

Letters from Life.—No. 18.

Nursing Home,
Great Eastern Hospital.

DEAREST JEAN,—I have been kept in such a whirl since I came into this chaotic Ward, that letters have been quite out of the question. The change after Damian is all the more cruel, because had I been sent straight here—never having known better things—the whole *ménage* might have struck me less forcibly; at the same time, my three months' experience in Damian is an immense help, as Sister took such pains to teach me the routine duties of Ward management in the very best way. How I miss her bright presence about the Ward, her beautiful neatness, her dainty touches, and, beyond all, the *influence* which is felt by all the surroundings of a truly sympathetic woman. It is sunshine—music—perfume—all in one. Heigho! where was I? Well, the morning after my memorable interview with the Matron, the sword of Damocles descended; one word, and my doom was pronounced.

"To Matthew," said Night Sister, at breakfast time, "and it's sorry for you I am. Here, you poor little white mouse," addressing a pale-faced little Probationer, who started when addressed, "take care of Nurse Graham; help her to survive the first day." And as I passed her chair, she put her hand kindly on my arm, and said significantly, "All bullies are cowards, and well do we know it in our distressful country. Look at that poor little misery," pointing at my companion; "she was once suspended for in subordination. Matthew has cured her."

The poor girl's eyes filled with tears. We pass across the garden together; she turns towards me presently and says, "It's very foolish to cry, but somehow I feel so broken down. Everything goes wrong. It's worry, worry, all day long; nothing I do is right; and, indeed, sometimes my head seems stuffed with wool, and I do make terrible mistakes. I am so glad you are going to work in our Ward, you look so strong; so—so true somehow."

I keep pace with the girl's flagging footsteps, and notice, with pity, her worn and colourless face. She is not an educated woman—but there is refinement about her, and refinement is the one quality in the Great Eastern which one can most easily dispense with.

"The truth is, you are worn out; you want a holiday."

"Yes, I know. I have only had one week since I came, fourteen months ago; and even if I could be spared—which Sister says is impossible—I could not afford it. I have nothing but my salary; and it is all I can do to scrape my Pension Fund premium together. What with washing and extra uniform, and—"

"And food," I add.

"Well, yes, and food, I am always penniless. I am altogether a poor thing. Somehow it seems no use struggling. It will all end some day, I suppose, or I shall, which comes to the same thing."

Jean, if that girl does not get rest—real rest—of body and mind, I shall bring it in a case of manslaughter!

A nice sort of person to attend on sick people!

By this time we have mounted numberless stairs, and entered Matthew Ward.

Oh! how it smells!

We find the Night Nurse (there is only one Nurse to thirty-four beds) comfortably esconced in the kitchen, making a hearty meal off fried eggs and bacon, steaming coffee and toast.

"Now, you'll just have to hurry up this morning," she says to Nurse Ross, my companion. "What with one thing and another, I've not finished up; and there are so few patients up to help just now."

Nurse Ross makes no remark—puts down her shawl and goes wearily down the Ward. Another Nurse now enters the Ward. She is brisk enough, and we hear her clarion voice before she appears, and immediately devotes herself to toast and coffee. She eyes me up and down, and sniffs. "Have you come here for use or ornament?" she jerks out; "because there's no time for standing playing the statue in this Ward."

"No; you all appear remarkably busy," I reply. May I ask who is in charge of this department? I can *smell* there is work to do, the question is where to begin."

"Doubtless, as you are so mighty clever, your nose will direct you," she bursts out coarsely; "only I don't advise you to let Sister catch you behindhand with your share."

I shudder as I think of the Sister of these syrens. However, without further ado, I set to. The patients seem very busy, many of them up, shuffling about the chilly Ward in shirts and trousers, in and out of the kitchen, in and out of the lavatory; one boy is sweeping regardless that the beds are still unmade, and of course skimming round lockers and tables; others are polishing away door handles, ventilators, tins and basins. At this rate all will be in apple-pie order by eight o'clock. Nearly all the Ward work is skimmed over by the patients to the best of their abilities, poor fellows! But *locomotor ataxy* is not conducive to accuracy of touch. The only patients who remain in bed, I find later, are the paralysed cases, and the weary and patient expression of their faces tells a sad tale. In Damian Ward—but, there, if I begin comparing the methods of Damian Ward with Matthew, comparison will be too odious. At the same time, I am glad I have been sent here, Jean, because the condition of these patients is heartrending. They are principally nervous cases, and loss of muscular power is at all times terribly distressing to watch in a man. Their ailments are more or less chronic; indeed, one man has been here two years. "They live in hopes," he observed to me one day, with a horrible grin. "My ailment is unique, Nurse. Whenever I wants anything, I threaten to discharge myself. They won't let me go—I know 'em. I've spent ten years, in and out, of this 'ere 'ospital." Poor fellow! what a life! what a spirit! I try to cheer him up. "Now, No. 6, you are very ungrateful," I say. "You must have an ailment you should be proud and grateful to be suffering from, a disease quite out of the common way—something mysterious, and, as you call it, unique. If I was you, I should make a will and leave *myself* to Dr Grey Mather, who has been so kind to you. Your mind would then be at ease, and you would enjoy his interest and attention without suspicion."

"Well, Nurse, maybe you're right. You see, things

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