

Our Holiday Letter.

A QUIET RESTING PLACE.



Of the many old interesting towns of Normandy, there are few spots where one would more willingly linger than among the picturesque surroundings of

the present, linked to the historical associations of the past, of the ancient town of Caen.

It finds a record in the early pages of English History, from the fact that here the body of the Conqueror of England found burial, and we are told how (with the irony of fate) the right of him who had taken violent possession of so large a territory in his lifetime, to the few feet of earth, which were all that were needed for his last resting place, was disputed at the last moment by an angry creditor, on the ground that it had not been paid for.

Here however the body of the Conqueror remained unmolested until the storm of the revolution burst over France, and in those turbulent days, when nothing was sacred in the eyes of the maddened people, the grave of the Norman king was rifled and his bones scattered abroad, so that no trace remained.

But though all that was mortal of the first William was swept away, with nothing left but a record on a stone to mark where the body had once lain, the memory of the King and his wife, Matilda, has been enshrined and kept during the many centuries that reach from their days to ours by two monuments which stand now prominent features in this quaint old Normandy town, the one L'Abbaye aux Hommes, the present Church of St. Etienne, founded and endowed to serve to mark the spot where his body was first laid, which was originally covered by a Latin epitaph recording the events of his life, but omitting to mention that he had conquered England, and the other L'Abbaye aux Femmes, built at the further end of the town, to serve as a tomb for his Queen, and to perpetuate her memory.

It was to this latter foundation that we made our way recently during a brief visit to Caen, for we were told that the Abbaye is now used by a nursing sisterhood, as the town Hospital, and where a hospital is to be seen nurses can assuredly find something that will interest and perhaps teach them. This spacious building, so long the home of prayer and mediation, is now the scene of the no less sacred duty of ministering to the sick and suffering. The admirable way in which the venerable Abbaye, with its airy corridors and lofty apartments, is adapted to this purpose, at once strikes one.

The long cool passages lead us upstairs to the large wards, and if to our eyes—fresh from another régime—there is a bare unfurnished look in them, and we miss at first glance the coloured rugs, and bright flowers and plants, to which we are so accustomed in our English hospitals that we take them as a matter of course, and which form so pleasing a variety to break up the monotony of long lines and bare spaces, yet the air of the ward is cheerful, the beds are spotlessly

clean, and there is a general atmosphere of peace and calm, where the noises of the outer world do not penetrate.

The gentle-faced Sisters moving silently from bed to bed, receive us with pleasant looks, and are ready to answer any question, and give us any information we require.

Although it is only ten in the morning, we find that a meal is being given round. We watch a group of children—apparently convalescent—who are evidently enjoying a lunch which is certainly not to be found in the diet scales of our experience.

It consists of a bowl of clear soup, with pieces of meat in it, some shell-fish like mussels, and some thin red wine!

Passing on we come to the children's ward, bearing over the door the inscription "Les Saints Innocents." Here are collected a happy party in charge of an elderly, motherly looking attendant.

The trim neatness and order of an English ward are not to be looked for here. The quaint little wooden beds—like boxes—would doubtless be condemned by the sanitary ideas of to-day; and the old-fashioned cap tied on each tiny head would also, I feel sure, find no favour in the eyes of an apostle of hygiene. But the effect of the whole scene gave an impression of an atmosphere of tender care surrounding these little travellers, who had gone so short a distance along life's road, and yet had already found it a hard and difficult path.

Outside in a small sunny courtyard, a few of the children were placed on a mattress on the ground, in charge of a bright faced young girl, evidently a novice, and whose duties we imagined corresponded to those of a probationer in our ranks.

Before we took leave we were shown a small ward, with the words, "L'Ange Gardien," written over the door. Here all cases "in extremis" are moved, that their last hours may not be disturbed by the noise and distraction inseparable from the routine of a common ward. This is surely a wise and thoughtful arrangement, by which the dying as they approach the borderland and enter into the Valley of the Shadow may be free from the sights and sounds that might harass and jar upon the spirit which has done with the cares and concerns of this world.

For the other patients in the general wards, also, the arrangement is a most happy one. It is certainly depressing to sick people when deaths occur in their midst. They are acutely conscious of all that goes on behind the drawn screens, and the subsequent removal of the body is a gruesome sight to those who remain behind, and who are apt to wonder if the next turn will be their own.

The gardens and well-timbered grounds stretching behind the old buildings afford a delightful place of recreation for the able-bodied inmates of this ancient Foundation.

I should advise anyone interested in nursing, who may happen to find herself with some leisure hours at Caen, to visit this quiet spot, where—though methods and theories may differ widely from ours—the beneficent object of the work is the aim after which we all strive.

"Guérir quelquefois
Soulager souvent
Consoler toujours."

M. GREENHOUGH SMITH.

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