

A HISTORY OF NURSING.

MODERN NURSING IN AN ANCIENT SETTING.

Owing to the great pressure upon our space we have been compelled to suspend for a time our notices of the fourth volume of Miss Dock's "History of Nursing." In this issue we once more resume this congenial task at the chapter on "Modern Nursing in an Ancient Setting."

ITALY.

Concerning Italy Miss Dock writes: "Nowhere on the Continent, except in France, are there such old and interesting hospitals as in Italy. Judged by their architectural and artistic charms, and by the atmosphere of antiquity and story in which they are enveloped, they are fascinating, but in the light of modern ideas fall far into the background. . . ."

"The system of nursing that had developed during the Middle Ages, producing saints and humble self-sacrificing workers whose names and very memories are now lost, has come down to the present day unchanged in general outline, but altered for the worse in certain details, namely, the diminished number of nuns, and the introduction of secular untrained attendants under the authority of the civil administration.

"In a word, the transition stage that marked the last century in French hospitals had been entered upon somewhat later by those of Italy. Through the pressure of economic conditions the number of oblates, lay sisters, and other unpaid workers were shrinking, and those of self-supporting though ever so poorly paid women, increasing. This economic transformation; political changes, bringing the civil government more to the front in hospital management and displacing the purely clerical control; scientific advance, revolutionizing the study and practice of medicine, and profoundly altering the relation of the nuns to hospital work, were the three deep-lying factors preparing the way for the individual workers whose careers we are about to follow. But before beginning with the doings of the new generation we shall quote from an article written by a nurse in Italy, which gives an authoritative statement of the internal conditions of the hospitals, and sets the stage as it were for our characters."

The writer of the article referred to by Miss Dock is Signora Celli, a nurse of German birth, who had been trained in the Eppendorf Hospital, Hamburg, who married Professor Celli, famous for his research work into and practical

experiments with malaria. As Socialist member of the Italian Parliament, the Professor helped to bring about the government control of quinine, while "Signora Celli visited the peasants of large regions, making control experiments, taking blood specimens, and in every way assisting her husband. . . . She made strenuous efforts to initiate the training of nurses, and succeeded in developing certain lines of teaching though without founding a regular school. Her greatest contribution to nursing reform in Italy was, undoubtedly, her strong, accurate, published presentation of careful, thorough investigations into conditions, and her bold statement of facts. Her writings are characterised by high professional ideals and warm human sympathies." The History should be studied for her luminous summary.

Miss Dock then relates that "twenty-five years ago no influence from without had ruffled the order of the internal management of the Italian hospitals. But it was meant to be the prerogative of Old England here, as in many other countries, to bring a new element into these massive buildings. The love of English people for Italy is proverbial. The Italian cities have always held colonies of Britons, and it so happened that in Florence, in 189—, there lived a Scotch-English-lady with her family. A born altruist is Miss Amy Turton, possessing extraordinary optimism and energy, with a gift for setting things in motion that has had notable results in many directions. No one else could so well as she describe her long, plucky, undiscouraged quest during the years when, like Columbus, she never remitted the determination to reach her goal." Miss Turton is rightly described as "the pioneer of modern nursing in Italy." Through her letters to this journal from 1895 to the present day, and covering a period dating from 1891, our readers have been kept acquainted with her work, which, undaunted through solitary years, is now bearing abundant fruit.

Miss Turton writes:—"The idea that something practical should be attempted to improve the nursing in our hospitals came to me in 1890 or '91 in Florence. I used often to visit Santa Maria Nuova, and we had a little society—composed chiefly of rich friends of mine—for taking food and garments to the sick, so that each ward was visited at least weekly, and fruit, biscuits, eggs, wine, tobacco, snuff, books, clothes and little pious pictures were given to the patients. It was not exactly satisfactory—they needed so much, and there were so many of them—but we redressed a few serious evils, as I remember, one Italian friend

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)