

Professional Review.

Extracts from "French Life in Town and Country."

By HANNAH LYNCH.

THE ASSISTANCE PUBLIQUE.

The Assistance Publique has done more for the poor than all the Kings of France put together. In the days of Louis XIV. there was no such thing as a public lying-in hospital. Wretched women, without a home or means of any kind to obtain them shelter for the birth of their child, had to go to the Hôtel de Ville, where they lay on the floors, and even two occupied each of the few beds, and childbirth took place in a state of indescribable filth and discomfort.

The calumniated Assistance Publique has built a large maternité, where mothers and infants receive all possible care; and, in case of pressure on their space, they pay midwives properly diplomæd to take charge of poor women in their own houses. Everything at present is so comfortably organised in these public institutions, that many women of small means prefer to avail themselves of them rather than endure the domestic upheaval of a confinement at home. It should, however, be admitted that the Assistance Publique took the idea from M. Pinard's charmingly situated maternité of the Boulevard Port Royal. M. Pinard is something more than a celebrated accoucheur; he is a philanthropist, or, as his enthusiastic disciple, Dr. Franck Brentano, said of him, when kindly doing me the honours of the maternité of the Boulevard Port Royal, he is a saint. He decided that his hospital should be cheerfully situated, and so it lies in lovely gardens, and on every side, the patients have views of flowers and trees, and green spaces between well-kept paths. Not a hospital this, surely, but an elegant old mansion, through whose long, open windows the fragrance and bloom of flowers carry joy to the senses, while the song of birds makes perpetual music for the weary convalescents. Dr. Franck Brentano showed me the trim rose-beds with the proud intimation that it was M. Pinard who exclusively reared them for his invalids. From time to time he gathers them and places a rose, moist with its early dew, beside a patient, bringing her, with such delicacy, the assurance that she is, for him, something more than a public patient.

I have heard a great deal of abuse of the lay nurses who replace the sisters now in public hospitals. All I can say is, that I was struck with the spirit of cordiality and exquisite humanity which seemed to emanate from everybody I encountered at M. Pinard's maternité. This, of course, may be due to the governing hand, for where so rare a nature as the chief commands the illimitable devotion and passionate admiration of his subordinates, it is but natural we should find an atmosphere of disinterestedness and good will. That M. Pinard's delicate consideration for oppressed womanhood does not end, or even begin, in this well-ordered hospital is proven by the establishment of his admirable asylum close by. This is a home for friendless women awaiting their turn to be received in the hospital. Here they may come for two or three months, free to live and work as they like, to go to mass, to the temple or synagogue, or to no church whatever; and, by sewing or some such light labour,

to earn a little to put by for the day they leave the maternité. . . . The land that can produce men and women like M. Pinard and Madame Coralie Cahen, need have no fear of the triumph of decadence. There were nearly seven thousand births during the last year at the maternité. When we remember that women are not obliged to give their names, and that their secret is honorably kept in the teeth of all inquiries that may be made, there seems less and less reason to-day for the extremities of despair. . . .

NUNS AS NURSES.

For years past there has been raging in France a bitter war between the Catholics and the Radicals on the subject of hospital nurses. The Republic, which mistrusts the Catholic party, has sought to limit their power in every direction. It was a mistake, I think, to attack them at hospital beds, for if there is a place which belongs by divine right, if I may say so, to the nun, it is the side of a sick bed. With their guimps and coifs, their life of religious meekness, their cheerfulness and self-abnegation, they make ideal sick-nurses. Then the patient feels that with them it is not a profession, the means to an end, that money is not their object, nor are they likely to forget their duty in a flirtation with the doctor. In England and France I had had, unfortunately, experience of both kinds of nurse, and I unhesitatingly give my preference to the French nun. She is softer, kinder, gayer, and more delicate and modest in her handling of a patient than the average lady nurse of England. She nurses you for love of nursing, or for the good of her soul, and she has the secret of a boundless sympathy and untiring good-will. Yet many scientific Frenchmen and big doctors, while praising her disinterestedness and purity of motive, allow her unsatisfactory peculiarities. For instance, they complain of her indocility to the doctor and surgeon, and state that when a difference of opinion between them and the superioress arises, the religious sick-nurses will obey the superioress rather than those in whose hands lies the fate of the patient. Dr. Fauvel, of le Havre, stated before the International Congress of Assistance, relative to the laity of the new hospital of that town: "As regards primary instruction and professional education, the nuns are in no wise superior, quite the contrary; with an incomplete professional education the lay staff has shown special knowledge ignored by the nuns, nursing the sick with greater intimate skill, preparing instruments, baths, helping the doctors and pupils more efficiently, being more docile in taking the thousand precautions ordered in operations and the dressing of wounds. It is a mistake to regard as false all the accusations made against the Sisters; and I declare emphatically that I have found in lay nurses an equal and often a more spontaneous devotion." This is quite possible, but I maintain, upon personal experience of both methods, that the religious atmosphere brings a refinement and delicacy into the sick-room by no means to be despised. At Lyons, as early as the 15th century, a medium was found between congregational and secular sick nursing. It appears to work excellently, though the persons in this state affair who deserve our pity are the unfortunate sick-nurses, whose sole reward of a life of unceasing labour is the precarious value of fifty low masses after death. I cannot, for the life of me, see why these poor women, so

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)