

Christmas at the Feeble-Minded.

THE THANKSGIVING dinner had scarcely disappeared before the children began to talk of Christmas, and officers and teachers were not far behind them in planning for the great day of the year. In the school rooms the lessons were full of allusions to the good time coming; the blackboards were ornamented with Christmas trees drawn by the children, and in one room a large picture of Santa Claus drawn by one of the boys was changed from day to day to suit the taste of the artist. Christmas songs and a little play in which Santa Claus appeared were chosen for the children to learn, and the work of teaching them commenced at once.

Early in December circulars were sent to the many friends of the institution reminding them that the season of good cheer was approaching, and by the middle of the month answers in the shape of gifts and money began to arrive in great numbers. And now began the busiest season of the year in all departments. All packages were opened in the office, lists of their contents written in the Christmas book opposite the names of the children for whom they were intended, and itemized receipts sent to the donors. They were then sent to the departments to which they belonged, where they were prepared for the Christmas trees, each article being labeled with the name of the child who was to receive it. The money sent was receipted for, and when designated for special children was expended for them. Money contributed to the general Christmas Fund was added to that of the state and expended for children not otherwise provided for, their wishes being ascertained and carefully considered. The preparations were not complete until the Superintendent could be assured by the heads of the various departments that every inmate of the institution had been appropriately remembered, but by Christmas Eve everything was ready.

December 23d a Christmas song service was held at the time of the usual Sunday evening service. Several choruses and a duet were sung by the children with spirit and expression which did credit to themselves and their teacher. A visiting friend sang two beautiful solos which added much to the pleasure of the children as well as of the faculty. The dear old Christmas story was told by one of the teachers in simple language easily understood by the children. A responsive story, and reading and prayer by the Superintendent completed the program for the evening.

On Monday morning the baby class at Skinner Hall opened surprised eyes upon a Christmas tree alight with candles and covered with toys. At two o'clock in the afternoon Santa Claus started upon his rounds to the different buildings in a little carriage filled with gifts, decorated with evergreens and flags and drawn by a Shetland pony. He was followed by the school band, whose lively strains drew expectant children to the windows to greet with enthusiasm the approach of their old friend. His first call was at Sunnyside where a beautiful tree awaited him. After music by the band and choruses by the children, old Santa distributed the presents from the tree with merry remarks for the amusement of the recipients. From here he proceeded to Skinner Hall, then to the Annex, and at five o'clock to the Retreat, a similar program being repeated in each department.

At seven o'clock in the evening the children of the school department gathered in the large assembly hall, which was beautifully decorated with evergreens and Japanese lanterns. Above the stage were a star and the greeting "Merry Christmas" made by an ingenious arrangement of electric lights, and at each side was a heavily laden Christmas tree. The entertainment opened with an overture by the orchestra followed by a chorus by the children, after which the curtain rose upon a row of dolls—the "Christmas doll" of various nations—which, upon being wound exhibited their accomplishments in approved doll fashion. Next a little play entitled "The Trapping of Santa Claus" proved very amusing to the audience. After another chorus by the children, the great event of the evening occurred—the coming of the real Santa Claus with his load of Christmas gifts. As there was no sleighing his reindeer were useless, but instead of coming in a ship as last year, he rode upon an immense elephant which walked across the stage swinging its trunk and trumpeting in quite a realistic manner. The children, silent for a moment with astonishment, soon drowned the noise of the elephant with their applause and their enthusiasm was not lessened when a slide was erected down which their presents were sent from the back of the gigantic animal. After the distribution of these gifts and those from the trees, which required about two hours, a "Goodbye" chorus was sung, and the happy children marched from the hall to the music of the band.

Christmas morning the smaller children upon entering their play rooms found pretty little Christmas trees, decorated with candles, candies, etc., awaiting them, which were a source of pleasure throughout the day. The children at the hospital who were unable to attend the exercises in other departments also had their tree at this time and were abundantly supplied with gifts.

The Christmas dinners in the different buildings with their bountiful supply of turkey and its usual accompaniments completed the formal program, after which the children took undisputed possession of the kingdom of play.

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