

LADY ANN AND H'IRIS.

"Christmas toys to suit all pockets from £30 to 6d."

The announcement which was framed in holly and sparkled with artificial frosting, hung outside one of London's stores. At night it was rendered more compelling by electric bulbs emphasizing "£30 to 6d." in maddening monotony.

A whole window was occupied with a display of treasures which made the heart of "every little girl and every little boy" beat with pleasurable anticipation, with hopeless longing, with stolid resignation, or, most pathetic of all, the unenvying, ungrudging admiration of the true slum child, "in whose conversation is no bitterness."

Little Lady Ann, in her white fur coat tugging at Nannie's hand, cast covetous eyes at an immense doll's house, "fitted up with every modern convenience"; dancing up and down with excitement as some fresh attraction met her eye.

"Nannie, Nannie, a real bathroom, with lickle towels and a piece of soap. Oh, Nannie! A nursery like mine, and a piano like Mummy's. O, do you think Daddy will buy me it for Christmas?"

Here she suddenly became conscious of a child standing next to her, who was tracing with a dirty little finger various unattainable joys, and translating their meaning to a baby in a dilapidated pram, who responded by blowing bubbles out of lips set in a halo of grime. Lady Ann's sudden awareness of H'Iris and 'Orace caused her to shrink up against Nannie, and regard them with the stare common to the gently and rudely born child when its attention is arrested.

H'Iris quite unmoved by aristocratic interest continued her monologue.

"'Orace, look at the lovely doggie, with a collar on an' all. 'E can say 'bow wow,' it ses so on the ticket."

"'Ere 'Orace. Can yer see Father Christmas? 'Ung all over wif toys 'e is. Ere duckie, H'Iris will show yer." This involved his sister disentangling the infant from its unspeakable pram and holding it up before the tempting display designed for more fortunate children.

"Now 'Orace you can see nice. Them crackers, 'ain't they woppers? Wonder what's inside. 'Eaps of motters I should fink."

'Orace having had enough set up a wail of protest, and his sister's maternal instinct being aroused, she fished in the miscellaneous collection at the bottom of the pram and produced a sodden dummy which she crammed into an unwilling mouth, plumped 'Orace into his chariot, and at the call of duty, tore herself away from fairyland and made for Edgware Road.

Lady Ann, relieved of the embarrassment of such unusual and strange creatures, once more turned her gaze to the doll's house, and was shortly after escorted by Nannie in a select direction home to tea.

Now Nannie had been instructed to inform Lady Joan FitzJones if there had been anything that had appealed specially to the little girl in the Christmas shops.

It was not surprising therefore that a ticket marked "Sold" appeared that evening on the doll's house. Lady Ann was an only child, already satiated with luxurious toys.

The mother of H'Iris and 'Orace, Mrs. 'Arris, had occasion to pass the same store on the way home from her "charing" job in the West End, and she too stopped before the toy window.

It must be admitted that her mother's heart was not free of discontent as she reflected on the inequalities of life; she gave a sigh as she foresaw Christmas time for H'Iris. "'Orace 'e won't notice anything."

She was a self-respecting widow, albeit neither she nor

her child attended any place of worship, and so were debarred from the seasonal advantages of so doing

Sunday was the one morning when she was not obliged to turn out at six o'clock to get to "me office cleanin." So it is not surprising that she took a "lay in" on that day.

H'Iris in consequence had to be on duty with 'Orace. These omissions in no way troubled Mrs. 'Arris, who considered herself quite as good, if not better than the back-bitin' set, what attended the Church for what they got.

"I should like to manage that doll for H'Iris" she said to herself. "Shuts its eyes an' all. Ain't it wonderful? Sixpence is a lot of money though." She consulted the shabby purse in the palm of her hand.

Should she? Ought she?

"She deserves it, bless 'er 'eart," and Mrs. 'Arris threw her cap over the windmill and entered the store.

"Sorry, they're all sold but that one in the window."

Mrs. 'Arris gave a grunt of disappointment.

"What a shime and I'd set my 'eart on one for my little gal."

The young lady was a kind girl, in addition to being a young lady.

"I'm afraid its no use to ask them to take it out of the window to-night, but I tell you what. I'll ask them to put a 'Sold' on it and you shall have it in a day or two. Those dolls have been a popular line, they've gone like hot cakes."

Mrs. 'Arris thereupon parted with her hard-earned sixpence, and, having suspiciously inspected the receipt, departed to her home.

That evening there was unusual excitement in the toy department when the lights were put out. The dolls house in particular gave itself airs.

"Did you notice the lady with the fur coat who came in to-night? Well, I overheard one of the young ladies—the stuck-up one—tell her that my price was £30 and that she would reserve me for her. I'm the only one as far as I can see that's sold in advance. That tells a tale, doesn't it?"

"You make a big mistake," came a little piping voice from a remote corner. "I've got a ticket like yours on me."

The Teddy Bears, mechanical toys, and elaborate dolls, all turned their attention—they hadn't all got eyes—to the humble corner from whence the voice came. Alone, unique, "marvellous value," was a small doll with flaxen hair and gaudy clothes.

The dolls house turned up its door knocker, which did duty for a nose.

"I ask you, comrades, did you notice the person who paid sixpence for her? No gloves, cotton stockings, and goodness knows where she picked up her hat."

The peal of derision that arose from woolley, wooden and cardboard voices was so obtusive that the night watchman on his rounds said "Order please," in his sternest official voice and silence followed.

Little Lady Ann awoke on Christmas morning in her sumptuous nursery and watched the flickering shadows cast by the fire, for some minutes before she realised that it was the long expected day when she would find—

"Such a surprise for you, darling, in the day nursery."

Santa Claus was not included in this modern child's upbringing.

She stole out of bed and slipping on her little quilted satin dressing gown stole into the adjoining room. Standing against a whole side of the wall was the coveted doll's house. With little squeals of pleasure, and braving certain anger from Nannie she proceeded to investigate her new possession.

Disillusionment followed, and Nannie hearing ominous sounds rushed to the scene to find her charge a kicking

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