

Our Foreign Letter.

IN AN ITALIAN HOSPITAL.

From an Englishwoman's Diary.

(Continued from page 256.)

January 23rd.

A NEW case of hysteria, quite typical, cataleptic, convulsive arch, and extreme emaciation and anaemia. The poor girl, Marietta, is only nineteen, and has been ill for more than a year. At first they treated her on "depletary" lines, when acute abdominal pain brought on sobbing fits; then as the more pronounced symptoms appeared, she became a sort of "spectacle," and half the village watched her go from one fit into another; lie rigid for hours, or throw herself into the form of a half arch, only heels and head touching the bed. She has had several attacks since she came last evening. We were told merely to see that she did not fall out of bed, otherwise to be very calm, and not let her talk over her symptoms more than possible. The last attack this evening ended with piteous but reasonable crying, and Suor. M—— managed her quite beautifully. She put her arms round her, and laid her down, and talked consolingly to her about her mother coming to-morrow, and finding her much better, and that she would take her out in her garden. (Suor. M—— is devoted to flowers, and has a little bit of flower-garden amongst some cabbages, etc., near the river.) She next fetched a few flowers she had been keeping for the altar—heartsease and stocks—and gave them to the poor girl, who gradually left off crying, and became almost cheerful. It reminded me so of my first dear "staff," who had such a perfect way with all her "children," calming and consoling even the most desperate. What was professionally interesting was that the contagion of these sobbing fits did not spread. The sister seemed to calm the whole ward in consoling that one patient.

January 26th.

Marietta has been rather quieter since that evening when Suor. M—— comforted her. But to-day there was a regular outbreak whilst I was off duty, originated by her, poor girl. I found everybody in a state of exhaustion, and Suor. M—— gave me a graphic description of the whole scene.

She had been for her dinner, and returned to find Marietta in the worst fit she had yet had—tetanic, cataleptic, and convulsive alternately.

"It took both the infermiere and myself to hold her at one moment" the Suora said; "and just then poor little Elvira took fright and began her appalling screams!"

Elvira, a child of sixteen, in the last stage of nephritis and phthisis, has had several screaming fits lately, and we always dread hæmoptysis.

The Suora sent Teresina to quiet her, when Sofia (cardiac girl, bed next to Agata, now diagnosed *isteria*) began too, and not only to sob, but to give the regular yelp she had heard from Agata and the others lately. Suora. M—— had to fly and give her *bromuro*, and ice-bags on her heart, and sent for another Suora. and the doctor. But the infection spread! No. 6 (the first nephritic case, whom I was not allowed to wash) began the same hysterical sobbings—for she is very weak, poor girl—but whilst they were giving her ether, and trying to calm her, they saw that Erminia was in danger—

unconscious and cyanosed—the heart beating as if it must burst itself. The doctor gave instantly an ether hypodermic, but they were very anxious, and Adele, next to her, half fainted, and required "bromuro" and ether. Happily, the peasant, who is also hysterical, did not have an attack (this is interesting), but just cried quietly beside the originator of this pandemium—"versavo quattro lacrime per dispiacere" (I shed four tears from grief), as she put it to me afterwards, poor kindly creature.

It must have been an extraordinary scene; out of twelve patients only four retained self-control. I was so glad to find my dear Grazia had been one of the latter; Teresina told me she had even helped to console some of the others.

February 8th.

After almost a month since the last "angina" or "tonsilitic differetico," a new case began. The microbe is evidently lodged in the walls, so the Professor ordered the ward to be vacated, and disinfected, when he made the rounds. Orders came to remove the patients to the only unoccupied ward before evening; this ward is used only in the fever months (malarial fever, not infectious) when the hospital is hopelessly overcrowded. It is an appalling place, and the weather was also terrible—a downpour from morn till night; also, the ward had not been used for months, and the newly-lit stoves brought all the damp out on the walls, and a most unpleasant smell. We all felt so sorry for the patients, but, of course, had to make the best of it, every other ward being full. It was no one's fault, but a very great misfortune that disinfection was a necessity just now that the weather is bad.

My poor Carlotta wept bitterly at being put in the bottom bed. I do not know why she was given this place; being an arthritic case, it seemed strange to put her near *two* damp walls—but she has so sweet a nature I expect they thought she would rebel less than the others. Erminia is much worse again, and this move caused greater prostration than ever; so, after dining out to meet a priest, who lectures on Italian literature, and is very "illuminato," I went back to the Hospital, having dined in uniform, and stayed till 2 o'clock. I found Erminia worse, and the others all restless and miserable, in their "purgatoris," as they called the wretched ward. We kept up good fires, and the floor was thick with seccatura (saw-dust) to absorb the moisture, but still it was so cold, and damp, that I had to keep on cloak and galoshes.

By 12 o'clock they were quietly sleeping or dozing, and I was thinking of leaving, when Marietta suddenly began her convulsions, throwing herself into the typical arch. Sleepy Pasqua (the elder infermiere) was nearest her, and prevented her falling sideways out of bed. I went to help her, applying the usual abdominal pressure, when terrible cries came from the bottom of the ward. I recognized Carlotta's voice, and leaving Marietta to Pasqua, Teresina and I hastened to the poor creature, to find her in an agony of fear and distress, having awaked with her face covered with damp, and her limbs immoveable. Her cries woke all those near her, and they naturally expostulated and lamented. It took a good quarter of an hour to rub camphorated spirits into Carlotta's articulations, and reduce them to comparative mobility, and herself to any sort of calm. Poor, poor creatures! We were all so infinitely sorry for them; the night Suora, who returned several times, the doctor, and even the porter, who finally (at 2 o'clock, when all were

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