

Afghanistan.

A SESSIONAL lecture of the Royal British Nurses Association, with lantern illustrations, was delivered by Miss Lilius Hamilton, M.D., at the Medical Society's Rooms, on Friday evening last. There was a fair attendance, considering the inclement weather. We are glad to be able to report that the chair was occupied by Miss Wedgewood, Matron of the Royal Free Hospital. The force of the remarks of the NURSING RECORD as to the incongruity and absurdity of the affairs of the Nurses' Association being conducted by men, is at last, apparently, being appreciated, as upon the last two occasions the chair at the sessional meeting has been occupied by a lady. Now that hospital matrons are beginning to emerge from the "modest violet" stage, and to take the position which befits the important public offices they hold, we hope that the new departure is an earnest of what we may expect in the future. We should be still better pleased if, on future occasions, some of those ladies who worked hard for the Association before the Charter was won, and its position consequently assured, occupied the chair. Miss Wedgewood made an admirable chairman, and, in a few well chosen words, introduced Miss Hamilton to the meeting. She referred to Miss Hamilton's connection with the Royal Free Hospital, a fact of which they were proud. She had upheld the traditions of her school. The English equivalent of her official title in Afghanistan was "The Pattern Lady," a sufficient testimony to her tact, courage, and professional skill.

Miss Lilius Hamilton, who certainly excels as a lecturer, said that Afghanistan is a purely artificial kingdom, and, therefore, its people have no national characteristics. They are, in fact, as dissimilar as are Germans, French, and Negroes, and as difficult to mix as oil, water, and sand. Again, there are people of all sorts; the Ameer for instance, has the most charming manners, and is exceedingly courteous; on the other hand, the coarseness, brutality, and vulgarity of some Afghans is at times terrible. There are Afghans witty, clever, and amusing, and there are Afghans stupid, dull, and heavy. The climate of the country is perfect. It is a country of sunshine, with a pleasant winter, the soil fertile, the flowers glorious, and the fruits world-famed, and yet, when Dr. Hamilton tried to engage a servant in India, she met with the reply: "Your honour must excuse me; it is a country of blood and stones." That was true also. The point of view from which the country is regarded depends much upon when you come, where you go, and what you are yourself.

Miss Hamilton then gave an interesting account of the history of the country, and the establishment of the kingdom of the first elected king. The reign of the previous king had been so terrible that at last in 1747 he was assassinated. Then a dispute arose amongst the many chiefs who claimed to be his successor. At last a novel suggestion, but one which was based on tactics, not unfamiliar at the present day, was made. "Nabush Shah was too strong for us, let us choose a chief of the weakest tribe. If he oppresses us we can kill him with a blow, if not we will be true to him, fight for him, and, if need be, die for him." This suggestion found favour, and so, after centuries of no other but momentary might, the first duly elected king was

appointed. The chiefs expressed their fealty by appearing before him with halters round their necks, and grass in their mouths. The coronation ceremony was followed by a terrible function—the conferring of the power of life and death. A certain number of men were brought by each tribe, and these were put to death as a token that the power of life and death was in the hands of the newly-elected sovereign.

The present Ameer has this power, and occasionally his decrees appear severe. He is, however, a patriot, actuated by the desire for his country's welfare; a seeker after light, desirous of consolidating his kingdom, leaving it on a higher level than he found it, and ambitious for his nation. He struggles, suffers, and chafes because he is unable to accomplish more. Once when Miss Hamilton was trying to persuade him to take a much needed rest, he said, "I have no choice; I must work. Sixteen years ago I came to this kingdom—came because there was no one else to save her. I must go on. Why? Because there is no one else who will work for Afghanistan. Find me a man true to his country, and you will see how gladly I will resign. You call me king, I call myself slave." On another occasion the Ameer remarked that if he were to kill all the rogues in the country there would not be a man left. If, therefore, he sometimes seems severe and cruel it is because he believes that nothing short of terror will restrain his subjects.

Miss Hamilton showed some excellent slides and told many interesting stories, which we regret we have not space to print. She considered that the best thing she ever did for Afghanistan, was to take back with her when she visited England, as physician to the Shahzada, a trained nurse—Mrs. Daly, a Member of the Royal British Nurses' Association. She gave an interesting description of her dispensary work amongst the poor on the occasion of her second stay in Afghanistan. Three hundred and fifty, she said, was a usual number of patients, but when they amounted to seven hundred and twenty the work was somewhat overwhelming. There was, as in all eastern countries, much ophthalmic work. These cases she always now treated with good results with blue stone. Until she adopted this treatment she was quite unsuccessful with them. She not unfrequently performed as many as seven or eight operations for cataract in a morning. She always attended to the women patients first, giving as her reason, that as they had no privileges elsewhere, they should be first considered when they came to her house. Miss Hamilton introduced vaccination into the country, and, at the Ameer's request, tried to instruct the doctors of the country in the theory of vaccination, and very difficult she found it. She tried to base her instructions on knowledge they already possessed, and, as a preliminary, inquired what they understood of the process of digestion. This they described to her. The food in the stomach becomes chyle. From the stomach it goes to the liver. The liver divides it into four parts. The upper part is steam which produces madness, the next melancholy wind, the third slime, which is the source of boils, and the fourth food; this goes straight to the heart from the liver, and from the heart to the blood vessels. There it is again divided into two parts; the lighter part nourishes the soul, and the heavy part the tissues.

A vote of thanks to Miss Hamilton brought the proceedings to a close.

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