

## Our Foreign Letter.

### A FORMER QUEEN'S NURSE IN JERUSALEM.



DEAR MADAM,  
—It fell to my lot to be asked to go out with another Nurse to open up District Work in Jerusalem 1903-1906

amongst the Moslems and poor Christians, and I think that perhaps some account of my experiences may be of interest to your readers. There are a number of hospitals and charitable institutions, but no systematic District work had been done there. The method of District work we adopted was rather different to our English method in the Queens'. When we first went out we had to hunt up our patients, if we heard of anyone being ill we went at once to see if we could help them in their trouble, and so by degrees they sent for us and got to know and trust us. We had a very nice Arab who introduced us to many patients and taught us their ways which was a great help. If we stayed late in the evening at a patient's house some male member of the family would always see us safely home.

A great feature in the District work is teaching the women how to nurse their families which the better class of Arabs learn to do very intelligently. The District Nurse comes in contact with many nationalities, Syrians (or as they call themselves Arabs, Arabic being their language) Greeks, Russians, Turks, Copts, Abyssinians, Armenians, and also the Fellaheen (peasants) and the Bedouins—the true Arabs, nomadic tribes. There are English, Greek, French, German, Russian, and a few Syrian doctors to work under, which makes nursing somewhat difficult, so, of course, the more languages a Nurse knows the better she gets on. It is not an easy matter to make the patients keep to one doctor if they do not get well quickly. It is quite a usual thing to find that they have called in another medical adviser since your last visit, and they will meet you with two prescriptions asking you which is the best, or perhaps you find that they have taken medicine in a few hours which should have lasted two days. They have no idea of doing things quickly. For instance, if you want hot water for your patients it takes a very long time to heat, for they have only small charcoal braziers, so that while it is heating the nurse has to possess her soul in patience. There is generally only one small room for the whole family; the beds are mostly mattresses on the ground, with a quilt for covering. In some houses they are clean, but others are extremely dirty. Amongst the poor Moslems one often finds the houses are nothing more than cellars, the only ventilation coming from the door, but nursing amongst the high class Arabs is quite different. They have nice clean houses and beds, and the women are extremely intelligent. To keep in touch with the patients and their families it is necessary to visit them in a friendly way occasionally, but

one must not proselytize, as a great number of the inhabitants of Jerusalem are Christians belonging to the Greek and Latin churches. We did not work amongst the Jews as they have their own doctors and nurses.

When we went out first we each had a large silver cross given us to wear when engaged in our nursing work. These crosses were much loved by the people, for Jerusalem is a city of crosses. One patient of mine, a little boy of eleven years of age named Elias, a Christian, was dying of an incurable disease. He was very devoted to me, and I often used to go and see him between my professional visits morning and evening in the city. One afternoon when I went I had some beads of the country round my neck as I was not in uniform. He was lying on the ground on a hard bed, and when I knelt down beside him, he put up his thin hands fingering my beads and said, "Sitt, where is your cross? I do not like these." I asked him if he loved my cross, and his reply was, "Yes, I love it very much, and I like to look at it when you come." I bought him a little silver cross after this and tied it with white ribbon round his neck and little Elias was quite happy. He died shortly after with his cross in his hand. The Moslem idea of the Cross is somewhat different from ours. A young Moslem lady asked me once if I nursed sick people to ensure my own salvation. This same lady I was nursing just before I left Jerusalem, she had been ill a long time and there was no hope of her ultimate recovery. She is a most devout creature, her quiet patience and endurance being most exemplary. She took hold of my cross one day and said: "Why do you wear a reminder of that cruel deed that was done so long ago?" I told her, but she did not agree with me; her idea of Christ and mine was not at all the same. We went on to talk about the Holy Virgin, "Sitt Miriam" as she is called in Jerusalem, for whom my patient had a great reverence. I had to say good-bye to my little friend knowing it would not be long before she was called Home.

The care of the children is a great source of anxiety to the nurses, the mothers have so little idea how to bring them up. They love their babies but show it by foolish indulgence and utter ignorance in dealing with them. The mothers want teaching how to care for their little ones and the nurses find it very uphill work. But it is not often that a mother wilfully neglects her children, this is the exception rather than the rule. We had one case brought to our notice. It was a little girl of five years old, of Coptic descent and a Latin. Her mother left her husband who was a lazy man and drank and deserted her baby girl to go to another home and to profess the Moslem Creed. The child was in a sad state when brought to our house, very hungry and dirty, a regular little street arab. We tried to get her into one of the schools but there was no vacancy so I took charge of her with the help of our cook, a dear old woman from Bethlehem, until a home could be found for her. We clothed her and she became quite a happy little civilised child, very bright, lovable, and intelligent. We sent her to the Bishop's day school for girls. She had rather a sullen temper, but if we told her that the black

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)