



### Our Indian Letter.

IN the issue of the NURSING RECORD for July 28th, there is a notice among the "Echoes" in which is quoted the question asked in the House of Commons by Viscount Folkestone, with regard to extra pay for orderlies employed to nurse the sick in the Indian Military Hospitals.

Nowshera, which was the place referred to by Lord Folkestone in his question, is a small military station in the Punjab, and, as a rule, a very healthy one; but this year it suffered, along with a good many other stations both in the Punjab and further south, from a short, sharp outbreak of enteric fever, which, as usual with these outbreaks, was exceedingly malignant in character, while the excessive hot weather assisted in increasing the mortality.

I know nothing of what arrangements were made there to meet the emergency, nor whether they were fortunate in the possession of good and clever orderlies, which is very possible, because such do exist; but, alas! Typhoid in this country does not always "respond satisfactorily" even to the most careful and scientific Nursing. Therefore, I do not refer to Nowshera in the following remarks, but to the question of Orderly Nursing in general, and which is the same all over India, only modified to a certain extent in different places by special arrangements made by individual medical officers.

There have been several regulations framed at different times with regard to the training of orderlies for sick nursing, but all the same, practically speaking, there is as yet no body of trained orderlies at all.

Hitherto men have been drawn from the ranks when urgent cases required special care. They were always liable to be re-called and exchanged for others, at any time, if wanted for special drills or other military duties, and they were certainly returned to their regiment as soon as the sickness abated.

If, later on, sick orderlies were again required, the same men might, or might not, be supplied. Any experience they might have was thus wasted, and they had nothing to gain by endeavouring to learn their work intelligently. Occasionally, an enterprising medical officer started classes and lectures, and the men were most condescending on the subject. I have myself heard them say: "Yes, they thought they would attend the lectures, *it would help to pass the time!*"

Some few men volunteer for hospital work because they like it, and these often work wonderfully well; some because it affords them, in many ways, more liberty, and saves them from field days and morning parades, and others are sent in as required without choice of their own. But in future matters are to be somewhat different.

Comparatively recently a certain sum of money was sanctioned to provide extra pay for a small number of men; and still more recently, last May in fact, this has been made into a permanent allowance, and a new set of orders have been issued to regulate their training and organization.

These provide (1) that none but certificated men are to receive any pay; (2) that two sets of classes are to be held every year in every station in India, which are to consist of one month's stretcher drill (which, be it noted, is not Nursing), also twelve lectures delivered by a medical officer—these to be followed by a one or possibly two months' practical training in the wards of Hospitals where Nursing Sisters are employed. And, finally, soldiers may be employed for as much as 12 months in Hospital work, and during that time they will be exempt from all military duties except musketry practice.

There is no intention, at present, on the part of Government, to increase the number of Nursing Sisters; and, in fact, it would be impossible, even, to supply sufficient lady Nurses for all the military Hospitals; therefore, with the exception of some of those quartered in 14 or 15 of the largest centres, our sick soldiers in India are being nursed, and must continue to be nursed, by their comrades only, or by the native ward servants. In all the military Hospitals in this country there are apothecaries, now called assistant surgeons, who have sub-charge of the wards. These assistant surgeons are all on duty in the morning up till about mid-day; they go round the wards with the medical officer and receive his orders; they do the dispensing, and they have also a good deal of office work to do. When the morning's work is done, only one of them remains on duty for the whole Hospital for the rest of the 24 hours, though the others should visit their wards again about four in the afternoon, and may visit them oftener if they have anxious cases on hand.

Food, stimulants, and medicines are brought to the wards like clock-work by the various native servants appointed for the work, and the assistant surgeons are responsible that the actual orders given by the medical officers are carried out; but they are not expected to *nurse* the patients; and, indeed, they could not do so in addition to the other work, and Nurses will readily imagine the one-thousand-and-one things that need doing or seeing to every hour and minute of the day and night in a large medical ward, and which, probably, don't get done at all.

Men, perhaps with high fever on them, get in and out of bed as pleases themselves—possibly, having no one within call, they have no alternative but to do so. The medicines which are brought round in a basket by a native compounder, and administered all from the same cup (without its being washed) are taken or "chucked" away as the patient pleases. Powders are frequently given out in packets for the patient to administer to himself when he thinks about it. Milk, beef-tea, and stimulants, which are placed on the bed-side tables are drunk up all at once, or not at all, as it may happen; and a considerable amount of smuggled drink and food is brought in either by friends, or by native ward-cooks who are always willing to sell it. Of course, when there are cases so serious that European orderlies are appointed, matters may be slightly different—but often, only slightly—as, if the orderlies have no knowledge, they have naturally

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)