

nine. This is her plan; and she swept, dusted, cleaned our wash-stands and crockery, emptied slops, and left everything speckless as the great bell rang out at 6.40 for breakfast.

Dear Jean, do not think I am writing in a censorious spirit, because I describe things as they are. Everything is new and intensely interesting; and if I may not write unreservedly to my own sister, to whom may I? Your American colonel would probably politely advise me to "bottle up and bust"; instead, I take a bird's-eye view of the breakfast table, and recognise an old acquaintance. The cloth of yesternight still reposes on the table; I know it by certain large, brown stains which took the edge off my appetite when first we met. Liberal supplies of tea, coffee, cocoa, and porter have been bestowed by various careless hands upon that crumbly, long-suffering cloth, all that remains of its pristine beauty being a little oasis here and there of pure white damask, which peeps abashed from out the desert of dirt.

Dozens of Nurses crowd in, in various stages of untidiness—some fastening the straps of their aprons, others pinning on their caps. A rush is made at the loaves and butter, sugar basins, and milk jugs which are dotted about on the table, and I sit demurely in my chair, for a few minutes, quietly waiting for some polite person to pass me the fare; instead, my next-door neighbour stretches in front of me, clutches at a loaf, ruthlessly shaves off the crust, top and bottom, slices a quarter of a pound of butter in half, *pockets* half a basin of sugar, and then proceeds to divide the spoil between herself and her right-hand neighbour, who scrambles into her place five minutes after time.

A new Sister bustles into her place at the head of the table, ten minutes late, and informs us, with a jolly laugh and a brogue, that "she has never sat down all night—she has been so short-handed; and she has had to give every spare moment to that typhoid in Damian—twenty-first day—and Special Nurse taken off to a private case at midnight," &c. And then she sees I am a novice, and orders a "back-hander" of that mutilated loaf and swiftly-vanishing butter, gives me a cup of tepid tea, and takes down the names of a few stragglers, who make various excuses for being late—"they didn't hear the bell" and "their watch had stopped," and so on.

After grace, Sister opens a little red book and reads out the names of several Nurses, deputing them to new Wards or cases, and I hear amongst others, "Probationer Graham, to Damian Ward, Special to No. 26," and then a chorus of "Oh! Sister, mayn't I go?" "It's the

only ward to learn properly," and "They feed typhoids on chops in Matthew," &c.

"Can't please everybody—don't mean to try," replies the Sister, her fat sides shaking with laughter. "Now you can all be off—sooner the better—there goes seven," and a rush is made for the door.

I go up and ask her if the order is intended for me, as I have been directed by the Home Sister to go to Matthew.

"Then you just won't go!" she replied, emphatically nodding her fat little head. "Shure and you look a likely Pro., and there's no occasion for you to be taking a return ticket so soon. It's to Damian you go, and I'll be no friend to you again if you don't look well afther the poor young man—and his mother a widow. Here, Nurse Damian, just you guide this new Pro. Sister's waiting for her." Nurse Damian takes me under her wing, and together we pass across the garden, upstairs, and down corridors, and ultimately arrive at a door over which is written "Damian Ward, Male Medical." How my heart beat as I stood upon the mat. Once inside the Ward, with its long rows of beds, and sad-looking occupants, I felt quite at home—not a heaven-born genius by any means—but strong and sanguine.

A Division is composed of four Wards, each containing about thirteen beds, the whole superintended by one Sister, and an uncertain quantity and quality of subordinate Nurses. In the centre of these four Wards is a large square lobby, a useful place for carving meals, and airing linen.

A Nurse who has been on night duty is busy washing up crockery in the small Ward kitchen off this lobby, and comes out as we pass. "Sister has been on duty since six," she says significantly to my companion. "She is with poor 26; his Special was ordered off at midnight."

Nurse Damian raises her arched brows and gives her shoulders an almost imperceptible shrug. "A little murder more or less is of infinitesimal importance under the existing *régime*," she answers with extreme bitterness; "what's the use of slaving at the bad cases in the day"—and she quickens her pace with a firm and angry tread.

No. 26 bed is situated on the left side of the Ward, and at the foot stands Sister Damian, adjusting a disinfecting apparatus. I hear her sweet gay voice, before she turns her face—so full of exquisite grace—upon us.

"He is better," she says gladly, pointing to a young man who lies almost motionless in 26 bed; resting her beautiful compassionate eyes upon him. "This patient will be your charge," she says, taking my hand; "his poor mother's face will teach you the responsibility of your work far

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)