

Our Foreign Letter.

IN AN ITALIAN HOSPITAL.

*Pages from an Englishwoman's Diary.**(Continued from page 216).*

September 5th.

I found the assistant doctor on going to the Hospital, and heard the Professor had been telegraphed for from the country for consultation: so I returned home to find a note saying that there had been no Consiglio yesterday; but that he would let me know directly he had good news to communicate.

A few years ago such delay would have made one miserable: now I have got to expect it. The heat is really terrible too, all the morning, so it is consoling to reflect that I might have been knocked up had I begun work straight away.

One of the teachers told me the legend regarding the origin of our wonderful old convent. Suor. Ossola Benincasa, its foundress, predicted a "flagello" in the form of the plague, saying at the same time, that to save the town from extermination, "12 *douzelle* of the aristocracy" must bury themselves for ever in a hermitage, devoting themselves entirely to prayer and contemplation.

The plague came, and the prediction being recalled a great religious commotion arose; money was produced lavishly, thrown wholesale into barrels, the twelve damsels were found, and they and their riches were walled into their retreat. This was the nucleus of the convent; for, of course, as it now stands (I believe it is the second largest convent in Italy) capable of housing some 200 people), even the craziest of fanatics would have found it incongruous as the "living sepulchre" of twelve maidens. Apparently many of the richest women in Naples entered the order after, and so they went on building and adorning till it acquired its present size and beauty.

The thought came if only we could predict (successfully) a flagello, and its remedy as being the entering of twelve rich damsels into the Neapolitan Hospitals! We should then get *them* as beautiful and spacious as this old convent, and as well-nursed as *it* was well-prayed in. But no one thinks about Hospitals here as a field for active work; and since the Government have taken their administration out of the hands of the Church they seem to get no more legacies even.

September 10.

A very satisfactory note from Miss D— saying she will come by January. As my delay in getting to work here would, of course, make any gap later still more disastrous, I am immensely thankful to know that I shall be able to leave things in her hands, and so not fail in my promise to the Roman pupils.

I am hard at work translating some of my English gynæcological and nurses' clinical lectures into Italian, with the help of a most kind sister-in-law of the Principessa. They both help, in fact, and are keenly interested in them. I want the former to give myself in Rome; the others will be most useful to show to the doctors both here and there as types of the teaching probationers required.

September 18th.

At last the Consiglio have voted permission to the Principessa to found a training school for nurses in their wards. There have been an incredible amount

of difficulties made—partly from personal jealousy, partly from self interest, partly, I think, from real *not*-understanding more than from *mis*-understanding. However, now it is all settled, and the Hospital doors are open to us. The Principessa is to go to-morrow and receive the solemn permission of the Consiglio, and the day after she will introduce me as the teacher of the future nurses. By the way, she has not yet found any aspirants except the daughter of her aunt's butler. A good step from the *douzelle dell'aristocrazia* I desire. But Concetta seems healthy, amiable, and intelligent, and the Principessa has determined on trying her. After my first experiences in Rome, I am willing to allow responsibility of choice to anyone who is hopeful enough to take it.

Sept. 20th.

Curious that (quite unintentionally) the day I enter the first Hospital, with official permission to teach in it, should be the day of national unity, anniversary of the *venti settembre*, which brought forth *Italia una e unita*. I had hoped to enter on the 3rd, but it is a good omen—and I view omens like Epictetus—that my desires were deferred to to-day. The Principessa had not noticed the coincidence till I mentioned it, when she was delighted.

We found the Professore finishing the rounds; eight o'clock is the time he likes to begin, and he had asked us to come at nine. We spoke to most of the patients, and then the Professore asked his three house doctors, and a young woman, who has been called *diretrice* (though never having nursed), to come to the Sala di Consiglio. He spoke extremely well, gently, tactfully, and wisely. He said the School for Nurses was to be started under the Principessa and me; that I should be constantly in the Hospital, but that we should try and teach the existing nurses, so no one need fear being sent away, if working well. That we should take in slowly new pupils; and train them to be ready to replace the old ones as vacancies arise. That later on we would do finer things, give diplomas, etc., but, for the moment, we should begin very quietly, *evoluzione non rivoluzione*.

He asked the "Diretrice" to show me everything and take me everywhere: he did it, all with such tact that she showed no feeling; of course it was not a surprise to her, as everyone has probably been aware of the discussions in the council ever since I came to Naples. But is hard on her of course—for she has probably the conviction that she does her work perfectly, and no one else is needed to help her in it. The doctors said little, but were very courteous in manner.

We went round the cortile after, and entered the little chapel, where we found the priest, who was presented, and spoke most cordially; Padre Filippo is a tall, elderly, almost soldierly man, and I noticed afterwards that the patients seemed really to care for him.

The Principessa left after visiting the chapel, and I took off hat and cloak, and went round everywhere with "Donn Angelina" till 12.30, when I had to return to my nest for lunch.

I have been trying to concentrate my first impressions of the Hospital. It is unlike any I have ever been in. First of all it is—like most institutions apparently in Naples!—an ex-convent, so has a garden in the centre with arched cortile round. It is of a warm red yellow, so looks very cheerful externally with its garden and tropical plants against bright coloured

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)