



## Our Foreign Letter.

### A HOME FOR DELICATE CHILDREN.

"YES, this is their *home*," said the "Mother," "and we all of us form one great family."

We were standing with the Matron (or Mother, as she is called) in the big play-court of the "Children's Home" in Herrenhausen (Province of Hanover), watching a small convalescent from hip-disease foraging all by himself in an outhouse.

He found his treasure—a small cigar-box—and limped triumphantly past us, hugging it to his bosom, just raising a pinched, clever face to smile up at "Mother" before he entered the house. That look of confidence and the silent smile of a child that is satisfied formed an unconscious eulogy that was more expressive than the most ecstatic speech would have been.

"Poor little lad," said Mother, "he has been dreadfully ill for a long time, and has lain for months in the children's hospital. Now he is better. I am afraid he will always limp, but he gets along quite nicely."

"He is here to recover?"

"Yes, and I hope he will stay here until he is fairly strong."

"How long will that be?"

"I do not know. We would like to keep him for some time yet. Some children live with us for years. Very often their recovery would not be permanent if they were with their families. Here they have fresh air and plenty of food, and whatever else may be necessary. Besides that, we try to make them feel that they are *at home*—not in an Institution."

We had sufficient opportunity of noticing the healthy spirit of mutual sympathy and well-directed liberty this feeling evoked. While neatness and cleanliness reign throughout the house, there is a total absence of formality. The children are evidently on terms of good-fellowship with authorities who know how to make obedience a pleasure. There are never more than forty children in the family circle, although the size of the house would admit of many more. A greater number would make the present system impossible; thirty to thirty-five is the average number received, and among these delicate little beings "Mother," "Auntie," and "Teacher" are the guiding spirits, carrying out the plan of unity and confidence to the best of their ability.

Even on arriving, the pretty red-brick house, lying among green shrubberies and flowers, gives the impression of a private dwelling, which is enhanced by sounds of merry laughter and baby chatter coming through the open window.

"Whoso shall receive one such little child in my

name receiveth Me." These words form the inscription hewn in grey stone over the portal.

A bright maid answered our ring, and a minute afterwards we were shaking hands with the "Mother," a lady whose energy and devotion are only equalled by her kindness.

We found the smaller children assembled in two big nurseries, with large, curtainless windows looking out upon pleasant gardens and a cheerful playground. The inmates were all contentedly occupied in various ways. Some were manufacturing chains of small sections of straw and squares of paper—a labour quite as fascinating and certainly safer than stringing glass beads. None of the workmen were more than four, but they all took their work very seriously, as became children of a hard-working nation. They appreciated our interest, and held up or pointed out their special chains with much energy, and "Mine" pronounced with solemn pride of ownership.

A somewhat older infant appeared to act as superintendent of the works and purveyor of the raw material. She was so engrossed with the importance of this office that she scarcely raised her eyes to glance at the visitors.

Other children were amusing themselves in an adjacent room round a circular "walking-school," a kind of infant circus, that made it possible for the babies to learn to use their feet without fear of falling by placing their hands on balustrades just high enough for their convenience as they moved round.

Shrieks of laughter sounded from this popular centre of amusement, where Hans (who had not seen the seasons go round twice) was toddling after Fritz, a somewhat older, but far more puny boy. Hans was trying to catch Fritz, and the crowd of spectators were participating in this excitement. A gentle teacher kept guard. Presently, when Fritz had caught Hans, and Hans Fritz twice, she decided that both had better rest, and lifted the two champions on to a small oasis in the centre of their race-course, where there was a seat and a lilliputian table and toys, whence they could watch their companions move round them hand in hand, singing pretty tunes with their teacher, and illustrating some of the songs by actions—on the kindergarten system.

More than in all the other more or less typical children, I was interested in a beautiful girl of three, with perfect features and form, black eyes, and masses of golden curls. Added to these unusual charms she owned the grand name of Margarita, and had no worse ailment than general debility after some childish ailment, from which she was rapidly recovering. But Margarita was an unsociable, silent, and independent child. She held aloof from her playmates, and seemed happy alone. I was much amused on observing the calm energy with which she contrived to get her own way with the authorities.

"Each child you see here," said the Matron, "has a history. If I had time to write I could write books about them. Some of the life-stories of these poor little things are inexpressibly sad."

"Where do they generally come from?"

"Some are convalescents from hospital, others have had sickness at home, or are merely delicate and neglected. Some come for weeks during their holidays to recruit, and others remain here for years. We have one boy here whose father is in prison, and two others who have just gone to Salam (the home for incurables at Kirchrode) to say goodbye to their dying

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