

## Our Foreign Letter.

### CONTINENTAL HOSPITAL KITCHENS.



In my visitations to Continental hospitals I have seen some of the most beautiful and also the cleanest hospital kitchens imaginable, and have been surprised to find in how many of them all—or nearly all—of the work is done by women. One sometimes feels here that the kitchen stands on a higher plane than it does with us. We seem to be a little ashamed of kitchens, and often give them a mean corner and ugly appliances. Our home kitchens are usually hideous, and over here they are apt to be among the prettiest rooms of the house. To be sure, in these hospitals nothing like our charming little diet, or teaching-kitchens is even imagined, nor, except in some private hospitals, is the dainty tray to be found such as we have it under the beautifying influence of our domestic science teachers in training-schools. But some of the big hospital kitchens are beautiful to behold.

There seems to be a modern prejudice against brass and copper utensils, and no doubt iron-agate ware is more hygienic and easily cleansed. It is certainly also very pretty in the blue and white; but there is a kind of stunning gorgeousness about a huge hospital kitchen completely fitted out with brass and copper of the most solid and massive handiwork and shapes of antique and classic beauty, all polished until they reflect the light. A special one of these pictures of mediæval kitchen beauty and cheer was in Bruges, at the hospital of St. John. Deep covetousness filled my soul at sight of the copper bowls and brass pitchers hanging on the wall and standing about all ready to be stolen. The nun in charge, moving about in the dim spaces (for that kitchen was rather dark) in her robes and bat-like cap, made a most charming picture of a kitchen of the olden time. Then I shall not forget the kitchen in the big city, or rather canton, hospital at Berne. This was quite modern in its fittings and of a spotless cleanliness. One could not only have eaten off of the floor, but have quite enjoyed doing so. In the midst was a slender and even delicate-looking young deaconess in her dress of dark blue with small white spots and cap, who was the presiding genius of the kitchen. Every morning at six o'clock she was in the kitchen, her staff of women being there at four. She had a couple of men to do heavy work, but all the cooking was done by women under her supervision. The arrangement of everything was most orderly and dainty, and the kitchen was bright, as it was on the ground floor of a pavilion which stood in the exact centre of the whole architectural plan, the wards being along three sides of a great square, the administration in front, and the kitchen in the middle of the open space. Its architectural outline, with a big clock-tower, was so attractive that it was ornamental rather than otherwise.

Another beautiful kitchen was in Munich in the

General Hospital. The hospital has 800 beds, and the kitchen was spacious, with a number of smaller sub-kitchens opening from it in three directions. It was completely furnished with a most lavish and beautiful array of brass and copper very picturesquely arranged, some hanging in rows and some standing on shelves, the huge cauldrons all in their places on the great fireplace. One small room was completely filled with brass jugs and other utensils waiting to be scoured and polished. The hospital is in charge of Catholic Sisters, and there were five or six of them in the kitchen and its precincts, all at work cooking different things. In one small wing apple-tarts were being made; in another the vegetables were being cut up. This kitchen also was as clean as wax, and had a hospitable and home-like atmosphere that was very noticeable. It seemed like a place that was lived in. The Sisters were cheerful, friendly souls, not in the least austere, and seemed much pleased at our interest and admiration. (Mrs. Robb was with me.) The Head Sister told me she had no men—only women—help, and that these prepared vegetables and cleaned up, but that the Sisters did the entire cooking with the exception of the bread, which was bought. Their diet-lists, too, were very detailed and systematically kept, with duplicates in the bread-room, where sat the Sister who attended to the bread-cutting machine, which slices bread into any desired width. (Have we these machines at home? I am ashamed to say I do not remember positively, but seem to have a recollection of ward maids or junior nurses slicing the bread by hand.) I saw the bread-cutting machine first in the *Wilhelmina* Hospital in Amsterdam, and in Holland kitchens and kitchen appliances are elevated to a fine art, both in convenience and attractiveness. Now, perhaps the Sisters are not always good nurses, for they do not receive the training; but these German Sisters are certainly notable housekeepers, and a prettier sight than this great kitchen, the Sisters in big aprons, white fichus, and heavily pleated white linen caps, would be hard to find.

But perhaps the most sumptuous and amazing kitchen of all so far seen was the one in Venice in the *Civil Hospital*. This was bigger even and more opulent-looking, and its brasses more bewildering, more enormous, and more varied than any, for it had to provide for 1,300 patients. This, too, was beautifully clean—indeed, the whole hospital was the cleanest place we had seen so far in Italy. Here Sisters of Charity were in charge, wearing close black hoods and white aprons, and giving the same air of sweetness and charm. Four men assistants were allowed in this kitchen to do heavy work.

Now, one delightful kitchen was not in a hospital, but I must just put it in, for it was in a Hospiz—the hospiz on the top of the *Simplon Pass* coming by post-wagon from Switzerland to Italy. The monks here entertain all travellers, as they do on the *St. Bernard*, and their kitchen was big enough to stow away a hundred people, with a huge fireplace in the middle with its copper cauldrons full of hot beef-tea. The post-wagons always stop here, and the whole train filed in to be refreshed. As the pass was covered with snow, the hot bouillon was most acceptable. The monk in his brown robes was a fatherly soul; but, loveliest of all, behind the fireplace in a choice spot were seven young *St. Bernard dogs*, with their whole outfit of bones and warm mush-pot. Not all kitchens can boast of such an attraction.

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