

The Position of Nursing in France.

By ANNA HAMILTON, M.D.

(Continued from page 158).

The Chairman, considering how numerous were the conclusions proposed by each of the four reporters, decided to lay before the Congress the points on which the general reporter, M. Sabran, differed from the other reporters, and to adopt or reject them by vote after discussing them.

I will not attempt to give a full description of the violent discussion which ensued and lasted more than three hours; how doctors and hospital guardians from many towns made speeches for or against reform, the insulting assault made on the Mayor of Bordeaux by a guardian because of his declaring that all was to be reformed in the hospitals, the uproar which many times filled the great hall when the most exciting points had to be voted. It was indeed a wonderful sight, this immense assembly, mostly gentlemen, so intensely interested in the nursing question, which only three years ago, when I took it as the subject of my M.D. thesis, was considered as "queer," "improper," "ridiculous," "not worth printing," and so forth.

The Chairman favoured most evidently the conclusions of my report, of which most are in accordance with Combès' "Circulaire," and several times brought them forward as "interesting," "important," "practical," to the indignation of many. The Training-school of the "Maison de Santé Protestante" was constantly mentioned as an example, most irritatingly for those who declared such improvements impossible.

1. The first point violently discussed was the conclusion that probationers should be well-educated girls, and it was impossible to get a vote on this. The fact that nuns are generally all recruited in the peasant or servant class drew forth great clerical wrath as to such a *desideratum*.

2. Ought training-schools be established in hospitals connected with universities? was the next subject. The general reporter considered that it should be so (though in Lyons he sends the pupils in wards where students are not allowed to enter!). The Chairman insisted on this point as being a guarantee of success for the recruitment of the right sort of probationers.

But the public, who holds that this is one of the great reasons for the maintenance of religious orders, would not consent to such a plan; in fact, all the conditions which aim at favouring the right kind of school being established were fought against, on account of the congregations, who, but for the hospitals they hold, would be entirely expelled from France.

My next conclusion was that probationers ought to be trained under the superintendence of competent nurses; the Congress declared that the visiting doctor was to have the responsibility of their training, which was also the general reporter's opinion.

The bestowal of a diploma or certificate was adopted, and also that practical work should be considered more important than the theoretical examination.

The "matronship" roused a great deal of wrath, all these doctors and guardians considering that a "directrice" would be quite as bad as going backwards twenty years ago, when the "Supérieure" of the convent was the terror of all, being most powerful and

very ignorant. Of course she hampered them in everything. Only four years ago I knew of a Supérieure in a small hospital who forbade the surgeon to employ iodoform for his patients, as she disliked its smell!

M. Sabran declared that if a directrice was named the board of guardians might as well re-ign. That the Matron is a help and a guarantee of good order, economy, morality, does not seem to be possible in their opinion; she can only be an enemy. This is not so illogical as it would seem. They hate the Superior, and would withhold official power from her, but they want to keep the nuns, supposing that lay women can only be of loose morals in the hospitals! The fact that the Matron cannot work against doctors, being a trained nurse, and that she acts for the board (who can dismiss her if she should not prove up to her duty) could not be understood by them, and the vote was—no directrice.

Another point which was fought about was, were all the pupils of the nursing schools to have the same hospital training?—which was my opinion. M. Sabran declared that pupils meaning to do private nursing need not; it was also Dr. Durand's opinion. The vote was that there should be two kinds of training. But here was, of course, the secret thought that nuns could not hold all the posts in hospitals if they were to admit many probationers in the wards; the reporters consider that only the nuns will do the real ward work, and outsiders, lay pro's, will come in only for the time the doctors go round!

But by-and-by we had the Congress in a contradictory vote, unawares, when it was decided that all nurses ought to have a certificate after an identical training and examinations gone through in a hospital of the Assistance Publique.

Several secondary questions were discussed, and, finally, the important one of pensions was aired, but without any definite result.

On the whole, the Congress, though seeming to oppose many of the principles of real nursing schools, has been very useful to the cause of hospital reform by bringing forward arguments which shortly afterwards have been disowned by those who brought them forward!

The Congress at the close of the meeting drove to visit the Maison de Santé Protestante, and several of the greatest opponents of the intended reforms were surprised, intensely interested, and charmed when finding there a nursing school based on the principles they had just declared impossible to realise!

A Well-Earned Distinction.

At the banquet which closed the Congress of the Assistance Publique, the Minister of Public Instruction, M. Chaumié, presented to Dr. Anna Hamilton the "Palme Académique" (a certificate with a tiny violet bow) as a recognition of the able report which she had presented to the Congress. Her own Board of Guardians presented her with the decoration for grand occasions, two tiny palms, covered with small diamonds and rubies—a very handsome ornament. The gift is the more interesting as it is distinctly a tribute to the value of the reform work for which Dr. Hamilton stands.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)