

drive, a door was thrown open, and a flood of light streamed out upon us, while bright voices welcomed us with Christmas greetings, even before the carriage door was opened.

After kind hands had helped us off with our cloaks, a bright-looking Sister led the way into a lofty hall, at sight of which an involuntary exclamation of surprise escaped me, for at the further end stood two giant Christmas trees, reaching from floor to ceiling—the one bowed down by what appeared to be fresh fallen snow and clinging icicles, and surmounted by a sparkling silver star; the other blossoming in lilies and roses. Some Sisters were busily engaged in giving the finishing touches to the arrangement of the presents. It had taken a long time to arrange everything, but now it was nearly done, and the long tables looked gay and pretty; the rosy-cheeked apples, that, with the inevitable ginger-bread and nuts, are as indispensable to a German's Christmas as plum-pudding is to an English one, coming in harmoniously in the foreground on rows of soup plates.

At last the directing Sister heaved a sigh of content, folded her hands, and gazed around her well satisfied. Then she turned to the assisting Sisters, who were still giving lingering finishing touches here and there, and said, "It is done! There is nothing that could be better than it is. Now, let us get those patients in who cannot walk, before we ring the bell. You visitors, please stand beside the trees; you cannot help us any more just now; but, mind, we expect you to join in the singing with all your heart."

After that, for a time, came rumbling of wheels from the corridors at the other end of the hall, and slowly, painfully, the vanguard of those for whom all the preparations had been made were piloted into the hall. The next minute my friend was hurrying across the room to where a bright-looking old lady in a wheel-chair was sitting. By the way in which they shook hands, smiled and welcomed each other, I could see that they were old acquaintances.

The old lady was the mother of Sister M., of the Henriettenstift, and had come here to spend the last years of her life. Though hopelessly invalided and nearly eighty, she was one of the brightest, most beautiful old women I ever remember seeing, and a universal favourite with everybody. There was barely time for my friend to add more than a cheery nod and smile here and there, to one or the other of the patients she knew, before Sister M. had seized a little bell and was ringing it with all her might. The pastor had meanwhile taken his stand on the little platform between the trees.

The hall began to fill rapidly, and there was a confused sound of excited voices and shuffling

feet, intermingled with the *thud* of crutches; and in a short time all the "children of the house" were assembled in the hall. I had expected to see a maimed and sad company of wretched looking women, and was agreeably surprised to notice that many young faces looked out brightly from the crowd, and that most of the old and very ill wore a look of peace. There was only one really cross-looking old person, and she turned out to be a "first-class" paying patient, whose life was made a burden to her, mainly through the conviction that for her £50 a year she was not getting all she should.

A few minutes were spent by the Sisters in settling all their patients comfortably, and another in soothing the old grumbler, who would remark, at the top of her voice, that "*she* didn't want to be dragged out to be made an exhibition of. She didn't want anyone's charity. No, thank heavens; she could spare for others!"

At which Sister M. at once offered to wheel her back into her room; adding, she had had her choice about leaving it—and there was peace.

And then the beautiful hymn was sung that always rings out when the German Christmas tree is lighted, and hearts are softened with thoughts of charity and goodwill. "O du fröhliche, O du selige, gnadenbringende Weinachtszeit." (Oh, thou happy, oh, thou holy, blessed Christmastide!) Many voices joined in, and we outsiders, too, sang the dear old carol.

There was a singular pathos in hearing words of rejoicing sung by those who had "no hope for this life," and yet the heartiness with which the patients joined in showed that Christmas had brought to them also its message of gladness, and proved that the influence of their "home life" in Bethesda was a salutary one.

When the oft-repeated chorus, "Rejoice, rejoice, all Christendom," had died away for the last time, the pastor began his simple address. He did not keep his listeners long, or tell them anything new; but he reminded them gently of what they had surely often been told—that it was to celebrate the triumph of unselfish love, of love that passeth all understanding, that we celebrate Christmas, and that we who, as disciples of such selfless love, strive weakly and imperfectly to bear one another's burdens in the daily run of life, should not forget to share one another's joys. He then spoke of the perfect joy and peace that no earthly circumstances could take away; and concluded by begging all to strive to brighten this festival for each other, and to accept the little gifts provided, in the spirit that loving hearts had planned and loving hands prepared them, as symbols of the universal goodwill the angels hailed on Christmas Day.

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