Our Foreign Letter.

IN PARIS AGAIN.

(By A Guest at the Salpêtrière.)

III.

It was 11 o'clock before I was able to say good-night to my charming and interesting host and hostess — the Matron and her husband. "I hope you won't think too badly of me," he said, as we parted. "Not at all," I said. "I think you are charming, but I am still unconvinced that you have any right to be here; but I must sleep over it before I decide."

Next morning Madame Jacques asked me which hospital I should like to visit, as her work of inspection consists of surprise visits. I chose St. Antoine, as I wished to see Madame Brochard, the Senior Surveillante of Paris, the one who came to the Conference Banquet wearing her decoration of the Légion d'honneur. Her eyesight is failing her, and she is on the point of retiring from her work, and, as I expected, she did not recognise me, though she still remembered me. I was in a black coat and skirt, and I was much amused at her looking me up and down with a look of disappointment, and then, with the simplicity of a child, she said: "Oh! mais vous n'êtes pas belle comme vous étiez ce soir là! Oh! que vous étiez belle, qu'elles étaient toutes belles ces dames là; j'ai dis à Mlle Chaptal j'etais comme un St. Jacques moi, parmi ces dames." (St. Jacques is the Saint of Poverty); and then, as I said good-bye to her, she cried out: "Dites un bon jour à toutes ces dames aux Congrés, et dites leur que c'est un beau métier, ça, de soigner les malades—c'est bien beau ca." And then she took me in her arms and kissed me. That kiss was like a blessing which I should like to send all over the seas wherever there are women devoting their lives to the sick.

From Madame Brochard my thoughts went to Dr. Bourneville, whose noble life would take a book to write, but I felt that as a nurse I could not leave Paris without going to his house and leaving my card. He is now very ill, and, as I expected, I was not allowed to see him; but my card and a few flowers, which I handed over to the servant, were acknowledged by him after a few days on a card on which he wrote a few words, and which I shall always cherish. The pupils at the Ecole have all be taught to honour his name, and his kindly visits to them, and his approval of their work, are precious recollections to the young girls of the new school.

And thus day after day flew by until the Easter holidays, when I found I had stayed eleven happy days in this wonderful College for Nurses. I came in and went out as I liked, attended their lectures, walked into their library or their study room, or Salle de Réunion, lunched or dined with them or they with me, without any method or plan. I just wanted to breathe the atmosphere of the College. I wanted to feel sure of my ground. I did not want any impressions of the moment to influence me. It was such a serious question to study the training of nurses on fresh lines. It all came to me with so many surprises, so many fresh aspects. The great question that kept cropping up before me was the specially peculiar position of France, of the Assistance Publique, of its present nursing staff, and its history of secularisation. The next was the progressive and evolutionary movement of woman in civilised countries, the change in the feelings and mode of philanthropic and charitable works.

Talking of England, with its hospitals and nursing staff, there is but one opinion on the subject, viz., the interesting work of reform is done. The class of gentlewomen who entered in the earlier days are different from those who enter now. There is no question about it—there were more remarkable women twenty or thirty years ago than there are now. They have levelled up, but they nave also levelled down—the mass of tepid-hearted mediocrity which forms the bulk of the profession is distressing.

One is constantly hearing men talking of the Navy or Army going to the dogs, but if the nursing profession in England is not going to the dogs it certainly is going to the sheep. It is deplorable that so many Matrons are anti-progressive, living within their high walls, doing little for the profession at large, opposing a State recognition of the profession, opposing a central governing board, each posing as a queen in her own domain.

Against that, here they have in Paris an immense College, capable of containing about 200 pupils. It is a Government enterprise, uniform, concentrated, centralised.

In England there is but one College of Physicians and College of Surgeons. Doctors, chemists, and midwives receive diplomas or certificates recognised by the Government, while nurses are allowed to take in hand the lives of the nation, its sailors and soldiers without the slightest State control of their education, frequently possessing a variety of certificates ranging from 2, 3, and 4 years, and the quality of the training they have received, and the standard of examinations is problematical. The fact is incredible. The longer I stayed at this beautiful new College the more wonderful it seemed to me, for M. Mesureur had worked out every detail to mathematical order and minuteness, and with foresight for the future. In order to grasp the intricate and herculean problem which he had to face we must look backward and take a retrospect.

Some thirty years ago, a very rapid secularisation of the Paris hospitals took place, the chief promoter of the movement being Dr. Bourneville. The reasons were:—

(1) Political, *i.e.*, Anti-Clerical.
(2) Progressive, *i.e.*, Scientific.
(3) Administrative.

The ejection of the nuns was accomplished so

previous page next page