



## Our Foreign Letter.

IN AN ITALIAN HOSPITAL.  
(PAGES FROM AN ENGLISHWOMAN'S DIARY.)

May, 1893.—The patience of these Tuscan poor is extraordinary. One only realises it when finally they rebel. To-day we have had a most exciting scene at the Hospital. I was dressing to go home for lunch, when Rachele came to my room, saying something dreadful must have happened in the big medical ward, as she had seen a patient rush out of it in a state of fury, and neither the male Head Nurse nor the doctor in charge could persuade him to return. He had left the Hospital, swearing never to put foot in it again.

The Direttore's request to look in on the different wards made me feel rather guilty as she told me this fact. It is so unpleasant going into wards where one isn't working that I shirk it, and I have not been in that ward for several days. Of course, if I had an official position as any sort of Superintendent it would be different—even were I merely a philanthropic Inspector, authorised by the Board of Directors (*Consiglieri*), it would be a matter of duty to wander everywhere, and expostulate, or order amendments, &c. But I have no such position; my authority is entirely a matter of courtesy, and, being such, one hates trading on it. However, I knew I had better go now and see a little to the *morale* of the ward after the scene Rachele had described.

Silence reigned as I entered. It looked untidy and neglected—a feeling of depression in the whole atmosphere. Four beds were empty, two of which were unmade. One *infermiere* had gone to fetch clean linen for them, a patient told me; the other two had gone for the dinner, so the ward was taking care of itself.

Barga was taking the 12 o'clock temperatures. He is a convalescent, or chronic phthisical case, and has a passion for nursing. He is better educated than the orderlies (male *infermieri*) are, as a rule, and the doctors allow him to take the temperatures, and even to administer medicine to important cases during the day, as they trust his memory and his conscientiousness! Probably he has suffered so much himself from neglect and inaccuracy when really ill that he has realised to a great extent what is needed by the suffering, and his kind heart prompts him to supply that need as far as he is able.

I often wonder if anyone can nurse well who has not made his novitiate in illness? As with the moral sufferings of others, personal experience only can give one power or right to console; so with physical ones, only he who knows from experience what is desired and what dreaded—what comforts and what tortures—can really hope to diminish the sufferings of his patient.

Barga, anyhow, has made this novitiate, and has become almost a mother to the ward. Of course I turned to him for an explanation of what had happened, and he recounted, quite quietly, without any comments, what follows:—

"It has been one of these mornings when everything goes badly. You remember we used to have them when you were here, but now they happen more often." He related that the *infermieri* on night duty had begun work too late; only half of the beds were made by 7.30, and, in their haste to finish them and to sweep and dust, several poultices had been forgotten. Therefore, when Professor B. came for the rounds, he discovered them cold, stiff, worse than useless, reposing on unfortunate chests and abdomens as they had been reposing since midnight. Naturally he was indignant; snatched them off and flung them into the middle of the ward, declaring he would fine or dismiss all the *infermieri*. As soon as he had left the ward his assistant, Dr. R., discovered that the patient, No. 92, whose stomach he meant to wash, had been kept fasting and purged, whilst his breakfast had been given (instead of the purge) to his neighbour, No. 93. This discovery was severely reprimanded, of course, and the washing being impossible under the circumstances, the doctor left the ward. As soon as he had gone these two mistakes became the subject of lively argument between *infermieri* and patients; and still further excitement was created by the difficulty of persuading a poor old *nonno* (grandfather), who Prof. B. had ordered to the chronic ward, to dress and depart. During this noise a cardiac case, No. 84, tried to attract attention in vain, fell from the bed, knocking his head against the marble slab on which they keep glass, &c., and was picked up dead.

I felt as if Barga was inventing a story, but he continued quite unmoved: "Whilst we were dressing (laying out) No. 84 we were called by No. 70, who said, 'I believe this one is dying, too.' And so it was. This patient, also a heart case, had got up to get something, and, returning to bed, lay there speechless, and before the doctor came he too was dead.

No. 92, the patient who had been treated for No. 93, then became furious. He said he should not stay there to die, too, with no one to help him, but should go to his own home, where, at any rate, he would not have other people's medicine given him. Dr. R. was fetched again, but he could not calm the man. Nothing would induce him to remain, so they had to give him his clothes, and that makes the fourth empty bed, Signora."

I told him how sorry I was. But how discouraging it all is. No one to be trusted anywhere. They are not actually unkind, these *infermieri*, but so hopelessly ignorant and indifferent. They are constantly making mistakes and doing the least important things (gossiping especially), leaving undone those that really matter, or doing them too late. It is so difficult not to get indifferent to suffering when living always in the midst of it, and they end by doing only what they are *obliged* to do, instead of all they *might* to alleviate pain and increase chance of recovery.

(To be continued.)

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