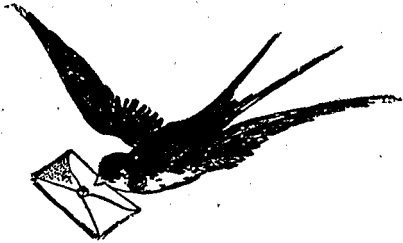


## Our Foreign Letter.

### A CHINESE COMPOUND.

BY A QUEEN'S NURSE.



Red Sea.

I cannot pretend that Chinese compounds in S. Africa is a nursing subject, but as the whole question of Chinese la-

bour in South Africa has been so much discussed in England, and as there have been such different accounts of the manner in which the coolies are treated at the mines, I thought it might possibly interest some of the readers of the BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING to hear what I and my travelling companion saw when we visited one of these famous compounds recently.

I shall not stop to describe the outward appearance of a gold-mining camp, readers can imagine for themselves the usual conglomeration of chimneys, cranes, and sheds which mark any mining-centre, the only distinctive feature of the spot being the hills of white sand which surround the place. These hills are hand-made, being composed entirely of refuse dumped down by the miners, refuse from the gold-bearing quartz after it has been ground in the crushing mills and has yielded up its treasure.

We were taken through many sheds of ear-deafening machinery and after having acquired some sort of idea of the various processes through which the gold passes, we finally arrived at the gateway of the Chinese compound.

Here we passed through a turnstile presided over by an English official, and inscribed our names in a book.

Our first glance round the interior of the compound made us feel as if we were indeed in a prison. The whole compound is surrounded by a high white-washed corrugated iron wall, and by an inner fence of barbed wire, and long tin buildings and sheds in parallel rows fill up the centre of the compound. There was not a tree, not a shrub, not a blade of grass to be seen anywhere, and the mid-day African sun beat down mercilessly on the glaring white-washed walls and tin roofs and on the dry soil. The bare tidiness of the whole place, too, recalled to one's mind all the places of detention one has seen elsewhere.

But we had not been long within the place before we discovered that the resemblance was superficial only. The first proof that the coolies themselves do not consider their quarters prison-like, faced us as we entered. There, on the office walls, were a number of posters in Chinese characters; one of these was covered with wire netting, and we were told that these posters are translations of proclamations, and newspaper reports of matters

affecting the coolies, and that the one protected by wire was the Government's proclamation on the subject of Chinese repatriation. It had provoked such indignation amongst the coolies, who understood by it they were to lose their job, that they had tried to tear it down, hence the wire.

We began by visiting the various sheds. In one we found the Chinese cooks hard at work chopping up meat for soup, and steaming great cauldrons of rice; in another we saw coolies preparing their own meals. Meat pies of a bulk and consistency that made one respect the Chinaman's powers of digestion seemed to be the favourite dish. The men are allowed either to get their meals ready cooked from the public kitchen, or are dealt out the necessary materials and can cook for themselves in their own private kitchen.

At the public kitchen each man is given two meals a day; each meal is served out in a tin dish, and consists of half a pound of meat, sweet potatoes, rice, and vegetables. At the door there are great troughs; these are filled at meal times with hot tea, and the men dip their teapots into them as they pass. For those who wish to make tea at odd times a tap which runs boiling water is provided, and lime juice is always to hand. There is also a canteen at which extras can be purchased.

We were next pointed out the bath-house; there are several wooden baths in it, and hot and cold water is laid on. This is a luxury rarely found in even smart South African houses.

In the next building we had a glimpse of the men's dormitories. These seem to be arranged like the third-class berths on a ship—long rows of berths one above the other. Each berth was wide enough for two occupants, with a space between. Here we noticed that each man had gathered his little ornaments and treasures, and had pinned them on the small bit of wall at his disposal, just as a schoolgirl decorates her cubicle.

We came next upon a pathetic little row of green plants growing in petroleum tins, an oasis in the desert, if five plants can be considered to make an oasis. These we found were placed in front of the joss-house, or place of worship. This was a rude and humble little place, but it was touching to see what attempts at decoration had been made, the door and porch were painted with Chinese characters, and pictures and curious designs were hung over the three altars inside. On one of the altars we noticed a small cucumber, placed there evidently as a humble offering. Next door to the chapel the author of all the paintings and designs was installed. He is artist and letter writer to the camp, and was so engaged in cutting out a quaint design in black velvet and wool that he hardly spared time to look up as we entered. We were told he was probably executing an order for a presentation banner, for the coolies are fond of giving banners to their favourite white officials. One corner of the camp was taken up by a huge canvas tent; to our surprise we learnt that it belonged to a travelling English circus, which had obtained leave to encamp there for the amusement of the

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