



## Our Foreign Letter.

IN AN ITALIAN HOSPITAL.

PAGES FROM AN ENGLISHWOMAN'S DIARY.

(Continued from page 175.)

A GIRL I found talking to Olimpia to-day is, however, a type which I shall not easily find in England, I imagine—unless a candidate for the Salvation Army may form a parallel?

"*Questa ragazza si fa monaca,*" Olimpia told me. "This girl is becoming a nun. She is only staying at the Hospital a few days, being weak, and then will go to the convent."

Maria, a girl of about 20, wearing the usual *pezzuola* (coloured handkerchief) on her head over her fair hair, with a curious quiet sweetness of manner, continued knitting all the time she spoke, though she looked straight at me with her serious eyes and smile.

"I always wanted to be a nun," she told me, "but for a long time mother only laughed, saying I should change my mind. But that was only to prove my vocation, for really both my parents are very religious, and my uncle is a priest, and my brother studying to become one. Whenever any nuns came to the village mother let me run to them, and accompany them in their search for alms. And the parish priest was very good to me too, and taught me lots of things."

I asked if she did not have to bring a *dote* (dowry), and she said her father had managed to give her two hundred francs (about £8), which would do for everything, *corredo pure*, clothes too—more he could not afford. Her own desire had been to join the mendicant sisters (poor Clairs, Franciscans), but her father had not approved, so she was going to become one of the nursing sisters here who go to the poor. I have seen them in the streets, and heard they were very austere, accepting not even coffee, and alas! not allowing the relations to share their vigils. Maria, however, looks so sweet and gentle that one cannot conceive any regulations really hardening her—and so one can but hope that the patients who receive her ministrations will reap some human comfort as well as spiritual solace thereby.

She told me she had already had much practice in nursing, for everyone sent for her directly there was illness. "*Perchè sapevano che non mi dispiaceva vestirli,*" she added. "Because they knew that I did not mind laying them out."

Olimpia, and one or two others who were listening, exclaimed at so young a girl having the courage for this sad office.

"You really did that?"

"Oh yes, over and over again," was her quiet answer, as her fingers moved quickly, the stocking growing beneath them.

She was distinctly anæmic, but seemed to have no thought for her health. "As the Lord has granted me my great wish to become a nun, He will also give me the strength necessary to fulfil my duty as such," was her answer to my hope that the Mother Superior would send her to cases adapted to her powers. And one felt keenly the beauty of the trust which "took no thought for the morrow," content in the prospect of serving to-day.

May 7th.—A scene which was intensely characteristic of this place and people took place last night.

"Carmelita has called to have the sacraments," Settimia, one of the servants, came to tell me, as I was dressing to come away. "She says she is dying."

"Have you asked the doctor in charge?"

"Oh, no, it is too soon to trouble him; he has been to her, and ordered a *bevanda* already this afternoon. But as you are so fond of her I thought you might like to come."

Carmelita was one of the patients who liked me to read S. Francesco's "Fioretti," and talked often to me of "Paradise, where she has many children waiting for her." She is over 60, and has suffered terribly, (tubercular lesions of bones). No wonder she often prayed to be released from a cross she found so heavy. The last two days she has been almost unconscious, and they did not even medicate her this morning, the Professor saying, "We will not disturb her," and merely ordering the assistant to write her a "*calmante*."

I went back to the big ward; it was dusk, and the curtains were drawn and the lamps being lighted. A small oil lamp was by her bed, and several of the patients were standing near. I gave her a spoonful of medicine, and she managed to swallow it, though with difficulty. The Capucino came, and, saying a few words to her, ordered the *infermiere* to prepare for administering the *Olio Sancto* (extreme unction). One fetched a small table, and stood it at the foot of the bed, spreading a cloth, and placing a crucifix and two candlesticks thereon. They were so shabby! one candlestick broken and crookedly fixed together with pink paper; it fell over when lit, so she got a little oil lamp, against which she propped it. Another servant had gone to fetch the vase of holy water, which had been left by No. 17 since she had had the last prayers two days before, but rallied; also the brass ewer and patten. It was now ready, and Padre Bernardo, a fine, healthy old friar, resembling Titian's St. Joseph, put on the white garment, over which he arranged carefully his hood, and, turning to poor Carmelita, said a few words to her, and then gave her absolution, sprinkling her with the holy water. The poor soul kept murmuring "I am dying," "*Muojo, muojo,*" as her breathing became more and more laboured. But she constantly turned her eyes to Padre Bernardo, and was evidently trying to fix her attention on the ceremony.

He read several prayers, as he stood before the little table, Settimia holding the broken candle by his book. Behind him stood some eight or ten women and girls, all in their white Hospital coats, and coloured handkerchiefs. Padre Bernardo then took some wadding from a little silk case, and, coming close up to Carmelita, anointed her with the holy oil on forehead, eyes, lips, and then on each hand; and then the clothes were pulled down to disclose feet also. But her poor legs were clothed in stockings, and, stiff and limp, it was a struggle to get them off.

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