

always they are well filled. At first glance such a ward was not prepossessing. The beds were all in a state of great disorder—and it is a well-known fact that a bed with covers pulled out from the foot and trailing on the floor on one side and with a pillow gone on the other can produce the effect of dirtiness, even if the sheets have been changed that morning. The occupants of these beds were all old men, and they were crawling in and out to wait on themselves or their more helpless neighbours, with a fine disregard for keeping in place any article of apparel other than their red cotton night-caps. To each ward there were “infirmières,” or caretakers, one or two, as it might be, untidy, helpless-looking women, with no very definite ideas of the requirements of their position, and the empty, unwashed plates and cups lying about on table and floor were trifles that seemed quite beneath their notice.

The dormitories where the inmates slept in some cases adjoined the wards; they were big, bare rooms, crowded with beds which were placed side by side and head to foot, and only separated from one another by a space a few inches wide. They were kept in immaculate order, however, but lack of proper air space was very evident, even though the rooms were empty.

In the children's side of the institution the same conditions prevail. They are taken in at any age up to thirteen, and taught to read and write and given an elementary education by specially-appointed instructors, until at the age of thirteen situations or employment are found for them and they are sent away. The directress, who took me over the building, opened the door of the children's playroom, and instantly a herd of about fifty children, not one over four years of age, came tumbling out like little animals when the cage door is opened. Each was dressed in a blue cotton pinafore, and their heads were cropped closely, except in a few cases where the possessor had been left with a little top-knot or forelock, the badge of femininity. Almost without exception they had ringworm, sometimes in most aggravated forms, yet none of them seemed “one penny the worse.” A deafening chorus of “Bon jour, madame,” and handshaking at the rate of seven at a time had to be gone through with before we could get on into the next department, where the older girls were. They likewise, in equal numbers, flung themselves on the door the minute it was unlocked, and a perfect pandemonium of “Bonjours” ensued, from which it was difficult to escape.

The *hôpital* kitchen is unique. It cannot be described, but the impression of a dark room, arched over by a high, vaulted stone ceiling, is mediæval in the extreme. A charcoal fire and utensils of burnished copper make bright patches in the quaint picture.

The *hôpital* possesses what is probably the finest

linen-room that any institution ever had—indeed, it would be hard to find such another room, used for such a purpose, in any house, public or private. Originally it was the library of the monastery—a great room, 100 ft. or more in length, and less than half that in width, situated on the top floor of one of the buildings. Shelves run around the walls from one end to the other and extend to the ceiling, and the edges of these shelves, which are very wide, the divisions between them, and the ceiling itself are one mass of wonderful carving. Like all wood-carving of those days, there is nothing superficial about the patterns—on the contrary, they are cut boldly and deeply, and the intricate and elaborate designs stand out in high-relief. Half-way down one side of the room is a little closet with a window in it, and the doors and shelves of it are wonderfully carved; here the monks used to keep their “immoral books,” but now books of every sort are gone, and the little closet as well as the shelves of the great library hold only the clean, new linen of the establishment.

Until two years ago nuns were in charge of this and other hospitals in Rheims, but they were then expelled, and the institutions placed under different control. The *Hôpital Général* is one of five which are under the management of one directress, herself not a nurse, but a woman of great executive ability, and who has begun as a first step in the reform a violent crusade against dirt. Compared with its condition two years ago, the *hôpital* is a perfect paradise of cleanliness. Among the *débris* were found in one of the rooms, encrusted with dirt, and used as common carpets, tapestries which have since proved to be of Gobelin make and of priceless value. At present they hang on the stone walls of the staircase near the old library, having been cleaned and restored as perfectly as possible.

The other institutions under the same management include a hospital for incurables, one for incurable children, one for convalescents, and a fourth which I have forgotten. The Civil Hospital for the “grandes maladies” is also emancipated from the nuns' authority, which took place two years ago, but it has a directress of its own. The directress of the *Hôpital Général* has had, and has, enormous difficulties to contend with. The “infirmières” (one cannot call them nurses, nor even caretakers, since that implies some little responsibility, which they carefully avoid) are, many of them, women of the lowest class. Drunkenness is common among them, and the discharge of one means the discontent of many and possible mutiny of all, so that progress is exceedingly slow, and every advance step has to be carefully thought out and planned for. As assistants the directress has eight “*surveillantes*” on a salary of a hundred francs (four pounds) a month, and fifty-two caretakers (including the “infirmières”) whose wages range from fifty to sixty francs a month.

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