

Our Foreign Letter.

THE HOSPITALS AND INSTITUTIONS OF SOUTH AFRICA.

THE New Somerset Hospital at Cape Town is Nursed by the All Saints Sisterhood, and has for many years been singularly fortunate in possessing a Sister at the head of the Nursing Department possessing all the qualities necessary for efficient administration. At present a very charming Sister is in charge, who has received a thorough Nursing education in England, and was at one time Lady Superintendent of the Royal Infirmary, Manchester; her brightness and serenity of face and manner are a delightful combination, and make the happiness of the Nurses who work under her assured.

Hospital deficiencies in Cape Colony are many, and the officials of these Institutions must content themselves with appliances which those in a more fortunate part of the world would consider most inadequate, and accommodation in which English medical men and Nurses would consider themselves very much as martyrs—however good the cause for which they worked might be. For instance, it is not long since the staff of the New Somerset Hospital congratulated itself most heartily on the completion of a wall round the grounds of the building, which is capable of containing some 136 patients. In speaking of this wall, one of the staff said: "It will now be possible to grow a few shrubs and trees without their being uprooted at an early stage of their existence."

In so many of the South African Hospitals there is a large percentage of cases of consumption. Many poor young men are sent out to the Colony in the last stage of the disease in the vain hope that they may recover under the influence of the genial climate, and that they may afterwards be able to gain a livelihood in a country which will allow of life and some share of health to a consumptive. But a large number of these cases very speedily find their way to Hospitals to die.

In 1894, a disinfecter was added to the resources of the New Somerset Hospital, and has proved a great boon in allowing thorough disinfection of mattresses, &c. The public are also generously allowed to use the apparatus free of charge, so that they are able to take precautionary measures for stamping out the contagion of diphtheria, scarlet fever, &c., arising in their own homes.

Fifty beds are set apart in the Hospital for the coloured races, and urgent demand is made upon this accommodation. So pressing is the need, that it becomes frequently necessary to discharge a convalescent, to make way for a more urgent case, when a few extra days in

Hospital would make all the difference to his condition. The Operation Room requires considerable improvements to bring it up to the requirements of modern sanitary surgery. The floor should be paved, and the walls tiled to permit of satisfactory cleansing, and wooden furniture replaced by metal and glass.

Another sadly needed reform is adequate provision for the out-patients, which was not contemplated when designing the building. Out-patients have been steadily increasing in numbers for several years past, and we not infrequently see as many as 100 or 120 standing in the hall at one time, absorbing the air or tainting it on its way to the wards above. A proper waiting room for this class is wanted, but what would be best for the purpose would be a separate building at the south-east corner of the grounds, which would considerably shorten the journey to and fro for the majority of them, and keep them away from the main building with their noise and unpleasant surroundings.

Meanwhile, as it is impossible for the staff to cope successfully with this growing increase of out-patients, and many avail themselves of the chance of free medical advice who are not strictly entitled to such charity, it has been thought advisable to limit gratuitous outdoor relief to those who bring a recommendation from a clergyman or a medical man stating that the applicants are unable to afford medical treatment at their own homes.

Hospitals in South Africa are apt to be very expensive to carry on when they are in rather remote or outlying districts. At the River Diggers' Cottage Hospital, Klipdam, the average cost per diem for each patient is fifteen shillings. Of course, the Nurses and servants are well paid, and the Hospital is a very small one. Typhoid fever cases form quite the predominant share in this locality.

In the "Hospital Disease Return," which is sent in yearly for the Statistical Register of Cape Colony, the Government has changed the classification of alcoholic cases, which are now included under the heading of "Poisons," whereas previously they were classed as "Errors of Diet," under "General Diseases."

There is a great dearth of Lying-in Hospital accommodation for the native women of South Africa, and in consequence, the death-rate of both mothers and infants of the various coloured and native races is very large indeed. Maternity Hospitals are not only needed to save these lives and to add to the comfort of mothers and infants, but they would form valuable Training Schools for obstetric Nurses and Midwives, both being scarce, and the latter an absolute necessary in some of the up-country districts, where medical assistance is very difficult to obtain.

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