



Our Foreign Letter.

IN AN ITALIAN HOSPITAL.

(PAGES FROM AN ENGLISHWOMAN'S DIARY.)

April 15th, 1891.

I AM beginning to feel quite at home, and profoundly interested in it all: certainly life in a Hospital is life, not mere existence. I am always wishing that I had had thorough Hospital training at home, I could then be really useful here. But I do not think they would allow a foreign trained Nurse here yet; they would fear her being too revolutionary, and hurting the feelings of the Nurse servants. Me they do not mind, as I just lend a hand anywhere, with the excuse that I want to learn. Of course they can't teach me very much; they are virtually untrained themselves, and do things in the most elementary manner.

The Nursing system is very curious here altogether—peculiar to this Hospital, I believe—most of them there are nuns of sort to direct, but here *all* the Nurses are foundlings, born in the Maternity Ward (shared by married and unmarried alike) or left at the small Foundling (*trovatello*) Home just outside. The babes are sent off to the country to peasant "*Nourrices*," reclaimed about 12, unless the foster parents wish to keep them; taught to read, write, and sew, and at 15 are sent into the wards to learn from the older Nurses, who in their youth had learnt from their predecessors, and so on for past centuries! For Head Nurses the most capable are chosen. Some of the present are real "*born Nurses*," nothing wanting but better education and definite training. Kind, patient, trustworthy, and intelligent; but very ignorant, without system, and consequently with very little authority over patients or fellow Nurses.

When these Sisters (*siamo tutte sorelle*, "we are all Sisters," they remark) become too old to nurse, they drift into the linen department, and sew, mend, and sort so long as health allows. If ill, they are put among the ordinary patients whilst there is hope of recovery; if the disease is incurable, they go to the chronic ward. When dead, the Hospital buries them, and they are regretted or not, according to the feelings they have earned from their "*Sisters*."

They seem quite happy; a few go off to service, and a few marry; but the majority accept the Hospital as their home. They are very proud of their dormitories, which they keep nicely; and often show me their treasures of linen (*all* Italians prepare a *trousseau*!), their pictures and other *souvenirs* adorning their walls or chests of drawers. They have ardent friendships, doing many kindly services one for another; as far as I see, there is very little quarrelling; and they are really exceedingly kind to the patients. Still, of course, no great refinement nor discipline can be expected

from them. And only a person who is not a foundling, and who is supposed to be educated—a *direttrice*, a sort of school-mistress, placed over all the women Nurses—she knows *absolutely* nothing of Nursing, and everyone has at heart a profound contempt for her, as they see she is virtually useless, and is "paid for simply wandering around."

They often say they wish I could get ladies to come who really cared for the sick, and who knew how to nurse; if they were heads of the wards they could arrange things justly, and maintain real order, if only the Directors of the Hospital would allow it! But they are divided into two parties; one wanting nuns to direct, and the other (to which all the doctors belong) preferring not to have them; and each party manages to outvote the other, so things remain as they have been for many past generations, and who knows how long they will continue so to remain?

Meanwhile I am very happy to be allowed in the midst of it all. I have a tiny lodging at ten minutes' distance, where I sleep and eat, but spend all my days at the Hospital, beginning soon after 7, as the Professors go their rounds of the wards very early.

I am now working in the gynæcological wards, but they are small; so I have a good deal of spare time, and Prof. B. (*Direttore*) told me he would be glad if I went about the different wards; it kept the Nurses up to the mark.

To-day has been very busy, and very *vital* somehow. I wonder if it hinges mainly on oneself whether one feels much or little? Some days one feels *nothing*—perhaps too tired? or otherwise absorbed? Anyhow, to-day I have felt very keenly. It all seemed to work up to that poor woman.

To begin, though: I did the usual temperature charting and douchings—all going on well. It was the day for examining and treating out-patients, so I spent a long time in the little visiting *sala*. Nothing very abnormal; all just anxious to get well, and rather unreasonable in their objections to the length of the cure. The usual rejection of any suggestion as to hereditary disease; it seems a point of honour to assign the death of parents and relations to *any* cause imaginable, save lungs or other tubercular affections—"*La tisia? ma, non! un po' di bronchite!*" (Phthisis? oh, no! only a little bronchitis!)

By 10 this is all over—the last patient examined, treated, and sent away. The bell rings to allow the relatives to enter the Hospital, and I meet a wonderfully picturesque crowd of them as I go along the corridor. At the entrance to the operating hall, I find Melitina, head Nurse of the big female surgical ward. She throws up her hands as she exclaims: "*Si figuri, Signora*, they have been nearly two hours over that poor cancer woman. You remember her—No. 20?" It was a case of sarcoma of the breast; second operation. "Go and see her," Melitina added; and I enter the *sala*, and find two assistant surgeons and two Nurses engaged in bandaging and supporting the poor creature. She was still only semi-conscious, but looked so broken and suffering that one a *little* realised what it all meant to her. The doctors left when the last bandage was secured, and the Nurses laid her

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