

REVIEW.

"DOORS OF HOPE" *

(DEUS CARITAS EST).

We have read with much interest "Doors of Hope." Visits to Mental Hospitals on the Continent by Mabel Hankin, made with the object of finding out how these different countries treated their insane, especially with regard to the nursing of the patients.

Miss Hankin visited 19 such institutions in France, Holland and Belgium—"State asylums, large private ones recognised by the State, mental wards in general hospitals, a wonderful Family Colony for the insane at Gheel, Belgium, a clinic for 100 patients near Haarlem for border-line cases, and the Hospital Toulouse, near Paris, where educated social workers assist the specialists in their treatment of abnormal children." "At every asylum but one I was," writes Miss Hankin, "received with the greatest courtesy and lack of suspicion, and shown everywhere and everywhere . . .

"There were two types of hospitals, those run by the State and those carried on by the Religieuses. In the latter case it seemed like a fond mother tending her sick children, and the former rather suggested a step-mother obliged to look after a family for whom she had no maternal feeling.

"One noticed that their different religious beliefs or absence of any such beliefs influenced their treatment of the patients.

"Belgium being very strongly Roman Catholic, most of the patients are accustomed to go to Mass daily and Confession weekly. The Church is respected, and the religious aspect apparently comes first. In the mental hospitals under the direction of the Sisters (Religious) they have daily Mass and sometimes more confessors than doctors. The Rev. Mother-in-Charge was very much in charge. Ordinarily no medical man slept in the hospital, and the doctors being Roman Catholics are in entire sympathy with the Rev. Mother. Reading lately a life of Florence Nightingale I noticed her remarks about doctors not in residence. She approved of this because she noted that where doctors were living among their patients they were apt to assume autocratic control of soul and body in the name of medical science! Here, though the doctor's directions were most scrupulously attended to, religion had the chief place.

"In the Lutheran country of Holland the Hospital Chapels are opened once a week."

In the hospitals run by the State in Holland, Miss Hankin specially noticed the attention to detail—everything was done to soothe and calm the patients. Nowhere did she find a padded cell in any of these asylums.

In France, in 1905, when the State separated from the Church, an order was issued that all Chapels connected with the asylums were to be closed or turned into laundries or playrooms. "Religion was not to be tolerated." If the patients wanted to go to Mass they must go outside the grounds to the village church.

Miss Hankin found more red tape about the State Asylums in France and more difficulty in obtaining admission to see over them. The doctors seemed on very friendly terms with the patients. In one hospital visited the nurses had an eight-hour day, and took all their meals in the wards, beginning at 6 a.m. and working till 2 p.m. The patients seemed to be classified as calm, agités, très agités—never as refractory.

The history of the asylum at Melle is interesting indeed. Miss Hankin imagines it must be one of the most remarkable asylums in the world. There were 800 women patients, presided over, not by the Medical Superintendent, but by

a woman elected every six years by the Community—the Reverend Mother.

In 1908, Mgr. Van Rechem, Bishop of Ghent, director of *les Sœurs de la Charité*, discussed the matter of the care of the insane with the State authorities. They agreed that reform was necessary, and allowed the Bishop to build his own asylum, a model one staffed by his religious Sisters and presided over by the Rev. Mother. It was to be a private hospital, but subsidised by the State and duly inspected.

The Bishop had thought it all out. There must be nothing to frighten the patients on entry, no high walls, but a hedge instead, and a little barbed wire covered with creepers where necessary. There were no gates, no lodge, nor porter.

On presenting her letter of introduction, in a very few minutes a very gentle, sweet woman came into the parlour and Miss Hankin was welcomed with the greatest courtesy and warmth, and at once given a meal and waited on by a Sister. Later she was taken round the hospital by the doctor who seemed to be the father of the establishment, he was so kind and sympathetic. Patients came to him holding out their hands to be shaken, and often with a cry of joy. It was all very human. Although there was an absence of red tape everywhere, everything was well managed and orderly. The Sisters treat their charges with much intelligence and imagination. They do not talk religion, they live it, and make an atmosphere of quiet calm. It is one of their rules to speak softly and gently.

At the Westonalle Asylum, Antwerp, Miss Hankin found that only elderly Sisters are allowed in the more acute wards—fine, large, motherly, middle-aged women of the peasant type, able to stand the strain, and with more experience than a mere girl of 18 or 20. She writes, "I should like to emphasise the excellence of this rule. The strain on young nurses is too great and leads often to violent reactions."

The St. Julienne Asylum, Bruges, for men only, is run by the Frères de la Charité. "The Brothers take up the work voluntarily for life; many of them looked quite young, and they range in age from twenty to sixty-five. The atmosphere which they make with their zeal and love and self-sacrifice is wonderful. There is not a woman in the place, and how beautifully clean the wards were! The Father took me over them, and I was amazed at their order and cleanliness. As much freedom as possible was allowed the patients, and there was such a friendly atmosphere about the whole place, very noticeable in the relations between the patients and the Brothers."

Of St. Michel, Bruges, Miss Hankin wrote: "What struck me most was the look of affection and trust exchanged between the patients and the Sisters. There was no rough handling, no impatience, no hurry to get off duty. The Sister leads a life of devotion and consecration, and realises very clearly that there can be no true mental health without religion."

The Asylum at Louvenjoul, near Louvain, is the most up-to-date in Belgium. The plans were made by Mgr. Van Rechem, the Bishop of Ghent, in co-operation with the architect, Joseph Hachez, in 1914, but the War delayed their being carried out, and it was not finished when it was opened in 1927 by Queen Elisabeth. They said: "In the past our asylums have been like prisons. We now want them to be hospitals for treatment. More light is imperative, no more padded cells; more liberty, no more bars or high walls, no camisoles de force, more medical activity, so that this magnificent hospital shall be a joy of the medical faculty."

The medical staff realise to the full the devotion of the Sisters and their part towards the cure of the patients. As Professor Hollander said in his address on the opening

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