

MRS. 'ARRIS IN 'OSPITAL ON CHRISTMAS DAY.

She lay in her spotless bed in the Accident Ward, the first time in her life she had been really clean since the nurse in the Poor Law Maternity Ward had washed her about fifty years ago with yellow soap, and dressed her in unattractive unbleached cotton with a blue stripe (*nous avons changé tout cela*).

Of course, she was unable to recall those circumstances, but here she was once more clean as soap and water could make her, and she didn't much like it. One side of her large red face was black and blue, and her arm on the same side was disabled in her splint, but she regarded her serviceable hand with interest and some amusement.

"They can't 'alf wash yer in these 'ere plices," she cogitated; "'ood 'ave thought my 'and could 'ave looked like that—like a blooming lidy's!"

She suddenly began to laugh silently, and its effect was that of a huge blanc mange shuddering beneath the clothes.

She had a fine sense of humour, had Mrs. 'Arris. Having thus enjoyed her private joke, she upheaved her person, which threatened to altogether annihilate the bed, and took a survey of her new surroundings.

As it chanced to be Christmas Eve, the scene was more than usually busy. Nurses flitted hither and thither, combining in a surprising manner their ordinary duties with festive preparations.

Already Japanese lanterns hung suspended from every available place, and behind a screen at the end of the ward mysterious things were going on, the nature of which could be guessed at by the slender top of a fir tree that vainly endeavoured to bear itself gallantly under the weight of a beauteous fairy who, after all, was not supposed to be composed of matter, and should have weighed nothing at all.

Contrary to all aseptic regulations, there was a motto upon the wall opposite Mrs. 'Arris' bed, which she spelt laboriously out. She prided herself on being something of a "scholar."

"'Ealth and 'Appiness to Hall."

"They don't give yer nuffin' to drink it in seemingly," she chuckled, and once more reverted to the blanc mange type.

A pro. passing her bed at that moment, Mrs. 'Arris hailed her in her most polite tones:

"I say, Miss Watcher call!"

The pro. newly imported looked uncertainly at the new patient and hurried up the ward behind the mysterious screen to inform Sister that that new patient in fourteen bed was at last awake and calling out.

Down went the wire and scissors, and down went Sister with her quick light step to Mrs. 'Arris' bed.

"Well, now, Mrs. Fourteen," she said, "you are awake at last."

"I'll thank you not to miscall me; my name is 'Arris."

Sister good-humouredly informed her that it was the custom to address patients by their numbers.

"Same as wot they do in quod! Don't seem to me the thing somehow. Anyway, are you the boss 'ere?"

"Well, yes, I suppose I am," said Sister, with a smile that caused pretty dimples to show in her cheeks.

"I should say as you're too young for the job, my dear; it don't seem decent to me for a young woman, somehow. But wot I were going to arst is: 'Ow I come 'ere, and wot abart my ole man.'"

"Well, Mrs. Four—, you were brought in early this morning by the—well, by an officer."

"Pleece orficer?"

"Yes."

"Why don't yer sy so then?"

"I am afraid that you and Mr. Harris must have had some difference, and well—you got the worst of it."

"My 'ole man's orl right, he is. A better 'usband couldn't be 'cept when 'es 'ad a drop; and I reckerleck now as last night being Christmas you understand, he suttinly was the worse!"

Mrs. 'Arris spoke without resentment as one who accepts a bruised face and broken arm as seasonable to the time of year.

"What I wants to know," she continued, "is when can I see Mr. 'Arris? 'E'll be hanxious, I can assure you."

"Now listen, Mrs. Four— Harris. Tomorrow, you know, is Christmas Day, and in the afternoon after the service we have a tea party, and each patient can ask two friends. Is there anyone else but Mr. Harris you would like to ask?"

"My lawful 'usband is all I want," returned Mrs. Harris, with lofty virtue.

The moment the nurses awoke the ward with carols, and each moment of that memorable day Mrs. 'Arris thoroughly enjoyed herself; the tragic happenings of the past forty-eight hours seemed to have been completely forgotten.

She was the success of the ward.

How she laughed at the contents of her stocking, which Staff Nurse Kate herself assisted her to investigate and danced the toy monkey on her bed, and finally surmounted her bruised countenance and straggly hair with a fool's cap.

Turkey for dinner! Well she was blowed if ever she thought she'd live to taste that; it would have been improved if she could 'ave had a drop of porter with it; but, never mind, they done their best.

Plum pudding—she reckoned it was a bit different to what she made one year when she 'ad the kids little.

Then followed the short service with the Christmas hymns, and the Chaplain told again in simple language the compelling story of the Blessed Maid with the Divine Babe.

Mrs. 'Arris cried at that. She reckoned it was a shime not to 'ave found a bed for Him in the Inn. She reckoned as 'ow she'd a fixed up *some think*.

Can it be doubted that Mrs. 'Arris' rough

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