

### Nursing in West Africa.

A MOST interesting sessional lecture of the Royal British Nurses' Association was delivered by Miss Mary Kingsley upon the nursing of Europeans in West Africa, at the Medical Society's Rooms, on Tuesday last. Mrs. Dacre Craven occupied the chair. Miss Kingsley's vivid description of African manners and customs should certainly put before nurses, who contemplate volunteering for work in West Africa, the difficulties and dangers which they will have to encounter. She began her lecture by stating that the question of supplying efficient nursing for West Africa was a complicated one. Good intentions were not sufficient, and nurses who might do good work at home, when surrounded with the appliances of civilization, might be quite out of their element in West Africa, and their inefficiency would be a cause of mortality amongst their patients. Her own opinion was that the needs of West Africa would be best met by the establishment of Hospital Ships, fully equipped, and carrying doctors and nurses, acting in conjunction with small branch hospitals on shore, which might be officered, for the most part, by orderlies. Here the patients could be nursed who could not be removed to the ships, but, as soon as it was possible to get a patient on board, on board he should go. Of course there were drawbacks, and there was the subject of bilge water to be considered, a fascinating subject to those interested in it. The lecturer then proceeded to describe how, on one occasion, smelling a smell which seemed to require mentioning, she was told it was bilge. It turned out, however, that it was a dead elephant which was applied like a poultice to the side of the hulk. At last, the smell becoming intolerable, she said, "For goodness sake, gentlemen, stir up your bilge, and let them fight it out!" The gentlemen, however, firmly declined, saying, "You don't know what bilge can be like when its back is up!"

Another disadvantage of a vessel moored at sea on the West Coast was that for six months of the year a tornado might occur twice a day. This relieved the monotony of life on a hulk considerably. It was quite possible that the hulk might break its moorings and drift out to sea. Still, no colony would see a ship with English women on board drifting out to sea without going to the rescue. In spite of disadvantages—and disadvantages there undoubtedly were in connection with hospital ships—the advantages predominated. As an alternative to this plan, Miss Kingsley suggested that every mail steamer running on the West Coast should have a properly-fitted hospital cabin, and a trained nurse in charge, and that the mail steamers should act in connection with the hospitals on shore.

The chief difficulty of the nursing question lay in the fact that, owing to the scattered white

population, the amount of good a nurse could do was comparatively small. Either she must make her way into the Hinterlands, or the patient must be carried down to the coast in a hammock. The practical outcome of this was that many men must live, or die, without nursing.

Miss Kingsley then described the amateur doctoring which she had met with in West Africa. The male form of amateur doctor, she said, was far more deadly than the female. A woman generally pinned her faith to one patent medicine and kept to that, but a man carried drugs to which he helped himself by the spoonful, or a case containing tabloids; tabloids of corrosive sublimate, tabloids of tea, and tabloids for preserving birds' skins, in bottles from which the labels had been washed off, were promiscuously mixed. When this man got fever he took whichever tabloids seemed good to him, and she had known of this being done once too often. The need of nurses was great, and many men died or returned home wrecks, whose lives might have been saved by good nursing. This was a reproach to English women. She was obliged to say English women because the Germans have trained nurses out there, the French have their hospital orderlies, and the Portuguese have sisters of mercy. So far as the English Colonies go the question is one of expense. The West African Colonies have to pay their own bills, but it may be hoped that the Home Government will see its way to providing the necessary funds for sending out nurses. In one colony, Her Britannic Majesty's Niger Coast Protectorate, there is a hospital at Calabar, for which nurses have been subsidized, Miss Scott, Miss Graham, and Miss Millard being the pioneers. Miss Millard fell a victim to the climate, but the others are doing good and useful work in the hospital. Miss Kingsley considered that it was most important that a hospital should be established at Sierra Leone. Here the death-rate is thirty-five per cent., and at Lagos it reaches fifty-two per cent. The Gold Coast draws a veil over its death-rate. Sierra Leone is a port at which all vessels call, and here a sick man might be nursed and fed, and get strength to encounter the trade winds before proceeding to Canary. For one man who dies of fever in the Bight three die between Sierra Leone and Canary. The staff of such a hospital should be a double one—one set at home and one at work, and a few to spare.

The second consideration was—Is the amount of good which they can do, commensurate with the sacrifice of life which nurses going to West Africa will undoubtedly be called upon to make. This entirely depends upon the nurses. If their love of duty is greater than their love of life, if they are content, for the sake of saving lives, to risk dying a fortnight after they land, then let them go.

Miss Kingsley described her own adventures in the cause of nursing; how, for instance, on hearing of a sick European, she tramped all night through

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