



Our Foreign Letter.

IN AN ITALIAN HOSPITAL.
(PAGES FROM AN ENGLISHWOMAN'S DIARY.)

(Continued from page 302.)

An old friend called me as I left Barga to chart the temperatures, Domenico, a most courteous person, who at first used to call me *Signora sposa* (lady wife, literally), thinking, I presume, only a married woman would nurse in a male ward. As he asked, however, how many children I possessed, I had to tell him I had no husband, when he took to calling me the absurd title of *Signora fanciulla* (lady maiden). His manners, however, are always most beautiful, and his language the purest Tuscan. To-day he wanted to draw my attention to a new patient, who, he said, caused him great compassion. This was a youth of some 20 years, who was sitting propped up in an arm-chair, with the whitest face I think I have ever seen.

"Another bronchitis case?" I ask. For here we use always the word bronchitis instead of phthisis, which frightens them. "*Un po' di tosse*" signifies phthisis in the early stage; *un bronchite* one interprets as the same sad malady in its advanced state. Domenico agreed that this was bronchitis; he could not term "*un po' di tosse*" the disease which had evidently brought the poor boy to the threshold of the other world.

I went and spoke to him, asking him finally if his relations lived in town and came to see him. When patients are near the end they are allowed to have a relation with them when the doctors are not in the ward, and I wondered why this poor boy had no one.

"*La mamma sta in chirurgia*," he answered, slowly (My mother is in the surgical ward).

"*Povera donna!* but can she not come and see you?"

"She has permission, but yesterday she did not come; and I longed so for her!" he continued, with that vibration in the voice so indescribable, but so unmistakable a sign of phthisis. "My poor mother! It is for me that she broke her arm. She fell downstairs when nursing me, and so both of us had to come here. At first she used to come and see me, but yesterday I expected her in vain."

I told him that I would find out the reason, and if possible bring her myself to him. He begged for oxygen and I gave him some, the sack lying on the bed beside him. I then went straight to the woman's surgical ward, the *infermieri* having returned and being occupied quietly enough in handing round plates, &c., for the dinner. It was almost the hour for dinner there, too, so no patient could leave the ward. But I found the woman—mother of the dying boy—

who was sitting up in bed, her head and arm bandaged. She had a youngish face, and sat looking straight before her, an expression of patient sadness in her grey-blue eyes.

I asked if she were too unwell to go to her son, who had been longing for her all yesterday.

"I got up and dressed three times," she answered, pathetically, "but there was no one to accompany me, so I had to return to bed."

I told her that I would take her myself later, if the *infermiere* had not already done so, and then inquired how her misfortune had come about.

"I had been nursing my son for so long," she replied, "for twenty nights I had not closed my eyes, because he had got far worse since our return from Sicily, where we were all working. But that night he seemed better, so I went to lie down in another room, leaving both doors open. He had a very bad hæmorrhage in the middle of the night. I heard him, and hastened to rise and go to him. But I was quite stupefied with sleep, and mistook the turn outside my room, falling down a flight of narrow stairs. I think I must have fainted; but I heard him crying, and I managed to crawl to him and to remain till my brother came. Then the pain was so intolerable that we called in the doctor, and he said I was to go to the Hospital to have the arm well set. I thought I could have returned home the same night, so let my brother bring me in his *barraccio*. But the pain was too acute, and the doctor told me I had far better stay in the Hospital, as I should only be a burden at home. Therefore I remained. Filippo waited four days without me, but then he came, too, for there was nobody to nurse him, poor boy! Besides, they told him I should see him often; so we felt nearer together."

Before leaving I asked the *Capo-Salo* how this neglect of the poor mother had occurred, and she simply answered that it was forbidden for patients to go to other wards, unless accompanied by an *infermiera*, and that yesterday no one had had time.

When I returned to the Hospital at three I found Maria still in bed. I helped her to dress, and to walk along the corridor and up the stairs to the men's ward. She was still very weak and shaky, and apologised pathetically for leaning on me. Her son was still sitting propped up with endless pillows, the bag of oxygen beside him. He could hardly smile at his mother, and said no word, merely signing that he wanted more oxygen. He was a great deal weaker; the pulse scarcely perceptible, and very rapid. Even after an inhalation he was unable to speak. I gave the poor woman a chair, and she seated herself near him, also quite silent. I left them like this: she so piteously patient in her grief, he panting like a wounded animal.

I stayed away less than an hour, but on entering the ward I saw a group round Filippo's chair—convalescents in their white Hospital garments, *infermieri* in their grey uniform, and the brown *tonaco* of Padre Clemente. I knew at once the end had come, and exclaimed, "That poor woman!" hastening to go to her. But Barga saw and came to me, saying that Padre Clemente had sent her back to her ward as soon as he came and saw that "*la Sorella Morte*" was wrapping the poor boy in her mantle of peace. So I turned to follow her down the stairs and along the corridor, where the sun sent slanting rays, thinking how its brightness must have mocked her sorrow, as

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