

In the corner is a Welshman who dreams every night of his "angel bride," and lives on her daily letters, written in Welsh, with a grateful postscript in childish English to the nurse. The love between these simple couples lasts on till they can sing together, "John Anderson, my jo, John," or compete for the flitch of bacon. Listen to this old pensioner.

"Have you had a happy afternoon, daddy?"  
"Ay, a nice long court to-day, nurse," and his face flushes beneath his silver hair as his "missus" comes into the ward on visiting-days. And she, dear old lady, is far from being jealous when he says to his nurse, "Oh, my dear, you'm enough to charm the heart of a snail!"

Just now the comic characters of the ward are two men who are convalescing from severe operations, and they pace the ward together, nicknamed "The Comedians," for Nature was in a humorous vein when she moulded the quaint figure of the old bachelor, and the crinkled face of the young one. The young comedian is a coachman by trade, and it is his boast that he is going "to drive nurse to her wedding, white ribbons and a," though in sadder moments, looking at his arms in splints, he puckers his absurdly childish face and meditates, "I'll be a poor hand at the ribbons after all!" The other comedian is an old fox-hunting butcher, with a face like a nursery rhyme. He has fallen from the opulence of butchery and the proud possession of a hunting hack to abject poverty, but nothing can quench his inborn drollery. He assumes a courtliness, too, that is very funny.

"Pretty well this morning, nurse?" he asks deferentially. "Well and pretty, nurse, well and pretty." Indeed, he is something of a gallant altogether, and romances of the old times when he was "trigged up in Sunday best with a flower in his buttonhole. And many's the mile I've been courting, in the happy old days, down country lanes." He makes a great affair of his daily toilette, carefully brushing the patched, blue tailcoat and threadbare velvet collar, as if he were getting himself up in pink for the chase. He shuffles about the ward in the old slippers, which have a little spring left in them, as if they still were dancing-pumps, and it is his great ambition "to dance a hornpipe with nurse." Unfortunately, that is not commensurate with nurse's idea of professional dignity, though sometimes, in mad moments, she can imagine herself skimming the polished

floor between the beds, keeping step with this agile, old-world comedian.

Oh, God bless you, dear, honest, great-hearted simple fustians!

## II.

It is night without. In the children's ward the firelight flickers on the folded cots. A little group is gathered round the fire by a baby wailing faintly. The dying infant lies on the nurse's knee, its little head moving from side to side in pain. Beside it kneels the fair little Sister, trying to coax the pet of the ward with spoonfuls of brandy and milk, and the young doctor leaning against the nursery-guard with grave face and professional air, is concentrating all attention on the wee, wailing baby.

It is one of the poor little "not wanted" lives; but if medical skill and nursing care can save it, it shall be saved.

Then the mother is sent for from the workhouse, not far away. She looks a wild Irish girl as she, too, comes into the glow of the firelight. She is picturesque, in spite of her roughness, in a big blue apron, and shawl pinned across her breast, ruffled black hair, and head unbonneted. Her words are careless enough.

"S'pose I should feel it, first going off," she says, alluding to her baby's death; yet, with a mother's heart within her, she passionately kissed the little one, then sits rocking herself to and fro, her head buried in her apron.

Ah, bright-eyed Jessie! Poor, unkempt, erring Jessie! In you culminates the sigh of pitiful, perplexed humanity!

The house-surgeon turned back as he left the ward to say to the Sister—

"Send for the chaplain if the baby is not christened. It will not live till morning."

## III.

CHRISTMAS in the wards, undeniably Christmas, kept up as Christmas used to be.

First, Christmas Eve, the good, old-fashioned Christmas smell of holly; and a very old-fashioned litter of decorations in new-fashioned, germless, aseptic wards. Every patient hangs a stocking to the bed-head, even such old souls as are dubbed "Grannie" and "Daddie," with all the expectant glee of children. Later, "in the stilly watches of the night," a nurse, or, it may be, an impersonated Santa Claus, steals round with presents labelled for each patient

according to their age and tastes, but spied by a wakeful patient here and there. For instance, Grannie, whispering delightedly—

"I see'd ye, my dear; ye can't catch Grannie napping. Oh, my! What a Christmassing to be sure! Never haven't hed such encouragements and indulgences ever since I was a—barn." And she looks round benignantly on the lofty ward, "like a fairy palace, zure," hung with flags and ivies, the firelight reddening the holly-berries, and casting mischievous lights on the mistletoe bough.

Except in children's nurseries, Christmas is nowhere so ideal as in the wards. "Goodwill" certainly abounds; the sick forget their sickness in the general gaiety, and the querulous their complaints. It is the nurses' delight to aid in every way to the festivities, and their spirits are exuberant, hospital discipline being relaxed. At the Christmas Day dinner the steaming turkeys and the flaming puddings are followed by dessert and crackers and songs. No wonder such unwonted feasting draws from the Welsh lad "Taffy" the remark—

"It's my seventeenth Christmas, nurse, and the nicest I've ever had yet."

And an Irish sailor chimes in—

"I'm coming back next year with the wife and all the family, and if ye put me out at the door, I'll come in to the window."

"Christmassing" does not end with the feast of the nativity; concerts last through the week, and the spirit of festivity dies hard. Boxing night is devoted to carol-singing (the whole day having been a sort of expanded grin after Christmas fare). There is an unusually fragrant aroma in the male wards, where the patients are propped up in bed smoking long pipes; this unwonted privilege is more prized than all the rest of the season's good things. Presently the wide doors open, and a whole orchestra of nurses, in their spotless uniforms, troops in. Lights are lowered and windows opened, and the sound of carols fills the ward, the echoes floating to the street outside (where many passers-by, to whom Christmas has brought no joy, pause to listen to the sweet singing, and feel it would be no hardship to be within those great walls, cared for and "tended" in a little hospital bed). The men hum in unison with the nurses' singing, or click their pipe; to the quaint tunes.

But they knock out the ashes and listen reverently to a hymn which recalls the Christmases of childhood—

"O come all ye faithful."

(To be concluded.)

## WHAT TO COOK, AND HOW TO COOK IT.

### PRESERVING AND CONSERVING. AROMATIC HERBS AND SPICES.

By L. H. YATES.

"But happy they, thrice happy, who possess  
The art to mix these sweets with due  
address."—*W. Hone.*



N England "to preserve" means, five times out of six, to boil our fruit to a jam or jelly. Even in large factories only a small proportion of the stock of fruit used is set aside for bottling or canning. In America the opposite is the rule; to can and bottle is quite a matter-of-course with the American housewife—jellies and jams with her are a luxury. To sterilise or can fruit, they say, retains its flavour far more perfectly than any other mode, and

this process is both less troublesome and more economical than the "old-fashioned" method of preserving fruit pound for pound with sugar.

This may be true, but it is also true that in England we cling to our old fashions, however much others may decry them, and we are loth to give up our beloved sweet, even if it is troublesome and costly. We might, however, with advantage keep our jellies and jams for table use only, making them extra good on this account, and use more "canned" fruit for cooking purposes. (By canned fruit we mean also bottled fruit).

Fruits may be canned (or bottled) with or without sugar, but as the sugar, unless it is previously boiled to a syrup, has no preserving quality, and as the fruit itself retains its fresh-

ness and flavour better without sweetening, it is best to leave it out.

To have a supply of bottled fruit in store enables us to indulge in tarts and compotes in winter that are but little inferior to those we enjoy in summer; but we find the indulgence to be a luxury if we have to buy the bottled fruit, as partly on account of the initial expense of the bottle and canning apparatus, and partly because this kind of stock is of a bulky and perishable nature, grocers and others charge more for them in proportion than for jams.

For home purposes, however, once the bottles with their screw tops have been purchased, there is no great expense afterwards. Large-mouthed glass jars should alone be used. If rubber rings are fitted to these as well as screw tops, see that the former are in