

PRIZE ESSAY COMPETITION.—XIV.

BY MISS N. WINTER, M.B.N.A.

CHRISTMAS is drawing near, and the most suitable reading is real events that one has experienced in a Hospital. Christmas Day in a Hospital, what is it? Some think of it with dread, and hope they may never be in such a place at such a time; but I am sure many can look back (although they were ill) and feel it was a much happier time than if they had been in their poor homes, where often they are unable to get enough to eat.

It depends what pleasure is provided for them. The patients are often heard to say a few days before Christmas, "Oh, this does not seem like Christmas time." But when the Nurses begin to bring in a little evergreen or holly, and other little decorations, to brighten and make their wards look pretty, then they think it is a little different to other days, and the old as well as the young begin to wonder what will be the next thing.

When there are only one or two children, the Nurse may get them to hang their stockings up to see if anything gets in before morning. A little boy once could not go to sleep, wanting so much to see what, and who, would put anything in; and in the morning his delight was great to find his stocking, which he put up empty, was then quite full.

On Christmas Eve the Nurse has trouble sometimes to hide under each pillow a *letter*; she does not wish the patients to see them, as the giver wished them to be a surprise. It often happens that one patient in a Ward has very little sleep or does not go to sleep till early morning; she may see Nurse slip something, not knowing what, under her pillow. As soon as it is light enough or the gas happens to be turned up, she tries to find what Nurse has put there. She finds an envelope, with "A Christmas letter for you" on the outside. Perhaps that one has never before had a letter in her life; often is it the case, that the patient opens it and inside she finds a letter and a Christmas card. Although it is a printed letter it gives pleasure, and only those in Hospital work Christmas after Christmas can tell with what delight the sufferers welcome Nurse in the morning by telling her of their letters. That one soon tells her fellow-patients, and they each in turn look, but do not always expect all will have one. After breakfast there are generally some Christmas cards to be given round, sent from some lady; sometimes each patient I have known to have as many as five Christmas cards. Even the food on Christmas Day is different to other days; instead of milk puddings

they have plum puddings and roast beef, unless they are too ill; then there is generally an orange each for them. At tea time, instead of bread and butter only, there is cake as a treat for them; mince pies are not always given, and if they are not it is because too many extras in one day would not be suitable; that is often given as another treat a day or two after.

The evening is generally the time for the greatest pleasure—for instance, in the way of a Christmas-tree; and it is nice to see as many as possible collected together in a Ward or large room, with a big tree loaded with gifts. On entering, those that can walk (and many carried) see a room lighted with lanterns, and such a tree and sight they have never seen before. It makes them wonder if there is really anything for them, and makes them forget for a little while their pains, and their dread of spending Christmas Day in a Hospital. It looks more like "Fairyland." Those who are unable to leave their beds are the ones that Nurse thinks of first. If any gifts are given before the tree is touched, the absent ones must have theirs, while the others can sit and gaze on the tree—there are generally crackers or oranges to take to them. Then each one in turn has some warm, useful gift. The pleasure it gives them quite repays any trouble the tree may have given to prepare. Many have often said after, they had *never* had a single present on that day before. Their bundles or packets are so done up that they cannot see what they have; but none are long in opening them, some to find shirts, stockings, cuffs, scarves, and shawls, and often a little gift handed after in the way of a framed text, or book, or toys for the children, to remind them in after years of the Hospital they were taken to, for the care and attention which they are unable to give themselves. All these little pleasures make them quite forget where they are, and many have said they shall ever remember Christmas Day in our Hospital. The men have the treat of smoking in the Wards by the fire on that day, which to them seems as much pleasure as anything else. A little packet of tobacco is often given to them with other things.

The children say sometimes, "May I come here again next Christmas?" And it is nice to feel, although patients are away for the next year, they often remember those that may be in their place, by sending a pair of cuffs or scarf they have made. A boy who was a patient for many months, and had to remain in bed, was taught to knit. Last year, after being home about three months, and knowing there would be a Christmas-tree, he made a pair of cuffs and sent. These little acts show how much they think. f

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