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Puppets of Childhood Attract Interest of New Generation

By MARIAN MURRAY

The growing up little girl whose mother tells her that she's "really too old to play with dolls any more," may know that all is not yet lost, if she can catch a glimpse of a basement room in the Wadsworth Athenaeum.

In a small, catacomb-like compartment, which members of the library staff use for brief moments of relaxation, Miss Sarah S. Eddy and her assistants in the children's room have arranged a collection of old dolls, with all those dolls' accessories, merely for their own joy and that of their friends whom they invite to look in occasionally.

Hewins Collection

And, if greater proof is needed that women folks are never too old to love those puppets of childhood, be it remembered that the collection was the property of Miss Caroline Maria Hewins, for more than fifty years a beloved member of the library staff, who died in 1926, shortly after her 80th birthday.

During her long lifetime, Miss Hewins traveled often in Europe, and wherever she went, returned with dolls dressed in the fashion of that country. Year after year the collection grew, until there were scores of dolls, old and new, which the owner bequeathed to the children's room, a department which had always had an especial place in her heart.

New Year's Reception

When the department was in the old Athenaeum annex, which was torn down for the building of the Avery Museum, the dolls used to be taken out each year for a New Year's reception.

Small mothers attended the reception, carrying their own offspring, who were properly introduced to the babies and children and grown-up dolls that were there to meet them. There were very formal introductions all around, to Marit from Norway, Lalla, the Jerusalem bride, Heidi and Peter from Switzerland, the lady from Iceland, the Turkish policeman with blood on his dagger, the whole Russian family made of painted wood, and all the others.

But this year, alas, as for several previous, there is no place to give a New Year's reception. And the dollies were surely feeling lonely and neglected, packed away in a dark closet.

Revive Showing

So Miss Eddy and Miss Elsie Hubbard, and others in the children's room decided that they would let them see the light of day once more—and incidentally let them be seen by some of the adults who would rejoice in the collection.

With loving care, the dolls' faces were washed and their clothes laundered or pressed, the furniture and the hundreds of small accessories were brought out and set up. And there they are for a week or two at

Anyone who ever has tried to furnish a doll house to scale will appreciate especially the bedroom which has been arranged for a very elegant French lady of the 70's, who is visiting, no doubt, and who stands casually with one arm over the footboard, looking about her at the clothes and conveniences that are almost all exactly the right size.

Completely Equipped

There is the bed from which she arose, with its embroidered sheets and pillow-cases, the brush and comb with which she arranged her coiffure, the soap she used for her pale complexion, the cross-stitched towel she used to dry her face, the candle that lighted her to bed, the Bible she read before she went to sleep, the work basket with scissors and thimble that she uses for her mending, the rubbers she will wear when she goes out.

That's just a hint of the dozens upon dozens of tiny things that delight the heart of any feminine creature. And nearby is the dining table, set with napery and silver, and food ready for the dolls who don't

even know that it's a pathetic fallacy that they should look hungry.

Some Are Stoical

One or two of them are much too aloof to express any human emotion in their countenances. There is, for instance, the Japanese warrior in traditional armor, whose eyes look serenely over the others. No one can read the expression of the Southern Mammy, whose face is a Brazil nut, and who holds a filbert baby in her arms. The Skookum Indian doll, whose face is a dried apple, is likewise of a proper Indian stoicism. The Eskimo doll from Vancouver, with the coat made from a grebe's breast, has its face almost hidden under a hood.

Many of the dolls were brought to Miss Hewins by friends, when they returned from far places. Miss Alice Tyler brought the Icelandic puppet, Dr. E. H. Gladwin brought the Jerusalem bride, Miss Alice Cummings brought dolls from Sicily, Brittany, Alsace. Miss Lucy Perkins, years ago, gave the Chinese Mandarin, Wang, whose long pigtail used to hang beneath a hat with a red button.

With her great understanding and love of children, Miss Hewins knew, long before the days of modern psychology, that by looking at dolls dressed in the costumes of other lands and other times, youngsters might most easily learn of strange customs

and people. Lady Geraldine, of 1830, wears an elegant silk gown; Victoria of 1840, shows another style; the twins, Sarah Elizabeth and Ellen Josephine, with pantelettes, blue and white frocks, and straw hats, are of a later but no less interesting period. And with these American dolls are more and more, of all sizes, from other lands.

The smallest in the collection are two pairs from Italy, each about an inch and a half tall. One pair are crocheted.

One of the largest has a place of honor. She is dressed in calico, with quaint leather shoes. But the members of the library staff look at her with especial fondness, and handle her with a hint of reverence. For they believe, although no one is quite sure, that this was dear Miss Hewins' very own doll, many, many years ago.

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