is only one kind of hospital. Another kind of hospital is a place where you go if you need to be looked after and have help. That was the kind of hospital that the Foundling Hospital would be. What is a foundling? A foundling is a poor baby found in the street with no one to care for it.

One hundred and seventy important men were chosen to be in charge of the Foundling Hospital. The Duke of Bedford was the president. All these important men could not look after babies could they? No! But they took care of the money that was given. They chose people to take care of the children.

Now the poor mothers brought their babies to the Foundling Hospital. They often pinned a tiny thing such as a button or ribbon to the baby's clothes. Perhaps they might earn some money. Perhaps even enough to take care of the child. The button or ribbon would prove the baby was theirs. They could go to the Foundling hospital and get the child back again.

The babies were sent to live in the country at first with foster mothers to take care of them. Then they came back to the Foundling Hospital for their education. The girls became servants when they were old enough. The boys were sent to learn a trade.



Do you remember Handel¹ who wrote beautiful music and Hogarth² the artist? They gave to the hospital. Handel gave concerts where his *Messiah*³ was played in aid of the hospital. Hogarth gave paintings and money.

Captain Coram was no longer rich. That did not matter. He had done what was right. He was happy.

1 We enjoyed some of his music in the lessons for 23rd March and 10th October.

2 See the lesson for October 26th.

3 See the Lesson for March 23rd.