

French Nurses.

By special request from many I will try to describe as truthfully as I can French nurses as they are to-day. In talking of French nurses, I must include nuns, deaconesses, the municipal *infirmières*, and the new school nurses.

As compared to German nurses, I should say the French had far more the knack of nursing. They are quicker to understand and perceive, they are more deft and lighter in hand as regards technique, but they lack the solidity of the German nurse, and they would never get through the work a German would.

As compared to English nurses, one might make the same comparison, as far as quickness, perception, and intelligence is concerned. They are cleverer at picking up things, and one has only to look at the way they keep their linen and their dressings to see their love of order and deftness of hand. For I have seen some of the nuns mending the linen of the patients and darning the sheets as no English woman can do, and I have looked in the cupboards and drawers and seen the exquisite neatness with which they have kept their surgical dressings and bandages, even to daintiness, which could never be surpassed by any other women, just as their millinery and "lingerie" is unequalled; but there is a curious trait in the French nation which spoils everything, and that is superficialness and lack of thoroughness, which seems inconsistent with their love of order and of the beautiful. Take for instance Paris, which is acknowledged as one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Her drainage is disgraceful, and the housing of the poor is shocking, while her hospitals and her treatment of her sick poor is pitiful. Anything that relates to the ideal and to the beautiful is unsurpassable, anything to thoroughness and comfort and administration they lack in; and yet they have order, and the outcome of order which is thrift. In thrift French nurses would put English ones to shame. I have seen a French nurse walk down a whole passage to relight a match which had already been used from a gas jet. Apart from the extraordinarily inconsistent lack of thoroughness, they lack the sense of discipline. The only discipline nuns know is that of the Church and the priest, while the only discipline the *infirmière* of the municipal hospitals knows is the law, for, in becoming a nurse, she becomes a government official, subject to its rules and regulations, engagement, dismissal, and pension. The nuns have been sent away from the government hospital for their lack of submis-

sion to her laws, and the *infirmière* knows no moral law, beyond the accomplishment of her work. The deaconess, I regret to say, lacks the *dévouement* of the nun, and the clear, honest position of the lay nurse—she is neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring, as the saying is; her half-vows (*demi-vœux*) prevent her from being sanctified as the nun, and from being a progressive woman as the lay nurse, but just manage to make her feel superior—by rights of Divine consecration, which she imagines raises her above the lay woman. Fortunately the French deaconess is a limited quantity, and the two orders which exist in Paris—i.e., *les diaconesses de Reuilly* and *les diaconesses Batignolles*—are supplemented by a few Alsations or Swiss, and it will not be long before they will die out and be replaced by the new order of the educated lay nurses. The latter "new school," which is in imitation of the English nurse, is making sure, but very slow progress, and after seven years' uphill work cannot possibly number more than seventy in all (both certificated and those still undergoing training). One reason is that apart from the Protestant Hospital at Bordeaux, the facilities given the pupils are not attractive, while the rules are hard. Both the Rue Amyot and the Rue Vercingétorex training schools make their pupils pay, and they moreover bind them for five years, two for training and three for private nursing, and as the position of French lay nursing is by no means assured, the young ladies find private nursing most distasteful. It isn't the slightest good telling French young ladies that nursing is a very honourable way of earning their living. Unless they are very plain, or sickly and delicate and absolutely without *dot*, French girls can always marry, and if they are well educated they can always earn their living by teaching, which to them is a more intellectual and pleasant work, and failing that, should they feel a *vocation* for nursing they prefer the more honoured position of the nun.

If French nursing is to become a success, there must first be a war, and when all the ladies of the "Croix Rouge," and of the "Union des Femmes de France" find that their hearts are broken and that their knowledge of nursing is small, that the nuns are not much better and that the coarse *infirmières* are not desirable, when the whole nation is so moved by all that war brings with it, then they will warm up, social positions, marriage, habits and customs will be set aside, and the new modern nurse will succeed.

Before closing, I should like to add a few words as regards my experience of training

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