

Our Foreign Letter.

NURSING IN THE BUSH.

"WHAT! going up into the 'Never Never country' of the North?" exclaimed my friends in Brisbane and Sydney when I expressed my intention of applying for the Matronship of the Hughenden Hospital. "You will never be able to stand the heat up there; you have no idea what the country and surroundings are like." Well, this was not certainly very encouraging. But I had tried private Nursing in Brisbane and Sydney, and had found it, for various reasons which I need not now detail, far less satisfactory, pleasant, or remunerative than the same class of work in London, so I determined to adhere to my plan of prospecting this terrible "Never Never" country, and sent in my application for the Matronship—salary £100 per annum—to which I was fortunate or unfortunate enough to be duly elected, and forthwith set out for my destination—800 or 1,000 miles north-west of Brisbane. The greater part of the journey was by coastal steamer. *En route* I was entertained by various startling accounts of my new sphere, which was evidently known by some of my fellow passengers. In Australian coastal steamers you will always meet people who know every place you can mention; I suppose, because places out here are comparatively few, and the people nomadic. Amongst other interesting items, I was informed that the Hughenden doctor was an eccentric being, dressed in "moles," and making his instruments of bits of fencing wire; that all Hughenden got very drunk at times; that milk, butter, fruit and vegetables were unknown, and that I should have to live on tea and salt mutton; finally, that water was sold at 2s. 6d. a cask. These things seemed unpromising, but I have since learned it is quite usual to paint such pictures in somewhat glowing colours, for the benefit of unsuspecting "new chums." Well, after eight days, to the land's last limit, or what seemed like it, I came; and in all essential points Hughenden may be taken as a type of all bush towns and bush Hospitals. The Hospital itself is a wooden, one-storied building, raised on piles about 4 feet from the ground, with a 12-foot verandah all round it. The roof of the Hospital and verandahs are made of galvanized iron; all buildings in North Queensland, except in some of the large coastal towns, are built in the same way. The galvanized iron roofs are very hot and ugly, but cheap, and the best thing for catching rain water, which is carefully stored in 1,000 gallon tanks, and kept religiously for drinking purposes only. It is far better than any other water obtainable, and, in times of drought, an envied luxury. These Hospitals have generally about 30 beds, by far the greater number being occupied by male patients. The bushmen are, for the most part, single men, and have no fixed home. In the Hughenden Hospital there are several detached buildings, a main building with three wards for men, surgery, etc. The female wards and two private wards form another block; the Matron's cottage, kitchens and servants' rooms all being detached. The advantage of this is that, in hot weather, each building has the air all round it. They are of course all shaded by verandahs. The work varies from time to time; but, taking it all round, I can say that the position of Matron to a bush Hospital is

by no means an easy one. There is no resident doctor, consequently much of the responsibility, that would be the house surgeon's at home, falls on the Matron out here. Then, again, she has no trained assistants. She has, probably, a wardman, and one or two more servants, but they are all untrained in Nursing; consequently, with bad cases, she is perforce almost always on duty night and day, and the wear and tear of this, especially in hot weather, is not, I think, compensated by the comparative ease and freedom she has in slack times. The salary is generally about £100 per annum, but money does not go so far as in England, and a tropical climate does not, I think, tend to foster thrift and self-denial in small matters. At any rate, I know of few Nurses who have succeeded in saving much out of their salaries. The general feeling is that, from a pecuniary point of view, we should, most of us, have done better, or equally as well, in the long run, if we had remained in England. As regards the climate, it is one of extremes, very hot from September to April, and bitterly cold in June and July, comfortable in the remaining months. The air, whether hot or cold, in the interior is always very dry, so that it generally suits people with delicate chests or rheumatism. But, of course, in such a large place as Queensland the climate varies enormously. For example, in to-day's paper there is an account of 22 people being drowned in a flood at Ipswich (west of Brisbane), whereas up here people are dying in the bush from thirst. Last night a poor woman was brought to the Hospital in a terrible condition. She, with her baby, husband, and another man, started on a journey through the bush, and when 12 miles out, the men went to look for water—failed to find any—were lost—found their way back to the woman next morning—all being then quite exhausted. The men started once more in search of water, and the poor woman, fearing her child might perish before they returned, tied it to a tree to prevent it wandering away, and, herself faint and weary, started under a blazing sun to tramp the 12 desolate miles back to town, with a temp. of 150 Fah. and 117 in the shade. She was picked up near the town, barely able to explain what had happened. But it was too late: the poor little fellow lay dead beneath the stunted tree to which he had been tied, and the little body with the distracted mother were brought in together. The men are still lost, and the mounted police with black trackers (aboriginals) are out looking for them, though it is not thought likely they will be found alive. This is by no means an uncommon occurrence. I should be afraid to say how many are known to have perished in this way since I have been up here, besides those who are never heard of. Water is kept cool in water-bags, which are flat in shape and made of canvas that holds water and at the same time allows a certain amount of evaporation and cooling. The "swagsman" is a labourer with all his possessions—generally a "blue blanket," "billycan," and a small store of "flour, tea, and sugar"—on his back, and carrying a water-bag in his hand. The "horseman" hangs his water-bag from his saddle, or slings it round his horse's neck. Every vehicle and waggon has the enviable water-bag hung beneath it. "Bless the man," say the North Queenslanders, "who invented canvas water-bags!"

Social life out here is somewhat similar to that described by Sister Henrietta in her paper on "Nursing in the Colonies."

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