

Our Foreign Letter.

IN AN ITALIAN HOSPITAL.

(PAGES FROM AN ENGLISHWOMAN'S DIARY.)

(Continued from page 298.)

ON my return, I again put on cuffs and apron, and go off to my women, administer another "lavanda" to those who should have them, and then having nothing further to do there for the moment, go to the operating sala, just as a girl I know is wheeled past, screaming. Two days ago, the removal of an *encondroma* (tumour of cartilage) on foot had been performed, but the sutures had not been made, and they returned to do it to-day. They did not wish to chloroform her, but, I think, repented not having done so; she began to shout before she was touched, and her voice was powerful as any man's. For a little I got her to remain quiet by talking rubbish, saying she could be only five or six to behave so childishly, crying before she was hurt, and so on. "*Ma ho paura*" (But I am frightened), she answered. When they took the bandage off and reached the huge opening in her foot, she began to scream in earnest. For a long time we were sympathetic, for we knew the pain was great, but Melitina's "*E fatto*" (It is done) grew monotonous in its absurdity, and the doctor's "*Stai buona; non ti faccio tanto male*" (Keep quiet, I am not hurting you so much), or "*Poverina, ti compatisco, ma abbi pazienza*" (Poor thing, I am sorry for you, but you must have patience), also became non-reiterable after the twentieth or thirtieth time. The patient was more like a boy than a girl, eighteen years old, *contadina*, and very strong and healthy, and she nearly threw us to the ground when we held her in her struggles to get away. Of course, it did hurt a great deal, and shouting perhaps relieved her, so she continued till the last stitch was put in and the iodoform dressing applied. I wondered would she have made as much noise had Prof. G. been there (as a rule they are in awe of him) but I think *she* would, being so utterly undisciplined and having the lungs of a theatre chorus. After this a small girl was medicated, but though crying in the beginning (having heard the other from outside) she was afterwards quiet and her wounds were soon arranged. It was past five by then and I went off to have my tea, and make a cup also for Zitina. I have a big book on pathology lent by the Professor, which I try to find time to read, but a quarter of an hour over my tea is all I get and even then it seems laziness; one always feels something may be wanting one, as things are so unorganised here. After taking Zitina her tea and registering temperatures I find the kind old "caperale" head Nurse outside the receiving ward: "*Vedesse se può fare destinare questa disgraziata*" (See if you cannot get this poor creature sent to her ward), she asks me. "*Sarà per noi?*" (Is she for us?) She screwed up her face and whispered: "*Per me è un cancro, e così la marederanno di là*" (I think it is cancer, and so they will send her over there). "*Di là*" (over there) means the place of the hopeless, the ward for incurables or its adjuncts for infectious cases. I spoke to the poor thing; she had the most ghastly face, the colour of death, lips quite blanched, emaciated limbs, and her body contracted with pain. "*Se potesse avec da bere! acqua non posso prendere*" (If only I could have something to drink! Water I cannot take), she told me. I went and found Dr. B., and asked if the woman was for us "*ginocologia*" (gynæcological). He said he had not yet examined her

but feared it was cancer. I said she was in great pain, and could she not be sent to her bed, wherever it was, soon? He said I might have her brought in, so Rachele and I fetched the poor thing. How her limbs shook! but she managed to walk to the saletto and we put her on the table. Dr. B. saw at once what it was. Everything that had touched her was rolled up and sent to "*bucato*" (laundry) and he washed his hands for double the usual time. Her sister was there and remained to talk to the doctors, while we took her off, Dr. B. saying to her "*Ti metteremo nell'altra sezione, sai*" (We will put you in the other ward). She began to cry desperately as soon as she got into bed in the receiving ward, and it was really dreadful to know what to say. I could think of nothing *true* that was encouraging; so simply repeated the words so familiar to all here. "*Povera donna, è la tua croce! Il Signore ti aiuti a portarla*" (Poor woman, it is your cross! May God help you to bear it). But when her sister came and began her consolations she cried quite desparingly, asking what her malady was. Of course we did not tell her. I simply said she would not understand the Latin name. I *cannot* tell the lies: "*Nonviè niente di grave, Guarirai, &c.*" (It is nothing serious. You will get well) like the doctors often do. Still it is quite horrible sometimes not knowing what to say. Truth is unprofessional; *relations may be told*, but not the patients, even though death is an utter certainty. I turned her thoughts a little by asking about her illness; she had been operated on at Tivorno nine weeks ago, and that I imagine will hasten the growth, as unsuccessful cancer operations generally do. I then said I would go and get the Marsala for her, and getting Dr. B. to order it, Rachele and I went in search of the chemist to obtain it. Even milk and marsala are ordered by the doctors here, written in the "cabier" (pharmacy book) and sent from the pharmacy; other food comes from the kitchen department (red wine, eggs, bread at 10, and at 4, and the other meals at 6 a.m., 12 a.m., and 6 p.m.). It is trying sometimes having to wait for the *doctor* to sign milk or marsala before a new patient can get it, but there were such abuses and wastes that the rule had to be made, and is *kept*. Of course any head Nurse who chooses can go to the pharmacy and say "The doctor is not here, but give me so and so, and I will make him put it on his book directly he comes." But I think they dislike doing it, and so sometimes having to do without things seems a heartless bit of red-tapeism. However, on this occasion Dr. B. was still there, so I got the marsala signed at once, and we fetched and administered some to our poor woman. We also got the necessary paper signed for her removal to the "Chronics," and as soon as "dispensa" (supper) was over (6.30), four of the men came with the "lettiga." She was lifted into it, Rachele and I taking her few goods (the marsala amongst them). We all started for the "di là." The men swung along—three young, one elderly—to them it was all nothing but a bit of the day's work, and they were fresh to their duty (they came on at 6) and so cheerful. I wondered so of what the poor thing was thinking; but probably she was benumbed, for I forgot to mention that, after the examination, the doctor had told me to give her a hypodermic of morphine, and that had calmed her pain and made her quieter. Still, it must have seemed a long, sad dream, those arcades, white and grey, freshly cleaned, through which we first pass, then a bit of gallery, and into the old deserted part of the Hospital. Two long, empty wards at a right angle,

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)