

Eight Months in French Hospitals.

By MISS EDLA R. WORTABET.

(Continued from page 250.)

My friend, who was a member of the Plaisance Dispensary, took me across to St. Joseph's Hospital, which stands just opposite the road. She is decidedly *clérical*, and she gave a contented smile, when on coming away, she saw how enchanted I was with all I saw. This new hospital, containing some 200 beds, has been given to the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul, and I must say I fell on some of the sweetest of their kind, and to my astonishment, their heavy grey cloth dresses were replaced by brown holland overalls, which looked quite neat with their deep white linen collars and tidy aprons. There was no question now about their having the pull over the municipal nurses.

Their wards were brightened with plants and flowers, and both they and the patients looked happy and on good terms. But, unfortunately, there was this same fatal system of having male and female attendants in each ward, and only one sister to supervise. It seems to me so extraordinary that they do not have probationer nurses amongst the nuns to do all the ward work. It is, after all, they who cook and do the laundry, and all the other rough and menial work, and, apart from the fact that they stop at nothing to save their souls, many of them come from quite the working class. It is, therefore, their system which is wrong and not themselves.

The same might be said of the municipal hospitals, for apart from the nursing staff, it is their mode of administration and their methods which are so fundamentally faulty. It certainly seems very extraordinary that there should be no medical superintendent and no nursing superintendent, and that there should be no professional supervision over the house physicians and surgeons, and no head to the *surveillantes* and nursing staff, beyond the *directeur*. Those who have visited the immense Paris hospitals will realise how little supervision the director can give, and the result of such a deplorable organisation, where young women and young men, male and female nurses, to say nothing of wild young doctors and students, are thrown together, and where it seems that night supervision is so lax.

Therefore, though I can readily see the formidable difficulties there are in coping with some of the almost unsolvable problems, yet it seems to me a very simple change to create two new posts, viz., those of medical and nursing superintendents. Such a move would cause a considerable reform and remedy much of the existing evil, and, as in the course of time the posts of *surveillantes* will only be given to those who pass the highest examinations

and who consequently are educated women, the tone of the hospitals would soon change.

The municipal lectures are given only in four places:—

The Salpêtrière and Bicêtre (infirmaries), the Pitié and Lariboisière (general hospitals), so that the nurses from the other hospitals are sent in wagons by the authorities. The lecturers are paid and chosen men, so that it is a matter of pecuniary consideration to limit the number. These lectures were first started in 1879, 1880 and 1889.

In 1902, Combes, president of the Council of the Assistance Publique and Prime Minister, sent a circular to all the *préfets* of France, requesting them to pursue with zeal the foundation of training-schools for nurses.

Combes' policy of anti-clericalism and secularisation was carried on with such an excess of zeal that he was obliged to send in his resignation not long ago.

I was so anxious to attend the lectures that I sent in my name to the Hotel de Ville asking for permission. I received a courteous answer saying that I was to present myself at the Salpêtrière on a certain date, either with my *brevet* or ready to pass an exam. This was a difficulty I had not anticipated and which frightened me not a little I, however, plucked up my courage and presented myself, and the ordeal turned out less alarming than I had expected.

There were several free pupils like myself, eleven St. Augustin Sisters from l'Hotel Dieu, and the rest were municipal nurses and candidates. Those who had *brevets* presented them, and the rest of us had to undergo a long dictation on hygiene and two problems of arithmetic.

Spelling never has been a strong point with me (much less sums), so I asked whether we should be allowed to make any mistakes, and they said, "Yes, ten." I made five, one of them being exercise, which I spelt with an *se* instead of *ce*—English fashion. My other mistakes must have been very funny, for the two examiners shook with laughter over them.

I was very much relieved when they told me I had only made five mistakes, and as my problems were correct, and I had a good running hand and spoke so fluently, they passed me with much pleasure.

I was very much touched at the courtesy I received from the examiners, and the nice feelings shown me by my fellow candidates, but, as I have already said, the standard of education was not very high, and those who presented themselves were of a humble condition—in fact, several had to be rejected.

I hardly knew how to contain myself with impatience till the following Monday, October 10th, when the first lecture was to be given. We all had to pass through the lodge gates, where tickets of admission were given us with our names and number and the signature of the director.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)