

Our Foreign Letter.

NURSING IN FAR COUNTRIES.



that surround it. At home, a nurse is trained to do things in the very best possible way; out there, the same result has to be attained, but sometimes by an exactly opposite plan. Also there are up-country, few, if any, of the ordinary conveniences of nursing, and skill and real ingenuity play a very much larger part in the Pioneer Nurse's work than is necessary at home. To begin with, rank is practically non-existent. At any rate, a Sister is compelled to be staff nurse, probationer, and she may consider herself extremely lucky if she does not at times become cook and bottle-washer as well. The Matron, although, of course, always responsible, has to waive her dignity and perform many and varied duties, from those of a washer-woman to the giddy heights of committee and dispenser combined. At all times does she have to live in close contact with her nurses, and it only too generally happens that those things too unpleasant for other people fall to the share of the up-country Matron. But nurse and Matron alike have to contend with almost insuperable difficulties in carrying out the simplest line of nursing.

For instance, it is trying, to say the least of it, to try and coax back the strength of an enfeebled fever patient when you are minus milk, minus eggs, minus fresh meat, minus chicken, minus almost everything edible but the terrible "Bully Beef," so well known and heartily hated by all colonial settlers. Pressed beef, the first time of tasting, is a dainty food, and one wonders why grumblers should be found. But it does not take even a newcomer long to find out that all tinned food has at least one thing in common, and that is—it all tastes alike. Bully beef or tongue, sardines or haddock, there is remarkably little to choose between them when they are cooked up. To be reduced to this to tempt a sick man's appetite is to at once set in motion a whole new set of ideas and inspiration in the commissariat department of nursing. Moreover, the hot climate has to be contended against.

Fresh milk, being such an important commodity when attainable, must not run the risk of going sour. Sometimes after the long hot march of the milk, "Boy," with his twelve bottles tucked away in canvas compartments in a sort of post-bag, hanging over his shoulders back and front, the milk is at that point where to boil it would be fatal, and precipitate the very catastrophe you are trying to avoid. A good method of keeping such is to place it all in a pail—if possible, an enamel one—place the pail in a larger receptacle full of cold water, and place over top of pail a thickly-folded towel, with both ends touching the water on either side; if at all possible to put pail containing milk in a running stream, so much the better. But running streams have such a curious knack of being some half-mile from the hos-

pital somehow, and hence another terrible difficulty to be overcome in nursing up-country. The labour of fetching water by means of a very small water cart, or tub on wheels, or sometimes only carriers, is tremendous. Not that many baths have to be considered, for with exception of a blanket bath, such luxuries do not exist for the poor up-country patient. Indeed, the staff may be deemed fortunate if by personally carrying buckets of water to their bedroom, or rather, I should say, bed-hut, they can enjoy this comfort of everyday life at home. Some there are among the venturesome souls who go a long way off, and, in primitive solitudes, disport themselves gaily in some running stream. But even then the joy of the bath is a little marred by the sharp look-out for wild beasts. Cleanliness may be purchased too dearly should it provide a meal for the hungry lion.

And the washing!—of clothes I mean! Well, no one I have ever come across at home even likes "the washing," but let any harassed Sister or overdone staff go out to South Africa, and in lieu of piles of beautiful got up linen to merely *count*—oh, let them try and get up that same linen; or still more harassing and not nearly so satisfactory as to result, let them superintend some raw Kaffir, whose great idea is to put all the stockings and woolies, not to mention coloured things, in one big pot and stew them till he considers they are done. Then it pleases him vastly to hang them over a line in the dustiest part of the compound, where the first breeze will troll them gaily in several layers of red dust, and the last state of those clothes is worse than the first.

To come down to pin-pricks, it is an excellent thing to teach nurses how to make beds, to turn the mattress every day. But it does not prepare the unadaptable mind to cope with the camp stretcher, which has no mattress, nor does it teach her to look in all the crannies of the woodwork and interrupt the frolicsome antics of the white ant, lest, perchance, your patient find himself reposing on the ground, and if bruises are apt to lead to bed-sores it gives an ample scope. And then the flies and moths and scorpions and tarantulas. For flies a most excellent remedy is oil of sassafras. Paint any available portion of woodwork, and you will have the extreme joy of seeing those flies clustering round your helpless patient's head betake themselves in a mighty hurry somewhere else. But the centipedes and scorpions are not so easily dealt with, and to the timid soul on night duty are a great trial.

The light is a very primitive matter; of course, gas does not exist, and when the candles are out it used to be the fashion to go round with a dark lantern and carefully light up each patient's face every little while to see they were all right. No amount of strained listening can detect the centipede just beginning its journey across a patient's face, leaving behind its fatal scarifying mark as witness to the lack of care on the nurse's part.

Nerves must indeed be left at home by the would-be Pioneer, or ordered to such control that they will not drag their hapless owner into humiliating passes. Honest fear must of necessity have its place, but even that, maybe, must be well under control. To a young nurse straight out from well-ordered wards, night duty is a revelation indeed in the up-country hospital. All the day staff fast asleep in various huts dotted about the compound or enclosure, much too far away to call to, the doctor half a mile or so away "down

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