

Our Foreign Letter.

WATCH YAM (BEAUTIFUL VILLAGE.)
CENTRAL ASIA.

PERHAPS some of the readers of the NURSING RECORD may be interested to hear something of the work of one of their fellow Nurses among the women of Central Asia. There are many difficulties to contend with of which those who work in well-organised Hospitals at home can have little conception. First there is the difficulty of learning the language. In the part in which I am working there was no written language at all so lately as 1888, and I had to learn it in a very tedious way, by holding up a thing and asking its name, and then writing this down as it sounded, and saying the word over and over again. Under these circumstances one's progress was very slow, still by patience and perseverance at the end of a year I could make myself fairly well understood on most subjects. Since that time various members of the Church Missionary Society and of the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society have been working hard to discover the grammar of the language, and to produce this in Roman characters. One day I was sitting by an old woman trying to learn how to pronounce some words, when another woman came up to me and said, "*Men, yed â mundak shalgam-chue*" (in my stomach there is a turnip). I controlled my amusement with difficulty, and replied, "Well what have I to do with that. If you have eaten too much turnip you will digest it in time." I then asked her how long it was since she had eaten the turnip, when to my surprise she answered, "I have eaten nothing to-day as it is not our custom, when we have a pain in the stomach which feels like a turnip." We were sitting then under the trees in the garden, and I asked her to come into my room. On our way there she had such an acute pain that she clung to a tree while it lasted, and when we got into my room she had another. After the second pain it flashed across me that she was in labour. I asked her all the usual questions and she said "No" to them all. The style of dress adopted by the native women made it impossible to venture on a diagnosis from casual observation. They wear a garment called the "*pheran*," something like a very large loose nightshirt, with large sleeves, like those worn by the Chinese. This garment effectually conceals all the lines of the figure.

There was no time for arguing, I was bound to act promptly. As I had only one little room I ordered a tent to be put up outside it, and put a bedstead into it, on to which I put my own bedding. My dear old ayah remonstrated with me for doing so, so I simply said, "This woman is ill, her home is six miles off, and I desire that she shall be made comfortable and cared for." We only just managed to get things ready before a nice little daughter arrived. After I had made the mother quite comfortable, using a flannel petticoat for a binder, and putting her into a nice new flannelette nightdress of my own, I turned my attention to the new arrival. When I had washed her and wrapped her up in a shawl, I sat down and made a little frock for her. When it was finished I took the little thing to her mother in order that she might admire her clean face, and nice warm robe, but to my dismay she cried with passion and distress because her child had been washed and cared for by English hands, and so had lost caste, although she knew it

was necessary that the child should be attended to, and there was no woman of her own caste near.

Soon after I took her a cup of warm milk. She refused to take it from my hands, but asked for a rupee to buy milk with. Then I tried gently to explain to her that if the milk was unclean because I brought it to her, the rupee must also be so, as it would pass from my hand into hers. She said that the rupee would not go into her stomach and the milk would. Well, a jug of milk was got for her, and a new basin out of which to drink it. I sat up with her that night. About five o'clock the next morning I made her nice and comfortable, and then as her pulse and temperature were both normal I told her that I was going to my tent to take a bath and have something to eat, and that I would be back in half an hour. I left a little bell by her side and told her if baby woke up before I came back, or if she herself wanted anything, she was to ring the bell, and I would either come myself or send the ayah to her. She said, "Very well, but come yourself, do not send your ayah because she is a lower caste woman than I am." Although she made so much of her caste, it is quite impossible to describe the condition of dirt and filth in which I found her. My little ayah was of the sweeper caste, or rather of no caste at all, for they do not believe there is any place provided in heaven for the poor hard working sweeper, who tries to keep herself clean.

I went to my tent and returned in about three quarters of an hour. To my astonishment I found neither mother nor child, the bed was empty, and neither blanket, jug or drinking vessel were to be seen. Oh, how I ran round the compound. I made every enquiry, but no, no one had seen the woman. I went one way, and sent servants in other directions, but no such person could be heard of, and people wondered at my anxiety. They laughed at my folly in making her so comfortable, and only answered my anxious questions with—"Kuchh-parwāni men" (never mind, do not make a trouble of it). For weeks and months I thought of that poor woman and child and wondered what their fate had been.

Three years had passed, when one day in 1892, as I was crossing over from the Hospital to help with the out-patients in the Dispensary, a woman and child came smiling up to me, and with many salaams the woman said, "*Je rari cheli*" (good morning, are you well and happy). I answered that I was, and I hoped she was the same. I was passing on quickly when she pulled me back and said, "What, do you not remember me, and her, she is your child." I said I was very sorry I did not remember her if she was one of my many children, and then I asked the woman what her name was and where she lived. Then she told me that she was the woman that had her child in the tent in our compound at the Numshi Bagh. I was very glad to see her, and asked her to sit down and tell me why she had run away, and I explained how dangerous it was to her to do so, and asked if she was not afraid to get up at that time and walk. "Afraid," she said, "oh no, I was much more afraid to stay with you and all your strange ways. Who ever heard of a woman having all clean clothes on at such a time, or of a child being washed before the third day after birth, and then that dreadful band round the child's waist, and the cord not fastened round her neck. How I longed for you to go away so that I could take that band off. And then my husband and my family did not know where I was.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)