

## Our Foreign Letter.

THE WORK OF M<sup>lle</sup>. NECTOUX AT ALBI.

of Albi, in Southern France, let them not dream of putting up anywhere except at the Hostellerie de Grand Saint-Antoine.

Of all the bewitching, delightful little French inns! Nothing more altogether alluring than this one, with Madame, courteous and capable, meeting you at the door.

However, I did not go to Albi just to enjoy the hospitality of this prettiest and best of inns, nor to admire the lovely country round, nor to wonder at the cathedral, gloomy and terrible, outside, with its wonderful stone lace-work within, nor to revive the history of the heretics of old, who, perhaps, had just the same open, honest, trustworthy faces that fill the streets of Albi to-day; but to see Mademoiselle Nectoux and her staff at the Civil and Military Hospital.

Here my eyes flew open, for I had expected to find M<sup>lle</sup>. Nectoux, the Directrice of a staff of nurses. Instead of that I find her the Matron of the whole establishment (superintendent of the hospital, we would call her) of, altogether, some three hundred beds, some of which are for the aged and infirm. Now, in Paris it is with difficulty one can even conceive of a Directrice at the head of the women personnel of a large hospital, and, perhaps, the idea of a woman head of all the house would not even be entertained as a dream. But in the provinces it is a successful reality. M<sup>lle</sup>. Nectoux is the chief officer of the hospital. The men officials—namely, an Econome (what we would call a steward) and bookkeeper, a pharmacist, and the always-important concierge, are under her authority. As this relationship is new, the officials old and trustworthy, and M<sup>lle</sup>. Nectoux a woman of great common-sense, tact, and savoir-faire; she does not jerk the reins, and all goes smoothly and well. Indeed, since taking charge last January she and her staff of ten headnurses have had all they could do to manage their own particular province, the wards; for, when they arrived, all in one group, at about noon one day, while the nuns left all in another group at one o'clock, they found everything destitute and empty except the beds. Every bed was full, though the supply closets, like Mother Hubbard's cupboard, were bare.

Among the patients in the military division there were eighty cases of scarlet fever and measles, which does not speak very well for sanitary standards in military barracks. For three months they literally "roughed it," almost as if it had been a bit of camp life, and sleep, as one of the nurses remarked with gaiety, "became a lost habit."

But they all enjoyed it, for they had the satisfaction of doing an admirable piece of work, and everyone is glad to have had that experience.

But the Administration of the hospital has been most considerate and active in making improvements. The two long dormitories, where the nuns slept, have been cut up into single rooms for the nurses, as pretty as possible, which each one decorates to her taste (and I believe I would know a nurse's room if I saw it in Afghanistan; for, after all, they do, in hospitals, keep their rooms more neatly and tidily than other people do), and they have their own bath, a nice dining room and reception room. The hospital is a very attractive old place on the mediæval plan, quite hidden from sight behind high walls and a huge mud-coloured arch and gateway. Like all French hospitals it has beautiful gardens and trees, and, like all that I have seen in the provinces, it has a farm large enough to supply all the vegetables and fruit. Two farmers cultivate this domain, and they also raise twelve fat hogs every year for hospital consumption. I thought of Miss Mollett and her chickens when M<sup>lle</sup>. Nectoux remarked casually that the Directrice of a provincial hospital had to know a little of everything, and I asked her what she would do if the farmers were inefficient (a hopeless problem to my mind); but she seemed to think nothing of it, and said for such troubles one could always fall back upon the Administration.

Our forefathers surely had noble ideas of space and architectural effect in building, but few of comfort, and of saving work perhaps none. The present Administration intends making many changes in the old wards. Their enormous windows, now set so high up that they cannot be reached, and that the sun can hardly enter, are to be lowered. The fine old heavily-timbered ceilings (which harbour germs, and cost too much to paint) are to go; I admit I heard this with a pang, for they are so noble. The funny old wooden beds, so hard to make and to keep clean, are being changed for iron frames. What an endless variety of queer corners and cubby-holes in these ancient hospitals, and how hard to keep them clean! But they are clean, and the patients well-kept, though it is heavy work for so small a staff, and all sorts of renovations are stirring and pushing under the strong and capable hands of *la dame blanche*, and her head-nurses, *les bleus*, as the patients at first called them from the colour of their uniforms.

As yet there is no training school, nor, at present, room for one; but I am sure that it will come with time, and that it will be a good one, for the need is urgent.

It gives me a sweet sense of the eternal recreation of things to see this ancient and dingy hospital taken in hand for renovation by these young and buoyant women in clear blue and white. They are at once so definite and so cheery, all gentlewomen, and, seen in the light of their professional activity, more than commonly attractive. One or two come from the Tondu; the Matron and other nurses from the Maison de Santé Protestante, of Bordeaux.

I should know beforehand that these schools would send forth women, who were not only good nurses, but something more—good citizens, with a high en-

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