

After a prayer another song was sung, and then there was a short pause. A murmur of expectation ran through the crowd, and all eyes were fixed on the tables, at which the Sisters were busy.

The silence was strangely broken by a loud laugh, and out from the group of patients darted a woman, tall, thin, and about thirty-five years of age. She ran up to one of the Sisters, and throwing her arms round her, exclaimed, "Soll ich nicht eine Puppe haben?" ("Am I to have a doll?") Her eyes were dancing with gladness as she spoke.

I did not hear the Sister's answer, for one of the visitors close to me whispered to another, "That is the baby of the house. That poor woman is perfectly well and strong—she may live for many years; but mentally she will always be five years old."

"How shocking!" was the answer.

"Not at all. She is a very happy child, full of freaks at times, but never malicious, very affectionate, and a very great pet with the patients."

"I thought lunatics were not admitted."

"They are not, as a rule, but, in this case, exception was made. This sweet-tempered woman-child was once a very prepossessing little girl, pretty, healthy, and lively. At five years of age she met with some accident (I forget what it was), and only recovered after a severe illness. In time, her strength came back. She played with other children; she delighted everybody by her pretty ways; and no one guessed there was anything wrong, until, at six years old, she went to school. Even then, everyone thought that her incapability to learn would pass; but, as years passed on, and she grew towards womanhood, her baby ways remained. The loving heart, the well-formed limbs, were untouched by disease, but neither kindness nor harshness could form her mind. The village people among whom she lived could not at all understand her, and she suffered greatly—suffered as a tiny child would suffer who is beset by teasing peasant boys, whose games are rudely interrupted, who is set to do impossible tasks, and punished for not performing them. The Sisters think she would have died had they not found her, and adopted her as their child."

"Of course she is happy here?"

"Of course; they even fancy she has improved; but I believe that is only fancy. She will be five years old till she dies."

"She has not at all the appearance of an idiot?"

"No; she is rather agreeable-looking. I was speaking about her to Sister D. the other day, and said something about the sadness of such a case."

"Well?"

"Sister D. quoted from the eighteenth chapter of St. Matthew, and the subject dropped."

While this conversation had been going on, some of the gifts had been distributed. Not one seemed to be given without some kind remark, and considerable trouble had evidently been taken to meet the tastes of the patients.

"There, Frau Heinze!" I overheard, "you are always fond of sweets. I think these will last you some time; only don't forget we like them too."

Frau Heinze was evidently one of those people who are always happiest when they have something to distribute. Her face beamed. (It was a nice healthy-looking face, not at all like an invalid's, though her wheel-chair proved her one.) She immediately opened the box, and held it out to the bright young Sister before her, who stayed to take two sweets before she passed on, remarking as she did so, "I shall visit you often, Frau Heinze, while your box lasts." Frau Heinze sat laughing at the poor little joke for a long time, passing it and her sweet-box round to all the patients within reach.

Another woman had some wools presented to her in a pretty basket, some remark being made about the Christ-child having remembered her fondness for knitting. A third received the bound volume of an illustrated paper, and by the way she at once opened it and began to study its contents, no doubt was left as to her taste.

One had only to look around to be assured that kindly forethought had been expended, and tact had governed the distribution of the gifts, and that the way in which they were given made them doubly welcome. There were few dull faces in the hall, and many happy ones, but the happiest of all was decidedly the "five-year-old," who was dancing around with a big china doll, hugging it to her breast, carrying it around to show to her friends, kissing it, and then coming back to kiss Sister A. once more for giving it to her.

At last the distribution was over. There was a short pause, during which friendly conversation between the Sisters, visitors, and patients went on; then two verses of a merry Christmas song were sung, and after that most of the patients retired. A few remained to join the Sisters at a grand tea, laid out on the same long tables that a short time ago had borne the presents.

How quietly cheerful that festive tea-table was, with its piles of thin-cut black bread, and crisp little milk breads, its homely tea (very weak for English taste), and the generous dishes of raw and smoked ham, sausages and sliced boiled eggs, followed immediately by a huge starch pudding, flavoured with raspberry syrup.

The Sister, whose mother was a patient in Bethesda, seemed to forget herself altogether in

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