

SPEDALE DEGLI INNOCENTI.

THE FOUNDLING HOSPITAL OF FLORENCE.

The Foundling Hospital of Florence is a very wonderful Institution and was inaugurated in the fourteenth century by Cioni Pilloni. Later Cosmo de Medici spent large sums for its development and maintenance and still later the Guild of Silk Weavers made themselves largely responsible for it. Rich citizens of Florence, however, have always lavished money on the institution, and to-day it is a very wealthy foundation. Into this home, for babies born out of wedlock, the little "Innocenti" are welcomed and no questions are asked even of the mothers who bring their small Florentines to this gigantic nursery. Whenever possible the mother is encouraged to stay in the hospital herself, for three months, to care for her baby; thereby the authorities try to engender affection in the women for their children, and, as a result, the former will often, even after many years, return and assume responsibility for their offspring if their economic circumstances make this possible.

The first proceeding when a baby is admitted to the hospital is to take a test for syphilis in the mother, and should it be ascertained that she suffers from the disease, then the baby is taken to a special department of the hospital and is nursed by a syphilitic nurse. There is no limit to the number of children taken, and they are treated as though they belong to one great family; the hospital makes itself the guardian of the girls until they reach the age of eighteen, and of the boys until they are twenty-one. Many of the girls go into service with families in Italy; many also remain in the service of the institution itself. Of the boys, some are taught trades while others have occupations found for them and for which they are adapted. Quite frequently people apply to the hospital when they wish to adopt children; farmers and their wives often do, and thus the children often find themselves in ideal surroundings for a healthy development.

The hospital is very hygienic in its arrangement, it is large, airy, light, immaculate in its cleanlines and is indeed a model nursery. It has its own country property, its own cows, its own dairy near Florence; the arrangements connected with the supply, storage and transit of milk are such as to ensure its absolute purity as a healthy food for infants. Certainly the large family of babies which we saw had an appearance of excellent health, and the older children gave us the Roman salute as we passed, with all the appearance of gaiety and happiness which we are accustomed to associate with both the babies and the grown ups of the sunny land of Italy.

The Maternity Hospital connected with the institution is well equipped, and Dr. Giulio Kirch, the genial doctor who took us over the Spedale degli Innocenti, told us that when he came to the hospital in 1883, 20 per cent. of the cases developed puerperal fever; an antiseptic spray was kept going all the time the mother was in child birth; at last the young doctors rebelled about having to work in a perpetual shower bath. Other and more modern methods were introduced, and soon cases of puerperal fever were conspicuous only by their absence. Mothers, when they leave the hospital, can have supplies of fresh milk for their babies, if they apply for it, and if their circumstances seem to justify such application.

For centuries children coming out of the hospital were given the surname of Innocenti, and families of that name in Rome are known to trace their descent from its foundlings. Naturally this has its drawbacks. Latterly a new practice has taken the place of the old, and when a baby's birth is registered the town council confers upon it what is to be its lawful name. If the mother of the child is prepared openly to recognise its existence it may receive her surname.

It was amusing to witness the smiles of youngsters, enjoying themselves on padded tables and evidently a source of considerable pride, all of them, to their respective mothers or nurses. It was laughingly pointed out to us that the babies all looked so much alike in their hospital garments, but that a visitor could always distinguish a boy from a girl because their long garments, folded back over their feet, were pinned in front in the case of the boys, and at the back in that of the girls.

As we went through the hospital, besides long rows of portraits of governors during different periods, we noticed some fine pictures, notably one of Elizabeth of Hungary offering flowers to the Baby Jesus, and another, by the great Fillippa Lippi, of the Infant Jesus being brought by an angel to the Madonna. Another picture was Ghirlandaro's Adoration of the Magi—a perfect picture for children with the sweetest little Mother, two old Magi and two tiny baby Saints. Over the door of the chapel is a fine "Annunciation" by della Robbia. Everywhere too you see della Robbia babies, each in its blue circle; reproductions of them are to be found all over the world, and as we looked round the Loggia there came to our mind a wonderful afternoon spent at the Wright-Kingsford Home in London. There too are the babies in blue medallions, there too the happy, healthy, unwanted babies which, six centuries after the founding of the Spedale degli Innocenti, find a home very much like this Florentine institution in its wonderful service of love and its principle of fulfilling the laws of charity and leaving judgment and recrimination out of its scheme of organisation.

ISABEL MACDONALD.

THE HOSPITAL WORLD.

The Halley Stewart Trust has made a grant of £2,500 to the Asthma Research Council for the establishment of special asthma clinics at Guy's Hospital and Great Ormond Street Hospital for intensive research into the cause and treatment of asthma and allied diseases.

The generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Ness, of Perth, Western Australia, was instrumental in enabling the Royal Northern Hospital, Holloway, to claim £35,000 offered conditionally last July for the erection of a special block of private beds for middle-class paying patients.

On Thursday, December 6th, Lady Cornwallis visited the Kent County Mental Hospital, Chartham Down, near Canterbury, and opened a Sale of Work in aid of the Patients' Benevolent Fund and the Mental After Care Association, which was founded by the late Rev. Henry Hawkins, for many years Chaplain of the Colney Hatch Asylum, and which is doing an increasing and most useful work.

Mr. A. H. Godfrey, J.P. (Chairman of the Hospital Committee), presided at the opening ceremony, and was supported by Dr. M. A. Collins (Medical Superintendent), Rev. W. T. Clements (Chaplain), and Miss F. A. Roden-Baker, S.R.N., F.B.C.N. (Matron). Several members of the Committee were present and also Miss Vickers (Secretary of the Mental After Care Association).

Since the opening of the Hospital in 1875, no such event has taken place, and the Matron and her willing band of helpers are to be congratulated on the great success of their hard work, the satisfactory sum of £200 being realised.

The stalls were a great credit to all those concerned, and the work of the staff and patients was wonderful to behold.

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