

Professional Review.

LE ROMAN D'UNE INFIRMIERE.*

Why was this novel written? We suppose it was intended to warn the uninitiated of the temptations, the hardships, the strenuousness of a probationer's life in Paris, to rouse the public conscience to the evil of the conditions it depicts, to stir up the Administration to vigorous action. We think the objects might have been attained no less effectually if its theme had been treated more delicately, with fewer revolting details; as it stands, it is only fit reading for wise men and women; to the rest, it will have much the same effect as the "penny dreadful." Its author, Monsieur Paul Bru, *Directeur* of the Hôpital St. Antoine, writes with authority by virtue of his position. The details of hospital management and routine, the sketches of the various characters, the medical patter and descriptions, all reveal his intimate knowledge of hospital life in Paris. He dedicates the book to M. Mesureur, *Directeur de l'Administration Générale de l'Assistance Publique à Paris*, who, in a graceful preface letter, acknowledges the compliment. This letter even welcomes the drastic criticism of hospital management; he gives hope that a new and better order of things is inevitably following in the steps of the enlightened treatment of the sick, and the advance in hygiene. Great and terrible is the need of reform; here is work for the women of France, to uplift in the eyes of the world one of the noblest of the professions, to purge it from iniquitous conditions, to make it such that girls of good education and moral tone shall not, like the heroine of the tale, find it a nightmare of horrors, a den of vicious and hardening influences.

The romance is briefly this. Germaine, an orphan, endowed with good looks, is obliged by circumstances to earn her living. After vainly trying to enter more honourable (?) professions—e.g. as a bank clerk or shop girl—she enters as a probationer (*filie de service*) in a large hospital in Paris. Determined to show courage and devotion, she resolutely sets herself to the work; the sights of hospital are at first new and terrible to her, but far more is she wounded in her deepest susceptibilities by the low familiarity of the men and the coarse, immoral tone of the majority of the *infirmières*. One of these, Victorine by name, a rough diamond, befriends and champions her, tries to open her eyes to pitfalls, to disillusion her. She also finds a true friend in Bertrand, the *interne* in charge of the first ward to which she is sent to be drilled by a rather acrid sister, Mademoiselle Hélène. She admires and respects Bertrand—his encouragement and protection do much to keep her from despair. After a time, however, she is transferred to another ward, where Meunier is *interne* (the work of an *interne* is analogous with that

of our house physician or surgeon). He is a worthless fellow; well aware that she is very different from the ordinary run of probationers, he wins her love by subtlety. The lonely girl, with no corner to call her own, so sorely in need of affection, so thirsting for happiness, weary after the long day's work, glad to escape from the orgies and ribaldry of the dormitory, welcomes his insidious kindnesses. Fascinated, blind to his true character, and regardless of Victorine's warnings, she becomes his willing victim, and for a time has some amount of pleasure; though now and then the thought of Bertrand, and the awful society into which her lover drags her, make her long for better things. Only after a severe illness, caused by the brutal conduct of Meunier, does she discover his unworthiness, and break with him irrevocably. She devotes herself anew with zeal to her profession, and does so well that she is chosen to help to nurse Bertrand, who has typhoid fever. He dies. Germaine, desolate, goes for a time to her grandparents in the country, but after a while she feels she must go back. She attends the evening lectures with a view to taking her preliminary examination. Great is her joy at passing—now she may hope for yet further advancement. She is now *infirmière de troisième class*, earning 35 to 39 francs a month, privileged to have a room of her own—a veritable palace to her. The novel closes with a scene in the out-patient department, in which she saves the life of the baby of her former lover—a noble revenge.

The crude realism, the merciless detail, the vivid colouring of the book, all combine to make a staggering impression upon the reader—one wrings one's hands and says, can such things be? There, for instance, is the description of the dormitory. "It was the head of a narrow staircase, like that of a loft, Germaine, laden with her parcel, climbs up it with difficulty; the walls on either side are dirty, greasy, crumbling; a suffocating, horrible smell almost overpowers her. At last she reaches the door—goes in, and stands aghast! A loft, lighted by tiny round windows, low, airless. The beds touch, only having a narrow passage in the middle. Here, where there is insufficient room for ten people, twenty are accommodated. No washstands, not even sufficient chairs for everyone; here and there a basin on a broken cane chair. An indescribable disorder reigns on the beds—petticoats, dresses, hats, lie with underlinen, scraps of greasy paper, scent bottles, powder-boxes, dirty combs, and other femininities! Yet there are flowers in broken vases (poetry is loth to die), bringing a ray of sunshine, a whiff of perfume, into this miserable hole."

Here and there, however, the sordid story is redeemed by the devotion and sympathy of some of the staff. We are drawn towards the fatherly, worldly-wise Director, who seems to be burdened with what are in England a Matron's duties in addition to his other, administrative work; his counsel is shrewd, his judgment keen, and he

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[previous page](#)

[next page](#)