

THE BLUE SISTERS OF THE JURA.

NEAR the western extremity of the Jura range of mountains, in the beautiful valley of the Doubs, lies the little town of Baume-les-Dames, containing a population, according to Murray, of less than three thousand persons. It is remarkably well provided with public buildings of various sorts; only two, however, need here be mentioned, as having some connection with the subject of this sketch. The Girls' Schools, for boarders as well as day-scholars, are under the charge of Ursuline nuns, while the Hospital is served by Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul, whose simple gray gowns and quaint flying caps contrast with the more solemn Ursuline robes and veils. But there is another less known religious habit also to be seen in Baume. Three or four women, wearing a garb such as many other communities wear as to shape, but in colour sky-blue, save the cap and collar of moderate dimensions, which are white, may be noticed occasionally flitting through the streets, or seated in church near their black and gray fellow-workers in the great cause of religion and charity.

These Sisters are not housed in any public institution at Baume, but are probably lodgers in some small private apartment; they are there nevertheless to supply a want once keenly felt. They belong to an Order—or more properly Congregation—recently established for the purpose of nursing all classes at their own homes, a work which none of the old established communities in the neighbourhood could undertake. Their Mother-house (*Maison Mère*) is situated in or beside the ancient city of Besançon, about twenty miles south-west of Baume. It is apparently five or six years since the first Sisters were sent to the smaller town; before which time, as the landlord of the principal inn in Baume assured me, the sick were attended by Nurses, who, if they did not invariably pilfer and get drunk, were at least tolerably certain to be found asleep when they should have been most wakeful. Now all is changed; for a very small sum the services of the Sisters may be obtained. Payment is of course made to the community, not to the individual Nurse, according to the rule of Sisterhoods. The Sisters also Nurse destitute persons gratuitously, as my landlord's married daughter informed me on another occasion; she added that they were "very devoted."

The Blue Sisters are commonly called—"Sœurs Garde Malades," and "Petites Sœurs des Malades"—that is "Nursing Sisters," and "Little Sisters of the Sick." I am unable to say whether either of these titles is their

strictly official designation. As yet they do not appear to have overspread the whole region of the Jura, whose wants they were specially intended to supply; I at least have noticed them only in one place besides Baume—namely, in Champagnole, a small town which may be forty miles south of Besançon, in a more elevated situation, whose picturesque aspect has elicited the admiration of Ruskin. A few more years will be needed for the full development of the work. The Sisters are simple women, apparently taken from the humbler ranks of life—ranks which in England it is most difficult to imbue with a principle of self-devotion, but which in France seem to accept it intuitively. Probably some ladies may in time join the Congregation, as they have already joined older religious Sisterhoods, whose original members were of lowly station, without claiming any superiority over the other Sisters.

I was not able to visit Besançon; this is perhaps scarcely to be regretted. Had I called at the Mother-house asking innumerable questions, without having any definite business to allege as an excuse, my motives would have been open to misconstruction. There is little risk of error in assuming, until further information can be obtained, that this foundation resembles in the main features of its history and constitution many which have preceded it, and whose annals have found their way into print. It must have originated with some woman possessing a devoted heart and an organizing head, gifted, moreover, with the power of attracting other women, and of retaining her influence over them. Possibly in station and education she was somewhat above her followers, and this proved a help towards securing their allegiance. This woman is, in all likelihood, the first Mother Superior. The clergy have no doubt played a part, more or less prominent, in promoting the new institution, and many generous friends have come forward to assist.

But, whatever may have been the details, this institution shows, as others have shown before, that in France when a cry for help is uttered, there are always pious, intelligent, and energetic women found to respond, by consecrating their lives to the required work of mercy. It also illustrates the different ways of managing these things in France and in England. In England, speaking generally, we can only hope to induce women of the lower classes to work for a few years under regulations, in connection with the institution or association to which they owe their training, during which period they are probably longing for the time when they will be able to follow their profession independently, or to seek a more lively occupation, and resolving eventually

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