

## The Evolution of a Hospital.

This is serious and not serious. Nothing can be honestly serious, straight through, in the country where I live, thank Heaven. Here we play as we work, though we have not yet learnt, thanks be, once again, to work at playing. Here, too, we know how to laugh and cry quite naturally in two successive moments, and how to pass off lightly and impersonally, misfortunes which would crush you calmer sister islanders, all girt about with a sense of your conscious self-importance. We are not important, and we know it. Neither are we self-conscious, but we don't know it.

My apologies to you, Mrs. Editor, now, once and for all; a continued apology, to run concurrently (like two sentences of imprisonment) through the whole course of my articles.

I live in Ireland.

That must stand as a paragraph by itself. For that at once explains, and condones everything. Ireland, like charity, covers a multitude of sins, delightful and charming sins. That, possibly you have heard before. Everyone preaches to us about our sins. We let them preach, because we are naturally courteous. But when they are gone, then it is the fun begins. If they could only see themselves as we see them! Dear creatures. We are a remarkably receptive people.

It will go hardly with you, I take it, as time goes on, to believe that there was, or ever will be, any hospital at all. Certainly there was not, neither is there. But that there will be, in the near distant future, I must ask you to take for granted.

In the meantime, I want to introduce you, firstly to the idea, secondly to the place, and thirdly and all through, to the people. For the idea, it is as God made it. For the place and the people, they too are from the moulds in which He pleases to fashion things beautiful and rare and good. Just how good you can never know, unless you be willing to come and dwell among them, observantly, simply, and withal very humbly, and this last is perhaps more necessary than either of the other two.

If you are a "proper" person in any sense of the word such as makes for puffed out righteousness, drop this article like a hot potato. (Has potato an "e"? Potatce? I always write it so in my imagination, but the "e" fades away on paper. "O" for a finish is very bald, isn't it?—but the "e" looks wrongly too.) Potatoes—you see we never use them singly here, but in heaps—in potsful. How to explain all there is to explain, without being purely didactic, I cannot guess. "Use," for instance, means "eat." That's one of your worst points; you English people over there, you know so little. Would you ever have guessed that "use" meant "eat"? Of course you wouldn't. How could you with your limited experience? But it does. Kindly try and remember it. It is sure to occur again.

If you would be so good as not to keep interrupting like this, I would be very thankful to you. I am come to a serious bit. And whilst I think

of it, never put down anything that strikes you as unusual in my style as wrong.

It is merely our Irish turn of a phrase. Is that clear? Very well then. This is the seriousness that is on it. I am sorry to tell you—No, I'm not. It's only like saying "Dear Mr. Bore,—Will you give us the pleasure." I don't regret it at all; I enjoy telling you that from first to last this thing that we are doing and the way more especially in which we are doing it, is an outrage on British Feeling. Propriety would blush. I often hear it blush—Poor thing. It is wonderful how long Propriety keeps its youth—ah, and innocence. I am trying very hard to condense into some one phrase the whole essence of shock which shall kill off Mrs. Proper and leave only the better sort of reader. I have it! Here, in Kerry—Did I tell you Kerry before? Never mind, you would have come to it sooner or later, and it is not of the least consequence—the geography part, with the lakes and mountains and rivers and the eternal, awe-inspiring, peace commanding sea (see ancient Irish MSS.), comes in due sequence, not now. Here, in Kerry, in my set, *we never dress for dinner*.

Hush! And now, if Mrs. Boffin has left the room, I will tell you the reasons, which are quite as shocking as the fact, perhaps more so. (1) We have no evening dresses. (2) And we cannot afford to buy them. (3) We have our dinners about midday, and even Royalty has ceased to uphold full dress—how did low necks and a strap ever come to be called full dress?—at that time of day. (4) We have our suppers as soon as we get home from work, about half-past six to seven, and get to bed as soon after as we can with a clear conscience, and if not without it. (5) And in the end of it what's the good bothering after thin things at all?

I just give it you as a sample. It is a very good measure of our life, and sunders us from many kinds of bores and boredoms, and conventions and unwholesomenesses, and things which make against health of mind and body, such as too much talking, which leads to slander and to exhaustion of mind, too much eating which leads to exhaustion of the gastric juices, too much drinking, which leads to things untellable, and too much nerve-strain which leads to the ruin physical and moral of the next generation as well as of our own.

Then, with the ground cleared, we come to the Idea. And since an idea presupposes a brain and a brain a body, let me for the first and last time tell you something of myself. Only as a necessary appanage to the Idea, because, although the Idea was never mine, but came to me from that glorious place which is the last home of thought, it had to take shape somehow in some brain. A woman—middle-aged and unashamed. Conscious that middle life has brought her her share of the best things that life has to give. Peace, such as youth can never know. Experience, born in pain and failure, now blossoming for fruit. Patience, or the makings of it. A keen sense of conscious enjoyment which realises its powers and their fulfilment. Above and beyond all, Love—not the selfishness *à deux*, but that spontaneous, unmerited love, which she can but receive thankfully and with

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)