

A Christmas Appeal for the Hospitals.

I WAS sitting by the fire idly watching the burning embers, and ruminating upon the pleasures in store for me during the coming Christmas season. Suddenly I heard confused murmuring sounds round me, and instinctively turning my head, I saw a form appearing, which seemed without substance and as of vapour. A voice issuing from the shape said, "I am the spirit of the dawning Christmas; come with me." I followed; silently, rapidly we sped along streets quiet and deserted as though touched with the silence of death. The spirit halted, and, taking my hand, we entered a room. A child was lying sick almost unto death upon a bed of straw on the floor. The mother, a poor half-starved creature, was bravely striving to hold back the tears, for her little boy's sake. Everything bespoke abject misery and poverty. There was neither warmth nor food. My heart contracted with pain and pity for them in their helpless suffering—sufferings which we in our comfortable homes little dream of. My guide motioned me to speak.

"Tell me, my poor woman," I said, "has your child been long ill?"

"For weeks, sir," she replied; "he used to sell evening papers, sir, and one night he came home all a shivering, and wet to the skin, and the next morning he was still all shaking, and his head aching so as he couldn't get up."

"But," I said, "Why do you not take him to the Hospital?"

"Ah, sir, I did try, and so did the Nurse who sometimes comes here, but the Hospital people said, 'We have no room, beds are all full.' Nurse said, sir, as how they have a wing (I think she called it) which would hold a lot more patients, only the Hospital people can't take the sick ones in, because they haven't enough money to open it. When I am sitting quiet like, sir, watching Johnnie, I think and think of all the things I would do if I was rich; how I should try and not let Hospitals have empty wings through want of money to open them." Musingly, she continued, "And if I could not do it all by myself, I would beg and entreat of other rich people to help." Suddenly, as with a touch of excitement, she exclaimed, "Don't you think, sir, that the reason why rich people allow Hospitals to have empty wings is because they don't think things out enough, and not because they are selfish? It is so hard, I suppose, to understand want and misery unless in the midst of it."

I glanced at little Johnnie, and thought how much better and happier he would be were he in a comfortable bed in a Hospital. Poor child, his little life was ebbing away for the want of nourishment, and the skilled care he would receive were he in a Hospital. The searching gaze of my silent guide seemed to scorch and wither me up. In low cadence came voices from all parts of the room saying, "You dream of pleasures which are transient, when misery and want hold out their skeleton hands for help; you live for self, and think not of the suffering ones—You." "Mercy," I cried, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The voices replied, "You are, for God holds all people responsible, according to the extent of their worldly means, in aiding the less fortunate." I sank, overcome with shame and remorse, as the thoughts of my past unthinking selfishness crowded upon my mind.

With a start I awoke to find my fire burnt out. The picture of wretchedness I had witnessed in my dream so impressed me that at once I went to my desk and wrote out a cheque and forwarded it to "the Hospital people," whom I knew were greatly in need of something more than whisperings of sympathy.

L. WADDINGTON.

A Christmas Dinner.

CHRISTMAS, and Christmas in the tropics, with the thermometer between 90° and 100°, the atmosphere most oppressive, and the mosquitoes poisonous. But we had made up our minds we would have a real Christmas dinner, and had invited one or two friends to share it. We were happy in having an excellent Goanese cook, and I had no misgivings as to the quality of the dinner he would send up. I had a plum pudding from England, and more, some real holly with which to decorate it. Cook assured me that he understood how the pudding should be served, and he had already been successful in making some mince pies, so my mind was at rest.

It was my first Christmas abroad. I had made cook happy with a Christmas-box that morning, and in the innocence of my heart anticipated that his gratitude would take the form of a more excellent dinner than usual that night. Four o'clock is the time when the cook usually returns to prepare the evening meal. He did not arrive, however, neither did it occur to the kitchen boys as advisable to mention the fact until 5.30. What *was* to be done? No one of course knew where he lived, so it was impossible to send and inquire whether his presence was urgently required at the funeral of one of the fathers, or mothers, or grandparents whose sudden and unexpected demise is usually the reason assigned for these absences by their sorrowing relatives. At first one feels sympathetic, but when this mortality goes on until about half-a-dozen of each have died, one hardens one's heart, and says in effect with Mrs. Gamp: "I don't believe there never was no such a person." Cook smiles benignly, but seems nevertheless injured that his veracity is impeached; still if one is very stern, perhaps a month elapses without any casualty in his family, when the same thing is sure to begin again. Somehow I had not taken into my calculation of possible contingencies the death of a relative that night, and it certainly was most inopportune and inconvenient. I could only hope against hope that cook might yet appear. Six o'clock came, and still there was no sign of him, and dinner was at seven. The *Nurses'* dinner—that is to say, the patients' meal—was earlier, and cooked by another person, so that was satisfactorily over. It was time to take some extreme measures. The chickens we were to have had were probably still running about the hut which served as a kitchen, and nothing else could at that time be procured. Finally the kitchen boys were commissioned to cook the potatoes, make the curry, and boil the pudding, and we set about opening tins of soup, and Cambridge sausages, which the store cupboard produced, and cooking them in the ward kitchen. If only I had not invited guests to share our Christmas fare! However, there was nothing for it but to make the best of the situation. We sat down to dinner at seven o'clock.

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