

humble desire to give something in return, however poor, for so much riches, so generously lavished upon her.

It all came about so naturally. A friend was asked who asked another friend, and so, after an interval of six years of training, the Kerry which had first inspired me, caught me back again to live with her for ever, if it please God, with the Idea already sprung to birth. How it originally came to me, I do not know. When first I knew it, it was already a certainty, not just a possibility, but one of those things which must be, because it had to be. A hospital for Kerry, for one corner of Kerry, because of the children haunted by tuberculosis, the women tortured in childbirth, the men struck low before their time. Full-formed, the question lay not in the what, or the why of the Idea, but only in the How. And that How is still with me, and I work on in spite of it.

I took a great deal of advice from a great many people, of different kinds and schools of thinking. Most of the people were kindly, as one is apt to be to some poor fool that knows not his folly, the length of it, and the breadth of it. Nearly all smiled benevolently upon me, though not upon the Idea, which seemed to them a thing unheard of. "Tut, tut, why pioneer down in remote Kerry when there is plenty of work lying nearer to hand?" Have you ever pioneered yourself? No? Then let me tell you what it is like. It is like being a Commander-in-chief without a War Office, a telegraph system, or an advance guard. If you fail, you fail alone, there is no one to hold you safe. "We said it all along, but she would not be advised." You call for volunteers. But first you must give yourself. You place your workers, but you must learn of them silently, in order to control them in those ways which it needs a lifetime to know. You must be the brain and the courage and the moderation, the help and the certainty of your tiny army. You may never be tired, or impatient, or hopeless or doubting. Mistakes, pointing to defeat, must be met unflinchingly, and as unflinchingly rectified. Defeat itself, for defeats there must be, must be fronted with a smiling face, a sure hand, and a steady brain. Panics must be stemmed. Justice must be meted out. Whoever fails, whatever fails, you may not fail.

And success? Well, we have not touched it yet.

But, it is all worth it. Even the failures and defeats are worth while. Always and always the words ring in my mind:—

"One that never turned his back, but marched breast forward,

Never doubted clouds would break,

Never dreamed though right were worsted wrong would triumph,

Held, we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,

Sleep to wake."

Have I them right? It is seven years since I read them, and my "Asolando" lies in an Oxford warehouse, with the smell of the stable through it.

What a digression! "Einsam bin ich nicht alleine," fortunately. Otherwise there would be no evolution of a hospital idea. One man tried to book me for Manchester, one or two for London,

Achill, Sligo, Mayo, India, only not Kerry and pioneering. "Tread in respectably-trodden ways" was the burden of their cry. "Take to something else and give up a luxury like a hospital for Kerry." A luxury. Did *you* ever need to be driven eighteen miles with a fractured thigh? Has *your* wife bled to death in childbirth for want of help? Is it *your* child that goes lame for life for want of treatment? A luxury!

There was amusement and fun galore to be indulged in privately. Oh, fellow-women, are we all, we women, the fools of the world? And, if not, how comes it that unfailingly we are met with the calm assurance that it is impossible that we should have considered the matter from a commonsense point of view at all? Time after time, I have quietly met question after question, varying from whether one had any idea of cost, to the gentle suggestion that if there were an operating theatre a supply of water would be necessary, or from whether I had any plans to work from, to the assurance that "doon there it is necessary to tie on the slates." And at the end it has suddenly struck the questioner that I knew what I wanted. That I had my plan, that I had not sat down to build my tower without counting the cost, that I was a professed nurse, accustomed to theatre work, that even damp-courses were not a thing of mystery—that, in short, one was a woman and not a court jester, nor an infant in arms. Oh, the scores of dear, delightful bogies that I have slain, the windmills against which I have tilted, the scarecrows, wagged at me by the friendliest of hands, which I have demolished. The sum and the summary of it all was "Don't." But I did and do.

The best fun, almost, was a Board—one of the forty-seven or so which rule our hapless country. It was—no, we are not there yet. I wrote to it about some land; it replied, putting me off. I asked for further information; it referred me to a Committee of quite another kind. I interviewed the Committee's representative after several ineffectual attempts. I wrote again to the Board; they had nothing to offer. I wrote back that I happened to know that they had, as I knew the district, and asked for details; they sent maps. I pointed out two convenient sites, and inquired price and other possibilities. My letter was "acknowledged." I wrote that I would like to meet that Board and speak to it face to face; it replied that the affair was not sufficiently advanced and the Board saw no advantage in an interview. But I went, all the same; it sits seldom, and you have to make the most of it. I sent in my name, was received, had a quarter of an hour's friendly talk with some excellent and business-like and sympathetic men, and left, with the land, so to speak, up my sleeve.

So it was all settled. No, not at all. Six weeks later I had a letter. The Board saw dangers ahead—there are always dangers ahead of every scheme, and if you look round the corner often enough every house-dog on the road will don the features of a wolf. The Board could not advise—I never asked them to. By the time I reached them I was already full to bursting-point with advice,

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)