

## Our Foreign Letter.

### IN AN ITALIAN HOSPITAL.

(More pages from an Englishwoman's Diary).

(Continued from page 137.)

January 13th.—Busy morning at hospital. The chief was well enough to return, though he still coughs a good deal; he has written out during his illness an "abbozzo" of our project, and Sister G— was as surprised as I was delighted to find that he has said concisely and vigorously all that I have tried to preach these three years. He is the strangest mixture of practical and unpractical—practical in his conception of our schemes, unpractical in having lost his first paper, and in gently asking us not to lose this one, as he did not think he could write it a third time!

Of course I copied it safely in my diary, so that it can now never be lost.

He begins by saying that Christianity has given great impetus to the natural feeling of compassion inspired by the sick at all times, but adds that these religious societies have constantly neglected professional training [la istruzione professionale è trascurata], and that a wider knowledge of the methods of nursing and making use of the progress in medicine and in hygiene would render nurses far more useful and beneficent to their poor patients.

"Who does not know," he continues, "that the care of our sick poor is almost always confided in hospitals (even in those where the Sisters superintend) to people who are ignorant and incapable, if not rough and negligent; and even when these worst defects are wanting, it is not less true that no amount of heart can sufficiently compensate for ignorance [tutte le qualità del cuore non possono essere compensato sufficientemente all'ignoranza]. The perfect nurse must possess the knowledge that will permit her to be the real aid and co-operator of the physician and surgeon.

"As well as the technical knowledge to be acquired by special teaching, the nurse must already possess self-sacrifice, unselfishness (even heroic), and the spirit of discipline. She must have devotion and enthusiasm for her profession, yet a calm temperament; she must have quick observation and love of truth; a keen sentiment for order, and the self-confidence which inspires trust, joined to a submissive spirit; high morality; good health; great personal refinement; tact; activity without bustle or noisiness."

The chief diplomatically adds that this ideal nurse he has found only in the French Sisters of the Presentation; for he is as convinced as I that in Catholic countries the co-operation of the Church is essential for success in any work that is to take root and spread. Therefore he plainly expresses his sympathy and admiration for the Sisters, as does Florence Nightingale in the letter quoted in the preface to the Italian translation of her "Notes on Nursing."

He next declares, however, that even if we cannot hope to find nurses with such perfect abnegation, such heroic self-sacrifice, yet we can at least expect to have "a staff of well-trained, docile, and willing assistants to collaborate with the doctors in an intelligent and assiduous care of the sick." And that, so as to form such a staff, we have decided to open a training-school

in imitation of those already existing in England, Germany, and America, in which school probationers will receive all the technical instruction (theoretical and practical) that is needed, receiving certificates for examinations well passed, and diplomas as nurses if proved reliable workers in the wards.

He ends by explaining that this new profession for educated women will prove more satisfactory to many than that of teaching or midwifery, the only two ways of independence hitherto open to better-class Italians. And he appeals to parish priests to spread notices of the School; and hopes that the Sisters who already nurse will perceive the utility of better professional instruction, and make use also of our School. His last words I will not try to translate; I only pray that they may be prophetic:—

"Accanto al letto del malato oppresso dai dolori di certi mali terribili ed oscuri, vi sarà uomo che non si senta compreso di compassione mista a un misterioso timore? Il dolore sotto la forma della malattia non è forse un retaggio comune alla intera umanità?"

"In nome dunque di questa vera e innegabile uguaglianza, voluta dalla Provvidenza, facciamo tacere ogni altro sentimento, e uniamoci concordi in un sol pensiero, quello di procurare ai poveri infermi un'assistenza pietosa e illuminata."

In the afternoon the chief did not come to the hospital, so I knew the Consiglio was keeping him; five, six, seven o'clock came, when I finished up "my children" and went off in the rain to ask him if all was arranged, and Sister G— able to come on duty tomorrow. He told me that she had been accepted as my substitute; and that they had telegraphed to the Principessa, "Consiglio consente sostituzione, esprimendo plauso ottimo prova nobilissima iniziativa mirabilmente compiuta." This is really a reward for patience and persistence, though expressed with true Neapolitan exaggeration.

January 15th.—After rounds this morning I presented Miss B— to the President, who was most polite, and begged us to "have an eye to the order and cleanliness of the clinical wards also." After lunch Sister G— put on uniform, and—at last!—began quietly to work in the wards. The patients showed no surprise, which proved that they were better mannered than the students, who seemed to pay almost as much attention to us as to the bedside lecture of the chief. I think it is the cap which astonishes them most. One doctor said gravely to me when I first wore it, "You will not feel the cold now"; and another frankly objected, saying it was "troppo monicale." In time the proper perception of its cleanliness and orderliness will penetrate.

January 17th.—Sister G— is quite at home in the wards, so I can now return to Rome. I have got so fond of the place, the work, the people, that it costs me a great deal giving it up to her. The patients are pathetically grateful, because really I have done so little for them, comparing it with what nurses do in every English hospital.

I went with Princesse d'A. to say good-bye to the chief. He was *en vaine*, and discoursed lengthily on our subject—hospital nurses—before a pious lady who was calling, his wife, and ourselves. He ended with a delightful *bon mot*, saying what we wanted to create were "gente col cuore foderato dal cervello." So true the need of contact between heart and brain!

(To be continued.)

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