Eight Months in French Hospitals.

By Miss Edla R. Wortabet.

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On taking up my post in Paris, I felt that if I was going to do any good I must know my ground and my bearings before I could steer even a small ship with wisdom and accuracy.

I have several influential friends in Paris who are keenly interested in the hospital and nursing reform, and I owe them a great deal for all the moral and practical help they gave me in encouraging me and giving me useful introductions. But, after all, it is what we do ourselves that teaches and qualifies us to cope with any object or subject which we undertake to cope with.

It therefore seemed to me that the two steps to be taken were first to visit the hospitals, study their workings, and see for myself their good, as well as their weak points; and, secondly, to attend both the municipal lectures and those of private societies (such as L'Union des Femmes de France, &c.).

There is nothing easier than visiting the municipal hospitals, for they are open to the public on Thursdays and Sundays from 1 to 4 p.m., and there is nothing to prevent one from going about from ward to ward speaking to the patients and nurses and gathering all the information one wishes.

Naturally, one's first impression is an unfavourable one, and I do not think that I can ever accustom myself to the uniform of the municipal nurses and attendants. Brown holland overalls and shapeless, big, coarse aprons are neither smart, attractive, nor neat looking. How one misses the neat, tight-fitting uniforms, with the dainty caps and white linen collars, cuffs, and aprons of the British nurses! Altogether one's ideas of French good taste in dress and politeness receive a great shock on entering French hospitals, for one meets with neither. But, as I got to know these nurses, their lives and their sufferings, I got to understand and to love them. They are badly lodged, ill fed, and overworked by the administration, and by the patients and the public they are treated with no respect or consideration or gratitude. No wonder they get defiant and unpleasant in their manners; even a down-trodden omnibus horse kicks when he is lashed beyond endurance. In fact, there is a tendency amongst them of late to fight for their rights and to try to improve their condition, especially as a better class of women are entering the profession. The present regulations not only compel a preliminary exam or the possession of a *brevet*, but, if at the end of their professional first year they do not pass their exams and obtain their diploma, they are not admitted or recognised as "nurses," but simply as *filles de service—i.e.*, servants or ward-maids.

There are many nurses even now who are unable to read or write.

I went to the home of one of them with a young friend who, with several of her companions, has for several years past visited a children's hospital regularly once a week (by special permission of the doctor of the wards), taking each child a toy or a picture-book, and doing her best to help and encourage the nurses.

As my friend knocked at the door she called out, "Minon."

"Mademoiselle Lilly," was the joyous answer, and the door flew open revealing the brightest and dearest of all faces.

It was quite beautiful seeing Minon and Mademoiselle Lilly greeting each other, the one so essentially a working woman, the other a slim, fair-haired girl—so unmistakably an aristocrat (for they still exist in France).

Minon was married, but she had no children, and her little house, consisting of a bedroom, sitting-room, and kitchen, were thoroughly well furnished with solid, good furniture, and everything was most beautifully clean. It was her "afternoon off," and she had done her weekly cleaning and was cooking the evening meal. Minon was an infirmière in the Trousseau hospital for children—quite a modern, up-to-date hospital, built in blocks, with all the latest hygienic improvements and very fine theatres, beautifully fitted up and mounted; but the more modern and the finer the buildings the more incongruous do the rough-looking nurses and male attendants look in their overalls—the frame and the picture do not harmonise or correspond.

We both sat down while Minon stood talking to us with her hands on her hips, and it was not long before she gave us the history of her simple life, which, to her, appeared such an eventful one. Minon came from a Breton village (a large number of nurses come from Brittany). She was the eldest daughter of a large family, and, having no *dot*, she could not marry, and her brothers and sisters required food and clothing; so she came to Paris and became an *infirmière* in the early days of secularisation, and sent her earnings home. Finally, Minon's goodness was rewarded, for she found in the uncle of one of her little patients a good honest and loving husband. To hear Minon relate how he used to sit by his niece's bedside and watch her as she went about her work, till out of sheer nervousness she would dash out of the ward; how he started courting her and how she snubbed him; and how, at last he had to resort to his sister's help to convince her that he was courting her "pour le bon motif," was delicious. After that what could Minon do but accept an invitation to dinner on Sunday at his sister's house? And, oh, how shy she was when the *fiançailles* came off, and how happy she has been since her marriage! Such a good husband, and she loved her little patients, and

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