

The Work of the Indian Army Nursing Service.*

By Miss PHOEBE F. WATT, I.A.N.S.

In attempting to give a brief account of the Indian Army Nursing Service, its advantages and disadvantages, in a way which may possibly be helpful to some intending candidate, two difficulties present themselves: first, that it is almost impossible to give an accurate picture of Anglo-Indian life to those who are strangers to it; in the second place, it must never be forgotten that fifteen years have to be spent in any part of India, and no one can foretell the effects of climate on the health.

Fifteen years' hard labour in a trying climate ought only to be attempted by the vigorous and strong. A weakly, delicate woman is not only a burden to herself, but a source of never-ending anxiety to her superiors, while her work must necessarily be less well done, however excellent her intentions.

All the rules and conditions of the Service are clearly laid down in a small blue-book issued half-yearly. This in itself is no small advantage, as before engagement all the rules can be studied and each candidate can be sure of the nature of her agreement.

Application for admission is made in the first instance to the Under Secretary of State for India, India Office, S.W., and a form is received, which must be accurately filled up and returned with the numerous necessary certificates attached.

If the candidate be accepted, she receives £15 outfit allowance (which is quite insufficient), and she will probably be ordered to embark on a transport about a month after appointment.

Pay begins from date of embarkation, with the addition of exchange compensation allowance, and the deduction of income tax (which always seems an unnecessary hardship). The pay averages 180 rupees per month, about £11 5s. English money. This sounds high, but it must be remembered that board is not included. The sisters receive from Government free "furnished" quarters, fuel, lights, and punkah coolies, but no allowance for messing.

The quarters allotted are, as a rule, convenient and comfortable. Each sister has a bedroom, dressing-room, and bath-room, in some cases a private sitting-room, besides a general drawing-room and dining-room for common use. "Furnished" quarters means that the heavier articles of furniture—beds, tables, wardrobes, chairs, &c.—are supplied by Government in each station. All cooking utensils, crockery, table and bed linen, cutlery, plate, and glass have to be found by the

sisters, and this is a somewhat serious tax on the pay.

It is usual for the senior sister to do all the house-keeping, and either make a monthly charge for supplying all household necessaries or charge each newcomer an entrance fee, the money being devoted to replacing worn-out things and breakages. The messing bills may be taken to amount to 50 rupees per month as an average. If Government could be induced to grant 100 rupees yearly to each establishment of nursing sisters much trouble would be saved.

We will now suppose that the new sister has arrived in India, and (to take an ordinary average case) that she forms one of three sisters working in a station hospital. One sister will be on night duty for a week, her hours being from 9 p.m. to 7 a.m. Sister No. 1 will be on duty from 7 a.m. till 2 p.m., and sister No. 2 from 2 p.m. until 8 p.m., unless there are very acute cases, when she will remain until relieved by the night sister.

These hours are slightly varied in different stations, but the above is a very usual arrangement. In comparison with a London hospital nurse's day these hours seem short, but in a bad climate, and with the endless worries entailed by working with orderlies and native servants, the work will be found quite sufficiently fatiguing.

Each sister is entitled to two months' privilege leave every year on full pay. Three days' hospital leave and ten days' station leave can often be obtained. After serving without privilege leave for two years and nine months, three months' leave may be granted to allow of a short visit to England. After five years' service the sisters have one year's furlough on two-thirds pay, with free passage out and home.

At the end of her five years a sister may retire from the Service with a gratuity of 500 rupees; after ten years' service 1500 rupees are given, and after fifteen years a pension of £15 may be hoped for. After twenty years' service a pension of £60 a year is promised, but it seems improbable that many sisters will serve so many years.

For lady superintendents the gratuities and pensions are proportionately higher; but as there are only four lady superintendents, a sister's chances of occupying this proud position are but slender.

The senior sister in each station receives 25 rupees per month extra, a small enough compensation for the worries of housekeeping.

Once a year the lady superintendent inspects each station in her presidency, and writes a "confidential report" on each sister as to the manner in which she has performed her work, whether she has "maintained pleasant relations" with the other sisters, her aptitude for training orderlies, and her conduct as a whole. The lady superintendent

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