

Charles Dickens Museum

Audio Transcript: 'Drooping Buds' from 'Household Words'

We followed, up the spacious stairs into a large and lofty room, airy and gay. It had been the drawing-room of the old house. A reviving touch had passed over its decorations; and the richly-ornamented ceiling, to which little eyes looked up from little beds, was quite a cheerful sight. The walls were painted, in panel, with rosy nymphs and children; and the light laughter of children welcomed our entrance. There was nothing sad here. Light iron cribs, with the beds made in them, were ranged, instead of chairs, against the walls.

There were half-a-dozen children—all the patients then contained in the new hospital; but, here and there, a bed was occupied by a sick doll. A large gay ball was rolling on the floor, and toys abounded. From this cheerful place we looked into a second room—the other drawing-room, furnished in a like manner, but as yet unoccupied.

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There were five girls and a boy. Five were in bed near the windows; two of these, whose beds were the most distant from each other, confined by painful maladies, were resting on their arms, and busily exporting and importing fun. A third shared the profits merrily, and occasionally speculated in a venture on its own account. The most delightful music in this world, the light laughter of children floated freely through the place. The hospital had begun with one child. What did he think about, or laugh about? Maybe those shadows who had had their infant home in the great house, and had known in those same rooms the needs now sought to be supplied for him, told him stories in his sleep.

One of the little patients followed our movements with its eyes, with a sad, thoughtful, peaceful look; one indulged in a big stare of childish curiosity and wonder. They had toys strewn upon their counterpanes. A sick child is a contradiction of ideas, like a cold summer. But to quench the summer in a child's heart is, thank God! not easy.