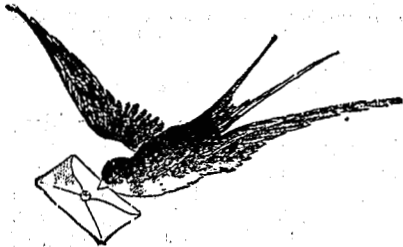


## Our Foreign Letter.

## IN AN ITALIAN HOSPITAL.

Pages from an Englishwoman's Diary.



November 23rd.

I HAVE decided to take a probationer now. The conditions are not really satisfactory; too few patients of course; but several

want a great deal of nursing, so I may be able to show her the rudiments of the art.

I went to see Signora P—, and heard that "Perla" (the chemist's daughter) had found another engagement. But she promised to send me a still more suitable young woman—Signorina Cotti. She is older, and "very serious." I told her I should be in between one and two to-morrow, if the girl would come then.

Signora P— talked much about Suor. Agostina's death. She is a curious woman—very strong in her opinions, and success has made her more even of an autocrat than possibly nature-intended. She blamed the Mother Superior frankly for not having taken any precautions to preserve the poor sister from the patient's vengeance. He had written threatening letters, and they seemed to have believed them, as they attempted to prevent his entering the hospital. But Signora P— declared it was culpable not to have sent the sister right away from Rome. It would have been so easy, as they have hospitals all over Italy. As it was they did not even move her to another ward, so that the man found her just where he expected to. How terrible this negligence must seem to them now!

November 24th.

I waited in till three, but no Signorina Cotti came. A note instead arrived by this evening's post, saying she had been prevented going out by a bad cold. I will go and see her myself to-morrow; that will be quickest.

Rosina (the hysterical patient) has been sent away by the Chief, for "insubordination." We have been trying to administer nourishment by nutrient "interoclismi," and the Chief explained that she should be placed with the chest lower than the abdomen, that the liquid might penetrate higher, where the intestine has greater absorbing capacity. Last evening he appeared on the scene when Suor. M—, the *infermiere*, and myself, were endeavouring by mingled persuasion and coercion to carry out his orders. He saw for himself her absolute rebelliousness; she screamed and sobbed; and he at last told the *infermiere* to desist. This morning Signor M— told me he had "licensed" the poor thing, and at twelve one of the *infermiere* took her in a fiacre to the big women's hospital. There they are in such large wards, that she will be left comparatively to her devices, and one hopes may weary of vomiting, and get food surreptitiously that she likes. She was an

impossible patient for a small hospital where discipline is more difficult to enforce.

November 25th.

I found the "Palazzo" where the hoped-for probationer resided. It was in a dark street, and I climbed about five floors (very irregular staircases), the portress having told me Signorina Cotti resided on the top floor. There were three doors, but two had other names; so I knock at the third with my umbrella (there being no bell-rope or handle) and am opened to by a most untidy looking but amiable woman, with a handkerchief tied over a swollen face.

"Signorina Cotti lives here?" I interrogate, and the lady informs me that *she* is the signorina herself, and invites me in, making excuses for a disorderly room. It was worse—it was positively dirty, and the smell (with its shut-up windows) took away one's breath. She apologized for having failed to keep her appointment yesterday, saying she had been suffering greatly from pain in her tooth, but had no courage to get it drawn.

This did not augur well for her possession of the common-sense qualities so essential in a nurse.

But, she went on, after I had expressed sympathy with her pain, and urged a *visit* to the dentist anyhow—

"Does the signora wish me to accompany young ladies to the clinica?" Signora P— had not quite explained what it was I desired, but she had understood there were young ladies; perhaps it was to speak French to them?

It was so comic, this utter failure, that I hardly realized the disappointment. The absolute unsuitableness of the woman, and Signora P—'s want of explanation, leading her to think that as I was "forestiera" my pupils would also be so, and, therefore, her capabilities for French would be useful in chaperoning them to and fro the hospital!

However, I explained that it was an *Italian probationer* I was going to teach, and had hoped for in herself—adding a little about my object in general. Her answer was:

"Ah, signora! is it not a life very hard to support? I could never venture, and you also look far too *sensibile*. But even if I had the courage to assist the sick, I am all alone in the world, and so have none to accompany me in the evenings. Therefore, it is not possible for me to come to the hospital."

I saluted, and retired, for this was final. The absurdity of the whole thing was its consolation; but I see there is the difficulty people always prophesied in finding girls or women who are semi-educated, and who will venture on this new career. Servants would come, for they have no tradition about "chaperonage," etc., but the class above them are afraid of losing caste.

I talked it all over this evening when dining with the Contessa S—. She is a great consolation to me, for she thoroughly understands what I am aiming at, and very few of my friends here do.

The next time I dine there she will invite a Senator who takes interest in nursing matters to meet me. He already had wished to start a training school after visiting some of our English and Scotch hospitals.

November 28th.

Dined with the S— and met the Senator, Marchese V—. We had a long talk after—Madame S—, he, and I. He told how he had tried, some years ago, to

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