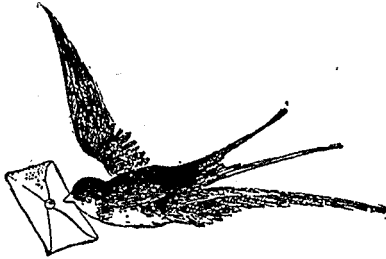


## Our Foreign Letter.

FROM SYRIA.



I have not much to tell you this week, but some incidents that have occurred during the last month may interest you.

There has been a very bad epidemic of ophthalmia, a great many patients have been treated for this, some in hospital and a very large number at the clinic. We get so used to "eye cases," which is not astonishing, as we see hundreds of them during the year. It is a common saying out here: "You may meet twenty pairs of eyes on the road, but you may only find one pair of eyes out of the twenty with good sight. Often while prayers are being said every morning in the Mission Hall, where crowds of patients attend, you may see many little children and small infants with a fringe of flies on their eyelids, and in this way infection is carried from one patient to another. When I first came out here I used to make paper fans and hand them to the mothers to fan the flies away. They would do this for a time, but the great heat makes the poor mothers so tired, and, as one of them remarked, "Why, we might be fanning all day long."

They have a most extraordinary way of amusing their children during the address, which is given every morning. Sometimes they bring a little bird with a string tied round its leg, and the little two-year-old child will hold the string while the poor little captive tries to free itself from its torturer. I told the mothers how cruel it was, but they did not understand, and one of them said: "How can it be cruel to play with birds? Why, we kill them and eat them." Another child will have a grasshopper to play with, the string attached to it in much the same way, or he will watch it trying to escape, not realising the suffering he is giving to this live toy. This seems very cruel to you, but I do not think the little Arab children mean to be unkind, for they have very affectionate natures; it is just that they do not understand. During the epidemic two little sisters came to us from the distant village of Aboud; their names were Sara and Niami, their ages nine and seven. The elder girl could see a little, but her eyes were in a filthy state; the younger child was quite blind and very ill; the lids were swollen to an inch thick, and the doctor said he was almost sure the sight of both eyes was gone, and we must be content if we could save the child's life. The inflammation was so great he feared it might spread to the brain. It was very difficult to treat this little patient without giving great pain, the lightest touch seemed to terrify the child. Several times chloro-

form had to be administered while the lids were painted with sol. arg. nit. grs. xv. This was done twice daily, and the eyes bathed every half hour with boracic lotion, sometimes oftener, as the discharge was very great and very contagious. The application of leeches we found did much good in reducing the inflammation, and thereby lessening the pain. Still, the doctors gave us no hope of the child's sight being restored; they were convinced she would be totally blind, but it was a great comfort to see the poor little thing getting stronger and chirping up at the sound of other children's voices. These two little sisters were in a small dark ward by themselves in the same bed, for it was impossible to separate them. Nearly all day Sara would sit with her arms round little Niami, chatting to her, and trying to make her forget her pain. At last, after three weeks' constant care, the children's eyes were clean, no longer inflamed, and no longer purulent. We still bathed them every day, and in my spare time I used to take Niami on my knee, and while telling her a story gently massage her eyes with my thumbs. This morning, after I had finished the massage, I put her in a swing cradle there is in one of the wards, and swung her to and fro while the other children played around. Suddenly the child burst into tears and said, while holding my hand: "Ya sith hatha rhàtim, ashooofha." (Oh! lady, that is a ring, and I can see it.") What joy I felt in that moment! The child was clinging to my hand and looking at a plain gold ring on my finger. She was not touching it, she saw it! There was such excitement in the ward. Sara hugged her little sister, and all the other children shouted: "Nushkur-Ullah, Niami can see." And it was true; the sight of one eye is quite good, and both children are so happy and well it is difficult to realise they are the same when we think of the two miserable little objects who came to us a month ago. Their mother came to take them home to-day. She was wild with joy, and kissed my feet from sheer gratitude. It was so embarrassing, as it was in the court-yard, where about two hundred people were looking on. I noticed a number of old patients among them. Some had just come back to see us, and others for treatment, or to "sleep in the hospital," as they say when they wish to be in-patients.

After chatting with some of them I returned to my wards, where Im Saleem, the ward servant, informed me that a patient had been up during my absence and had told her she had come expressly all the way from her village, eight hours' walk, "to see the Sitt she loved."

I could not find her in the wards or court-yard, so thought she must have left without seeing me. Finally, I went to my room, where, to my surprise, I found her squatting on the floor surrounded by all the things she had brought me. Directly I entered she sprang up, exclaiming: "Ya habeebty!" ("My beloved one.") She had only one garment on, such as the fellaheen wear in hot weather, and a very picturesque dress it is. She was covered with sand fleas, but what was I to do? She had walked eight hours just to see me; so I let her finish embracing me, and when she subsided I

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)