

## Our Foreign Letter.

FROM SYRIA.

## A CASE OF TRAUMATIC TETANUS.



A curious case of traumatic tetanus came under my care last month. A boy, aged five years, was brought

to the hospital one morning for the English doctor to cure, in whom the Arabs have great faith, so much so in this case the mother thought her child could be healed then and there, and that she could take him home with her. The history given of the patient's illness was an extraordinary one; he was playing on the biarra with his sister when he suddenly fell; little notice was taken of this, until two days after the boy complained of a feeling of stiffness at the back of his neck, and the same in the jaws; his mother finding he was unable to open his mouth wide or to masticate properly, became alarmed, and so brought him to the hospital. When talking of the boy's fall in the orange-grove, she said, "Ya, Khrawàjer hakeem" (Oh! Sir Doctor), "Rasheed is my only son; when playing with his sister the Spirit of the Earth struck him, and he fell, and two days after became like this, and he is getting stiffer and stiffer. Yashfeehoo ya khrawàjer, minshane yasour al meseeah, yashfeehoo." (Heal him, Sir, for Jesus Christ's sake, heal him.) It was strange to hear this Mohammedan woman pleading for her child in the name of Jesus Christ. Very little she really knew of Him; occasionally I have seen her in the Mission Hall adjoining the Hospital, where the Bible is read and prayers are said every morning, but the good seed must have found root in this poor woman's heart. She was intensely earnest, reiterating her firm belief in the work of the hospital, and pleading as if her life depended on the boy's recovery. She knelt before the doctor, then kissed his feet, and said: "You are a disciple of Yasour al Maseeah, not so? I heard here once a story about Him, how He healed all sorts of people, the lame, the blind, the paralysed, and even gave life to the dead; now if you are a true follower of Him you must open the mouth of my child, and make his back straight, and give him power to eat." We explained to her that all in our power should be done for the little patient, but she must leave him with us, as he must be put to bed at once. This pacified her, and she left us, promising to come every day; there was no need to promise to come, we knew she would do that, morning, noon, and night. The Arab patients always get swarms of visitors, too many by far, we nurses think. Visiting days are a sight for the gods! But I am digressing, and must return to the practical part of my story, and tell you what treatment was given to young

Rasheed. On examination, no wound or even a scratch was apparent, but the child was very ill. He was put to bed in a small dark ward alone, so as to avoid all impressions of sight and sound. As is well-known, in all cases of tetanus, the most gentle nursing is necessary, patients suffering from this malady being so sensitive to touch and sound, so that the lightest hand and softest step are absolutely necessary if we wish to relieve such patients of at least some degree of pain; everything done for them causes discomfort, and brings on the so-called "spasms" or paroxysms. And so in Rasheed's case infinite care was required not to increase the tortures through which the poor little man was passing. By this time the back had become rigid, and arched to an enormous extent, with the concavity backwards. The muscles of trunk and abdomen were quite hard, the legs rigid, the jaw firmly fixed, so that feeding was rendered a very difficult matter. Both nasal and rectal feeding were tried, but in each case increased the paroxysms; feeding by mouth seemed impossible, the teeth being so firmly clenched. It was fortunate that no other children were in the ward with Rasheed, the "painful grin" known as the *risus sardonicus* would have scared the poor little things out of their lives, I fear; it appeared positively hideous on this small brown face. The child was very weak, owing to the frequency of the "spasms," and the small quantity of nourishment taken, between these contractions he would say in a very feeble voice, "Taabairny, ya sit, homeeny zain." (I am tired, lady, make me sleep well.) At other times he would ask for Khrubs, which all Arab children beg for under all conditions of suffering; it is always "Bidde Khrubs." (I want bread.) One day the doctor extracted one of Rasheed's front teeth, and then feeding was easier. A tube attached to a feeding cup was passed into his mouth, and in this way milk, beef tea, and raw eggs were taken, each in very small quantities at a time. On several occasions chloroform was administered, so as to relax the jaws and enable the child to take food. I think everything possible was tried. To induce sleep bromide of potassium and chloral were given with more encouraging results than we had dared to hope for. At last, at the beginning of the fourth week, we noticed a great improvement; the paroxysms gradually became less frequent, the muscles less rigid, the temperature normal, the pulse stronger, and, Nushkur-Ullah (Thank God), Rasheed was on the way to recovery, in fact, convalescent. His mother came one day and said she was tired with having to walk to the hospital every day, so she would take the boy back to his home in the biarra to finish his "cure." This was very disappointing; however, there was no help for it. She was very grateful, but said her husband now wished to try other means, so our little patient left us in the arms of his uncle. It was such an interesting case, I was determined to know what happened to Rasheed, who had become very dear to us, so I rode out the following afternoon to the biarra. Directly I arrived, I heard voices to this effect, "Oh, here is one of the ladies from the hos-

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)