



Our Indian Letter.

It is the duty of each Lady Superintendent of the Indian Nursing Service to make a tour of inspection once a year, and to visit the stations under her charge. I will give a short account of my journey last cold weather, and of the five stations which are included in this circle.

I started from Rawal Pindi by the night train, and in about twelve hours reached Mian Mir, in time for breakfast. The Sisters at Mian Mir live in a pretty bungalow with a very good garden full of orange trees and bananas, about three-quarters of a mile from the Hospital, and they go to and fro in a bullock tonga, or covered cart, supplied by the Commissariat for the purpose to minimise the inconvenience of living at a distance from their work. Mian Mir itself is very flat, and not at all a pretty place. The day I spent there happened to be pouring wet, rain coming down in steady torrents, making everything gloomy and miserable. One noticed this all the more as the wards in all these Indian hospitals are dark, being built with a view to the hot weather. They all consist of a long, broad ward in the centre, flanked on either side by enclosed verandahs, which themselves form long and very narrow wards, and outside these again are ordinary verandahs; by this means the centre ward is protected from the sun and is much cooler. The partition wall between the centre ward and the side ones is, at Mian Mir, and in many other hospitals, pierced by a succession of high open archways, with just space between each for the width of one bed and bed-side table. Naturally this makes the wards cold and draughty in the cold weather, so the archways are closed by heavy padded "chicks," or hangings, and then the light can only come in through a row of small windows or ventilators very high up near the roof.

However, a good deal has been done, at any rate in the Sisters' wards, to render them pretty and comfortable. Chiefly from hospital funds, and partly by the Sisters' own exertions, matting has been laid down the centre of the stone floors, pictures have been hung, screens and small tables and a few comfortable chairs have been procured; there are generally flowers on the tables, and in nearly every station the Sisters have started a book cupboard for the use of their own special patients, and have collected by hook and by crook a very good supply of light literature to pass away weary hours.

Mian Mir as a station has a bad name, as malarial fever is very prevalent, and nearly every regiment leaves the place with a large proportion of its men seriously debilitated from the effects of it. In spite of this, however, the amount of severe illness is not large. There was a sharp outbreak of enteric lasting a few weeks at the beginning of last hot weather, but they are usually free from that scourge, and the time the Sisters

get most work is just while the large cavalry camp is held at Muridki, during every cold weather, and which generally supplies them with some severe cases of pneumonia and rheumatism. The Sisters stationed at Mian Mir have one great advantage in that they are among the very few who escape the cold weather in the plains, for they are sent for six months every year to Dalhousie, a station in the hills.

From Mian Mir I travelled straight through to Quetta, in Baluchistan, a journey of forty-eight hours, the first twenty-four carrying me down into a warmer climate, which, indeed, for several months in the year boasts of being the hottest part of India, but in January, Sukkur, on the Indus, has a lovely balmy summer air and a landscape of irrigated corn land, jungle and palm trees. From here one branches off northwards, and the last part of the journey is through about the most ghastly stretch of country that one could conceive. Totally devoid of vegetation, and apparently of life of any kind, the country gives the effect of having been overturned only yesterday by stupendous earthquakes, and the bare yellow earth, jagged peaks, and huge but shapeless rocks, are dreary and desolate to a degree. The railway is wonderfully engineered, and passes through a rift through the very centre of a colossal rocky mountain cracked from top to bottom. One emerges from tunnels to find oneself on a spidery causeway spanning the cleft at a giddy height, and in another moment one is plunged afresh into tunnel and darkness again on the other side. But the greatest obstacle to the railway are the valleys full of mud, hundreds of feet in depth, once liquid no doubt, but now, though dry, forming a most slippery and unstable foundation. As the train climbs higher and higher the cold becomes intense, and for several months parts of the line are generally covered by deep snow.

Quetta itself is situated on a wide bare plain surrounded by rocky hills, and the winters are bitterly cold, with intense frost at nights, and often snow, but though the nights are habitually more piercing than those of an English winter, the sun mostly shines out gloriously and revives one by day.

The houses, as well as the Hospital, are very different from those in India. They are rather more like English houses, inside at any rate, for they have no punkahs, and instead they have real windows, and grates in the fire-places, and they burn coal instead of wood, and very bad coal it is too.

The Hospital consists of a number of separate blocks, one of which is in the charge of the Sisters, and it is only 100 yards or so distant from the little house where they live. There are usually only three Sisters stationed at Quetta, as the average of work there is not heavy, though a tiresome and somewhat obstinate form of malaria is pretty common, and of course they do not altogether escape occasional enteric and other ills. More than once, too, since Sisters have been established there they have had the nursing of officers who had had the misfortune to be "Ghazied" in the vicinity, that is, attacked by one of the Ghazis, or Mussulman fanatics of the country, who believe that they gain heaven for themselves by murdering an infidel—mercifully, however, such outrages are now rare.

After spending two days in Quetta, I returned along the same route, passed Mian Mir again, and about nine hours' journey beyond I reached Amballa, a large and pleasant station, with a staff of four Nursing Sisters, including the Deputy Superintendent, who

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)