

Our Foreign Letter.

THE GUISEPPE GARIBALDI HOSPITAL FOR THE POOR OF MADDALENA.

In June of last year, an appeal was made in the pages of the BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING for an English Matron willing to dedicate some years of her life to working out a scheme for a little Hospital in memory of "the Great Garibaldi." On the occasion of the centenary of his birth a site had been given at Maddalena, a seaport connected by a bridge with the island of Caprera (the hero's resting place). The idea of this memorial—so far more useful than that of statues—was due to the English daughter-in-law of Garibaldi, Signora Costanza, or, in the English form—Madame Ricciotte Garibaldi. The Italian Government consented to grant a lottery for a million francs, and collections were made for the immediate expenses of renting a few rooms whilst the hospital was in course of construction, so that there only remained the difficulty of finding the right person to do first the work of organising, and then the actual execution, of nursing. But this difficulty seemed by no means a slight one, and General Ricciotte's magnificent optimism regarding the Garibaldian non-admission of difficulties struck one as probably without solid foundation. But events have proved that—to a large extent at least—he was right, and this determination not to be beaten has been crowned with, already, some measure of success, thanks to like indomitable qualities inherent in many English women—perhaps, we may say, especially in English nurses.

After a large number of failures in coming to an agreement with applicants for the post, a nurse volunteered who possessed the true pioneer spirit. But at the last moment death in her family compelled her to cancel her engagement, and Signora Costanza found herself again alone to cope with all the preparations for the inauguration. At this juncture, happily, Miss Bessie Gerrie, an English nurse well known in Rome, speaking Italian, and with some knowledge of Italian hospitals and doctors, offered her services temporarily. Thanks to her and Signora Garibaldi and her daughters, and also to the committee ladies (who helped to clean windows, brasses, etc.), the tiny building with its two beds for men and two for women, operating room, kitchen, storeroom, and two rooms for the "staff," as well as the out-patient "ambulatorio," was pulled into working order, so that on the 5th November, the inauguration successfully took place in the presence of Admiral Bianco, the Syndic, the ladies of the committee, and many other "Maddalenesi." It is interesting to note that although Signora Costanza is Protestant, no religious difficulties have arisen in the course of carrying out the scheme: on the contrary, the parish priest and a convent of nuns were amongst her most enthusiastic collaborators.

The difficulties to cope with were, however, enormous; every economy had to be made; the house possessed no water supply of any descrip-

tion, every drop having to be bought from a daily water carrier and stored in tanks. The operating room could not be used in cold weather, as the staircase leading to it was not enclosed. In true Italian fashion no heating apparatus was provided, until Signora Costanza brought petroleum stoves. But a perfect operating table and instrument steriliser were imported, and money was collected by the "infermieri inservienti" of the S. Giacomo Hospital in Rome to purchase the necessary surgical instruments, while gradually everything that can be got to facilitate work will be obtained. By the time *la Dottoressa*, Miss Gerrie, left the little place, it was in working order, with a good servant, and with Signorina Rosa Garibaldi as under-nurse to help with two patients, and with the out-patient department, which was always crowded with grateful and admiring clients. By wonderful good fortune Miss Gerrie had found a successor who was not only ready herself to accept the post with all its difficulties and uncertainties, but who was possessed of a friend (also highly trained) inspired with a like altruism. Miss Derrick and Miss Ellis, *le dottoresse inglesi*, came out from England the 23rd November, and with quiet earnest thoroughness set themselves to battle with physical disease, much in the same spirit with which the great General whose memory they are helping to perpetuate, battled with other forms of disease, viz., with the simple determination *not to be beaten*. They have very wisely understood that since everything in this world is relative, the secret of maintaining belief and securing success in a difficult enterprise, lies in comparing your circumstances, not with those you desire or have been accustomed to, but with those which have hitherto existed, and in making this comparison the little Spedaletto Guiseppe Garibaldi stands out in grand relief. For hitherto Maddalena had possessed no Hospital except a military one, and all the poor who were not soldiers had either to be doctored and nursed (heaven save the mark) in their houses, or else make the sea journey to Sassari and pay for their pension. Conceive, therefore, their delighted thankfulness at finding a quiet, clean haven in sickness amongst their rights, with a *dottoressa* continually in charge! Already a typhoid and malarial patient, and several major operation ones, have been nursed back to health; and in realising the comparative use and comfort they can be, and the comparatively enormously larger chance of saving life at their command, these nurses doubtless find fullest compensation. They also possess the entire sympathy and co-operation of Signora Costanza and her daughters, who are constantly backwards and forwards, taking articles of some sort or other from Rome to Maddalena, and who also are looking forward to active participation in nursing or ambulance work during the summer months.

It is from Madame Garibaldi that I have received these details, together with expressions of gratitude and admiration for these compatriots who, like herself, and so many others, have thrown in their lot with Italy.

M. A. TURTON.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)