

compassionate in every word. They are wont to watch through the long night hours by the bedside of an Arab sufferer as anxiously as would a mother—or perhaps even a father—breathlessly watch by the bedside of a dying child. They have left their own country for the first time in their lives, and have journeyed to this strange, far-off land, where they may minister to the sufferings and “give a cup of cold water” to wild, untaught Arabs—aliens in race, in religion, and in the kinship of civilisation. Their first business on arrival was to set to work ploddingly with a grammar, dictionary, and vocabulary to learn the language of their patients, and after six months’ study they had acquired sufficient Arabic for ordinary purposes, though they were constantly aiming at further proficiency. Often have I noticed these eager young scholars slyly consulting phrase-book or grammar at odd moments.

Even more rigidly than in European hospitals are the men separated from the women, though child sufferers are interspersed throughout. I am allowed—nay, invited—to question the patients freely; my difficulty is my ignorance of their language. This is, however, solved by the nurses, in whose fluent Arabic I love to detect “the dear, familiar strain” of Scottish intonation. The inmates to whom I address myself are not very glib in reply; they seem bewildered and puzzled with the strange white man, and his inquiries, and his attempted sympathy with their interests, which, they are thinking, can be no affair of his, and they appeal with childish helplessness to one of the coaxing, soft-toned young nurses to help them with suitable answers. Here lies an aged Arab, not unlike the principal figure in the Last Communion of St. Jerome in the Vatican, only differing from it in not being unpleasant to look at, with iron-grey hair and ragged beard, haggard and swart, stretched on a snowy pallet, in the piteous helplessness of extreme old age. He is motionless as death as I approach him; but when the doctor and nurse come up to his bedside his dimmed eyes light up with a sudden flash, and he stretches out his grateful arms to his two friends, whose hands he successively lifts to his lips and to his head with an impressive gesture of devotion. Here is another Arab, middle-aged, muscular, and with a wild, restless eye indicative of a Bedouin, luxuriously propped up with pillows. He is gazing with curiosity and wonderment at some English picture-papers, and replies to my friendly questions with dignity and intelligence. Another Mussulman, obviously of the better class, is listlessly turning over the pages of the Koran; while yet another, as obviously of the worst class, is vacuously doing nothing at all. The women seem dull and stupid, desperately plain and desperately modest; for on my unhallowed intrusion they clap their hands over

their ugly mouths with all the diffidence of sweet seventeen, and the nurses have some difficulty in soothing these gazelles. After the shyness has worn off, one old woman mumbles an endless sing-song over her abscesses, which she implores me to inspect; a young woman is mechanically stroking her baby; others stare at me with lack-lustre eyes, and can be persuaded to answer little or nothing.

In one corner of the ward, however, there is compensation for my many previous failures. A little duck of a girl child about ten years old, sitting up in her tiny wire crib, welcomes me with a strangely solemn decorum, then accepts my blandishments, purring like a kitten, and ends by engaging in a conversation which is startling in its precocity. I am sure it was faithfully translated by the nurses, and it was evident no “widow of Tekoah’s” language was put into the child’s mouth. She eagerly showed me her small treasures of nothings—childhood has little nationality, and these toys might have belonged to a gutter baby in White-chapel—and finally drew from a cache behind her pillow her most cherished possession, a rough, common, frayed picture, which she had rescued from some sweepings of illustrated newspapers, and which represented our present Queen Alexandra. She had stuck it on a piece of pasteboard, bordered it with coloured paper, and decorated it with a loop of blue ribbon; and now she proudly invoked my admiration of “the beautiful lady,” to quote her own expression. After we had crooned over it for some minutes, I asked, “Will you give it to me?” Sorrowful, downcast looks, and then, “It is for you to command and for me to obey.” “No, keep it; and would you like to send a message to the beautiful lady in England?” “Yes, but I do not know what to say yet”; and next morning she added, quite spontaneously, “Tell the beautiful lady in England I send her my wish that she may have the peace of God.” When I bade her good-bye she took my paw into both her tiny hands, raised it to her lips, and then reverently lifted it to the crown of her head with such singular grave grace and pathos as to evoke the involuntary outburst, “Child, child, do let me hear you laugh, or at least do let me see you smile, and do tell me what you mean by treating my hand in that fashion!” and she replied, “I mean gratitude, love, and obedience.”

Legal Matters.

We are compelled by pressure on our space to hold over till next week the full account of an inquest held at the Berks County Asylum into the circumstances of the death of Miss Gertrude Elizabeth Harris, until recently assistant school-mistress at Hinton Waldrist, near Farringdon, which took place shortly after a most brutal assault by Edith May Hall, a nurse in the institution. The jury brought in a very lenient verdict.

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