

Our Foreign Letter.

FROM FRANCE.



I witnessed a very pretty and interesting ceremony the other day; it was the distribution of prizes

and diplomas to the nurses at the Salpêtrière, and to those from other hospitals who come to the Salpêtrière for their classes and lectures. The exercises were held in the pavilion where the Charcot museum is placed, and the back of the long room was built up with raised seats. The platform was placed at the other end, under the beautiful painting of Pinel, standing in the court of the ancient Salpêtrière, and watching the effect upon a pathetic insane patient, of having the cruel irons struck off for ever.

To me, of all the hospitals of Paris, there is none so interesting as the Salpêtrière, with its varied associations, excepting only the Hôtel Dieu.

The nurses came in flocks, looking very neat and pretty in their best *costumes de fête*, their little white bow caps freshly ironed, their aprons likewise, and all wore gloves. The platform was prettily decorated with plants, and a long table stood at the side where the diplomas and prizes were placed, several *surveillantes* and the *chef du personnel* sitting by it to distribute them.

M. Mesureur, Dr. Bourneville, M. Montreuil, and a number of physicians took their place on the platform, while many friends and relatives of the nurses came to see the event. Altogether the scene and air were of joyous importance and expectancy.

It looked very strange to me to see a presentation of diplomas without a Matron! It is the first time in my life that she has been absent, and I missed her very much. Dr. Bourneville read the report, full of important records, valuable statistics, with the historical summary, aims for the future, claims and wishes that he has made a point of repeating yearly, then M. Mesureur addressed the class, and then the *Chef du Service* read aloud in turn the standings of all the pupils under all the varied subjects of study—*anatomy, physiology, etc., etc.*, and announced the prizes. There were several classes of prizes, but I could not understand quite all of that part of it. The nurses came forward to receive their prizes, and diplomas, and then, after the pretty, ceremonious fashion that we saw at the Hôtel de Ville, they were taken up on the platform to be introduced to important personages. There were two religious Sisters among the candidates for diplomas, and, according to Dr. Bourneville's reports, quite a number have taken

and are taking the professional instruction. Is not this a proof that the world moves?

M. Mesureur spoke so beautifully to the nurses, with such serious, straightforward dignity, and right from his own level, no talking down to them or patronising them. He took the occasion to speak of improvements that are to be made in the night duty, and of other details about the service, really making them all feel that they are a part of the Administration, and inspiring them with a sense of responsibility. I so much liked one thing that he said—he rejected the idea that has sometimes been expressed, that the word *infirmière* had come to have a hopelessly menial signification, and that it could never be anything but a lowly term, and he called upon them all not to wish to change this term, but to keep it and elevate it. I thought that was fine. Was not the word "nurse" once upon a time just as low in the scale of dignity? But now we would not exchange it for any other.

Dr. Bourneville's whole heart is given to the nurses and to their teaching. I greatly admire the dauntless courage, untiring patience, and uncompromising ideals of this veteran savant. We do not begin to know how immense his services have been in the cause of education. I have been reading over his reports for a number of years past, and they are intensely interesting. He is a warrior. His kind smile and mild tones do not betray this, but one can see it in his dominant nose, and in the straight, keen blue-gleance. Then there is something in the way that snow-white hair stands that shows he is always ready for the fray.

How seldom it occurs that a great physician is also actively interested in civic progress. He usually stands aside from civics and politics. Dr. Bourneville is a famous specialist in nervous diseases. He created the division for idiot and epileptic children at the Bicêtre, and is the medical chief of the Institute for Treatment and Education of Nervous and Defective Children at Vitry-sur-Seine. He has written much, conducts the *Progrès Medical*, founded the laboratory at Laënnec, established *médecins accoucheurs*, organised and developed the departments of hydrotherapy in a number of hospitals, founded medical libraries, and libraries for the patients, put the boxes into the railway stations to collect magazines for the hospitals, and, as a one-time member of the City Council, was active in measures for the hygiene of the city. His thirty-six years of advocacy of instruction for nurses (for his first effort was made in 1871) seem to me very remarkable, for I do not know of another instance of a physician who for so many years and under circumstances of such difficulty has consistently stood for the principle of education for nurses, nor one who has, at heavy cost of personal sacrifice, so untiringly conducted a pioneer work of which the obstacles, at the outset, may well be called gigantic.

To-day the ground which he began to break up in 1871 is yielding harvest, and all over France the movement for better education in hospital

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