

finally a round was made of Marsden Ward, so named after the Founder of the Hospital. In this Ward the Princess distributed flowers from her bouquet to all the women and children, and the Princesses had kindly little chats with several of the patients. "Lizzie," a little girl whose visit to a convalescent home at the sea was delayed so that she might be present at the function, was the recipient of three carnations, which she proudly induced someone to pin on her shoulder. One loyal little girl expressed her intention of pressing her flower "and keeping it always and for ever."

By special request of the Prince and Princess, the Matron, Miss Wedgewood, and her mother, who is a daughter-in-law of Josiah Wedgewood, were presented to their Royal Highnesses.

An infant in one of the cots attracted the special attention of the Princess, and calmly went on enjoying its bottle, quite regardless of the admiration of its future Queen, but it clutched on to her Royal finger and refused for some time to let go its tight hold.

And then the ceremony was over, and the wards, so beautifully decorated with flowers and so daintily neat and clean, were left, and the royal party drove away amid the cheers of the students, the staff and the visitors, the band playing the National Anthem, the volunteer corps saluting, and the "snap-shot" men taking the photographs of the visitors as they entered their carriages. The Committee and Mr. Theis, the Secretary, were indefatigable in their energies and preparations, and everything passed off to perfection.

There is still a large sum to be collected to enable the Committee to free the new wing, which has been built to allow accommodation for the increasing students and for the staff, to be freed of debt. In addition to the new rooms for the staff, there is also a Sisters' sitting-room, and a Nurses' sitting-room, and a beautiful roof-garden for the patients, which looks most inviting with its flowers and creepers.

The Royal Free Hospital was the first one in the metropolis to admit the sick poor without letters of recommendation. In 1827, a poor destitute girl of eighteen was found after midnight lying on the steps of St. Andrew's Churchyard, Holborn, without a friend, and died two days after from want and hunger, unrecognised and unknown. This distressing event was witnessed by the late Mr. Wm. Marsden, a surgeon, who had been much impressed by the dangers and difficulties arising to the sick poor from a system which required letters of recommendation before admission to the hospitals, so he established the Free Hospital as a medical charity in which poverty and sickness should alone be the passport for obtaining relief.

In 1832, during the epidemic of malignant cholera, the governors at once threw open the doors of the Hospital to all persons afflicted with it, although the other hospitals resolutely refused them admission. Also in the year 1849, more than three thousand cholera patients were treated, and in 1854, upwards of six thousand people suffering from the epidemic were treated. So that the record of the Royal Free Hospital has ever been one of large-heartedness and progression.

It must not be forgotten that it was this Hospital which made the education of women medical students in England a possibility. It is hoped that the sum needed for the completion of this new wing will very speedily be forthcoming.



Our Foreign Letter.

A MATERNITY HOSPITAL IN FAR ALASKA.

BY OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.

ALTHOUGH the belief in witchcraft has been partly broken down, and the barbarous practices of the native "shamans"—or "medicine men"—of Alaska have been to some extent modified by the spread of more or less civilising influences, the women of that north-west territory still suffer severely from one native custom which has been handed down from very primitive times. When a native woman is about to become a mother she is turned out of her home, provided only with a small rough shelter of boards, bark, or canvas as a protection from the elements and as a scanty provision against public observation. In one of these dark, cheerless, comfortless huts, on the cold, damp ground, covered, perhaps, with a blanket or a "carpet" of moss or bark, but very often with no covering at all, the Alaskan babies make their first acquaintance with the world. The mother is absolutely alone and unattended by either nurse or doctor. In this particular the Alaskan natives resemble the tribe of Giliaks, who are found in the island of Sakhalim, the penal convict island of Russia, in the Pacific. The race is fortunately being rapidly exterminated, and the manner in which they treat their women in childbirth is very much increasing the death-rate and hastening the end.

As with the Alaskans, when labour begins the woman is taken to a dirty little hut or shed, and is left absolutely alone until all is over. In summer this treatment does not so seriously affect the women and infants of this barbarous Giliak tribe, but their sufferings during the intense cold of a Siberian winter are terrible. But the Alaskans do not insist on this absolute solitude; the mother can sometimes count on the timely help of a woman of her tribe, but such assistance, when given, is necessarily of the most ignorant and primitive kind.

If a native "mother Camp" be forthcoming, the child may, perhaps, be half washed, greased and rolled up in a skin or blanket which is padded with dried grass or moss. After the little papoose is thus bandaged he is left more or less to his own devices, but he is, in spite of such neglect, generally much better off than his unfortunate mother. The meaning of "cleanliness" in its most simple form, is unknown to the Alaskan Indians, still less have they any knowledge of antiseptics or surgical cleanliness, and when is added to the normal dirt of the people and their utter neglect of all sanitary laws, the fact that the mother is frequently "up and about" the day after her confinement, we can hardly be surprised that sudden deaths, puerperal fever and many other diseases are extremely common among these wretched daughters of Eve whose motherhood is surrounded by such brutal conditions of neglect and hardship. The mortality and suffering among the infants is also very great.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)