

Our Foreign Letter.

THE FIRST NATIONAL CONGRESS OF ITALIAN WOMEN.



26th April.

Rome is rejoicing in her first women's congress, which is giving her cause for just satisfaction.

Over 1,000

"congressisti," men as well as women, are inscribed, and meet daily in her immense Palazzo di Giustizia.

Many other countries are represented, whilst Italians from Piemonte to Sicily have seized this opportunity to prove that Italy is "one and united."

Queen Elena was present at the opening ceremony at the Capitol, and there are rumours that she may honour the discussion on nursing with her presence, as the "relation" which will be made next Wednesday by Signora Rita Sciamanna on that subject is partly due to a desire expressed by her Majesty that she should treat it at the Congress.

The work is divided in different sections, which meet in separate rooms in the morning to read their papers, and discuss them, whilst in the afternoon the résumé of each section is discussed in a general meeting, and the more important papers are also read. Amongst these will be that of Signora Sciamanna's, and I will send a full report, as it treats courageously with the difficult problem, and is likely to bear results.

The sections which yesterday dealt with matter of interest to the readers of the BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING were those for hygiene and law, and the afternoon's full discussion on the "vote for women."

On hygiene the Dottoressa della Rovere and Montessori urged the enforced surveillance of convents and colleges for girls by lady doctors, quoting cases where the teachers were tubercular. Dr. Rosler seconded this desire, declaring it to be a duty to denounce transgressions against laws of hygiene.

In the law section more exciting discussion took place; termed, somewhat ironically, by the *Giornale d'Italia* reporter, "belle e nuovissime."

The question treated was the "corruption of minors," and Signorina Eva De Vincentiis urged the extension of the age limit to from 5 to 15, with 5 years' penalty. This gave rise to the "new and beautiful" discussion on "all sexual questions, which the ladies treated with absolute freedom." Dottoressa Mengarini even proposed examination for matrimony (*una leva per il matrimonio*) as for the army; that doctors should be compelled to tell the truth about the man's condition of health when he wishes to take a wife. "Women should no longer endure with holy

patience the immoral and unconscientious infection from men." And a lady doctor at law efficiently treated the legal possibilities of carrying out this desirable proposal, and she was followed by Signora Cuillini, who advocated sexual instruction, and informed her hearers that an appeal against "white slavery" had been laid before the Minister Rava.

Several men were present at this discussion, and Professor Foà expressed admiration for the "elevatezza della discussione," and saw no difficulty in doctors denouncing syphilis the same as small pox or cholera, whilst Professor Caruso sketched a scheme for sexual instruction, with anatomical and physiological programme. Italians certainly cannot be considered antiquated in their ideas, when they advocate such reforms as the above; and vote for "one and the same morality for both sexes."

The greatest interest was concentrated yesterday on the vote question.

The president of this section, Donna Giacinta Martini, unable from ill-health to read her own discourse, was present, and greatly applauded. I will quote only a few words: "Justice must at last be given to women: our claim is logical and humane, and we salute our English sisters who do not fear even ridicule. (Applause.) Our idea is right, and no amount of prejudice can hinder its ultimate triumph, a triumph in which we have profoundest faith."

A Dane and a Swede brought salutations and vows for success from their respective countries, whilst a German, Mme. Augusta Schawatel, left her hearers puzzled as to what was her exact meaning in saying that "women were immature for the vote, but so also were men," adding that "some women love their families more than themselves, and some love their country more than their family, why should not these (latter ?) have the vote? Therefore she would propose that there should be an examination of the women who demand the vote, and that the decision should be according to the individual, but not give the vote to all." (Murmurs.) The lady ended her brief but somewhat enigmatical speech thus: "I am persuaded that Italian women will be the first to enter a Parliament." (Applause.)

After Mme. Schwatel, the Onorevole Mirabelli (M.P.) spoke amongst great applause as follows: "I have come, invited by your President, to study the psychology of the Congress. This question will be discussed in Parliament, and I hope the deputies will vote in favour of your petition. If not, agitate and again agitate. . . Great rights are not acquired, they are taken by force (*non si acquistano, si strappano.*) The disquisitions on women's politic incapacity are grotesque. . . It is necessary that you should participate in our struggles, in our aspirations. . . Your triumph is secure, provided you insist. F. De Sanctis said that we Italians are intelligent, but not tenacious. Be tenacious, and you will obtain the victory."

After over three hours' discussion, this question of the women's vote was carried by at least four-fifths of the audience.

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(To be continued.)

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