Our Foreign Letter.

The Tulloch Memorial Hospital, Tangier.

The Tulloch Memorial Hospital has an almost ideal situation, about half a mile from the western gate of Tangier, and on the grassy Marsham or hillside. It stands on the edge of the cliff, which slopes steeply away down to the brilliant blue Mediterranean below; looking across the Straits to the Rock of Gibraltar on the right, with the great Ape's Hill, the other Pillar of Hercules, facing it on the African coast; Tarifa, with its lighthouse and shipping distinctly visible just opposite, and Trafalgar Bay away in the left distance. The air is clear, pure, and deliciously warm, not hot, for it is December, but like an early summer day in England; and the heat of the sun is tempered by the breezes from the east, which, however, have in them none of the biting bitterness of our east winds. It is a climate of almost perpetual summer, bright warm, health-giving, sunshine day after day, and, although this is one of the rainy months, rain has fallen but one day. Still, that was heavy rain, coming down like a waterspout, turning the deep sandy soil in the roadways into black bogs, and soaking the thin gay garments of the Moors, whose crude conception of an overcoat is a sack-like envelope—suggestive of a monk of the Inquisition—with a peaked hood drawn well over the head (ordinarily this hood hangs at the back and serves as the Moorish equivalent for a pocket), and huge loose sleeves, with quaint semi-detached portions for the forearms.

The chilly feeling in the air, after the downpour, makes it very credible that bronchitis and chest diseases are among the chief ailments which the Hospital has to fight, but a large proportion of the cases are surgical—accidents from explosions of ill-made firearms; and a great many are various forms of skin diseases, occasionally a typhoid case, but never small-pox. This last terrible disease is looked on by the natives as natural, inevitable, and not in the least to be shunned; they all, man, woman and child have it, and women will carry their children, with the disease upon them, about in the streets, and to the Hospital to fetch their own medicine.

The Hospital is a long, low building, originally stables, entered from the one side through a garden full of flowers and eucalyptus trees. The day's work, on Mondays, commences with a short service in Arabic at 9.30, to which all, of whatever race or religion, listen attentively, even assisting the explanation of verses of the bible by eagerly supplied phrases; and then the patients await in the large square hall, under the shade of banana trees, their turn of interview with Dr. Terry. There is one thing that strikes the observer—the philosophical patience with which the men sit and await their turn; an occasional yawn alone shows that the time seems rather long. They do not fidget, or grow restless, but are quite content to sit still till their name is called. The principal difficulty of dealing with such patients is their invincible ignorance of the commonest sanitary laws, and their almost invincible suspicion of Christian help; it takes long to win their confidence, but, once gained, they are like children—eager to show it. Between 25 to 30 out-patients are examined daily four days per week—on Mondays and Thursdays, Moorish men; Tuesdays and Fridays, Moorish women; and Monday and Friday afternoons, Spanish; Jews and Jewesses, the same days as the Moors; but the race distinction is too great to allow Moors and Spaniards to be together. If funds allowed, it would be still better for each race to have separate days.

There is a male ward containing 12 beds, for which there are many more applications than vacancies. The room is strangely unlike an English Hospital ward, the texts on the walls in Arabic, the guttural chatter of the men with one another, the raising of dark faces over the white coverlets with the broad red cross, to look with keen interest at the stranger. Faces so strangely different to, such distinct types, no two alike, ranging from the black, woolley haired, thick lipped negro, to the high, sharp featured, refined-looking Moor, scarcely darker than a sunburnt European. Several cases in this ward are accidents, some few skin diseases, several chest diseases. The female ward is smaller, containing four beds, one patient suffering from ophthalmia. Two have come from Alcazar, and it is astonishing to hear the distances these people travel to visit the Hospital. One old man had been brought by two sturdy Moors a five days' journey, a very arduous undertaking at this time of year, as the roads, where any exist, are very heavy, almost impassable after the rain.

The female patients are, on the whole, much more difficult to deal with than the men—more suspicious, less docile, and far less intelligent; in fact, they will tell you themselves calmly that they are mere animals, and have always been treated as such. A state of thing caused, to a great extent, by the exceeding facility of divorce. The Moor can divorce his wife at his own will, without reason or cause of any kind; and a woman will pass from one husband to another, perhaps, a dozen times, it may be without fault of her own. There was one exception to the usual suspicious reception of treatment. A girl from the inland mountain, suffering from dropsy, was brought by her mother, who seemed to feel such entire confidence in the course prescribed that she insisted on the reluctant daughter doing exactly what was wished, and strictly obeying orders; with the result that when the girl left, greatly benefitted, both she and the mother came some time after, a long journey, merely to visit and thank the Lady Superintendent, Miss Aldridge. But this is not, unfortunately, the invariable rule of gratitude.

There is another small room containing two beds, which is reserved for severe cases, operations, etc.; making a total of 24 beds. The dispensary looks quite English, and has nothing distinctly Moorish about it.

The principal meal of the day is between five and six. It consists mainly of kuskus, a sort of semolina, served in bowls, with meat upon it, and gravy poured over. The Moors have but two meals a day, and this grain is the principal native food.

The necessity of learning and thoroughly understanding Arabic adds greatly to the labour of nursing; but is, of course, essential, as the patients, the men especially, greatly appreciate conversation.

Connected with this Tulloch Memorial Hospital are the branch establishments at Tetuan, for medical work, under the direction of Miss Banks, Miss Bolton and Miss Hubbard; of Fez, with Dr. and Mrs. Churcher, and Mr. and Mrs. Edwards; and Casablanca, with Dr. and Mrs. Grieves.

previous page next page