

A Nurse in the Hop-fields.

This short account of my experiences as a nurse in the Kentish hop-fields is written in the hope that some others may be induced to offer their services there next year, but it is hardly what an overdone hospital nurse should undertake during her few weeks' much-needed holiday. Though most pleasant, the work is more or less continuous, and the night's rest often broken. To those nurses, however, who have a certain amount of free time at their disposal, it affords an opportunity of following their profession amongst delightful surroundings, and feeling, at the same time, that they are able, at any rate, to relieve some bodily ills which if left unattended might cause prolonged suffering.

The Mission extends over an area of many miles, including several parishes. At various centres small temporary hospitals are arranged entirely for the benefit of the hop-pickers during the late summer, each hospital being generally worked by two nurses and one or more lady helpers.

We were three in number, lodged most comfortably in a four-roomed cottage adjoining a coach-house, which was easily converted into an out-patients' department, and over which was our one ward for women and children. The surgery furniture consisted of a soft-water boiler, a large kitchen table, and two rows of seats for the patients, and there one of us was to be found at any hour of the day to assist those who came.

Our busiest time was from 6 to 9 p.m., when the hop-picking was over for the day and there were numerous troubles to be attended to. Poisoned fingers and hands were most frequent, caused by some dressing used for the hops, also colds and sore throats, and amongst the latter we detected two cases of diphtheria. Next in number came, I think, inflamed eyes, especially amongst the children. A broken wrist and a badly wrenched knee had to be rendered "first aid," besides innumerable pains and aches difficult to diagnose, but often successfully treated with *Lin. Saponis* externally and tincture of ginger internally. Burns, scalds, and cuts were, of course, common, and many other small injuries. Any case that we considered beyond our healing powers we sent on to the doctor, three miles away, or kept in the hospital for him to see the following day, according to circumstances. In this way we had six in-patients during our stay; the most serious case being a bad concussion brought in on Sunday evening and kept till mid-day Monday, when we were obliged to send the young fellow to the workhouse infirmary. We had no accommodation for men, so it was necessary to take this course, but we had the satisfaction of seeing our patient return to consciousness before his removal. The other in-patients were two anæmic girls, a phthisical baby, for whom we could do no more than give it

comfort for four days, a woman who developed scarlet fever and was taken to the isolation hospital after twenty-four hours, and a small child who died of convulsions soon after it was brought in.

There were also many calls for us amongst the huts and tents of the hoppers, and we were often roused at night by shouts from the road of "Nurse!" After a brief conversation carried on from our windows, we went, of course, with the agitated relative, sometimes to find we were scarcely needed; too many mushrooms, tinned salmon, or cucumber having occasioned the alarm, which had already subsided on our arrival. Our first experience of the kind happened two nights after we began our work, when we were conducted along a road in pitchy darkness, and then had to crawl through a fence into a field where the camp was. Our destination happened to be a tent, in which we found the patient already recovering from a violent attack of sickness, which had frightened her friends. The tent was crowded with human forms stretched with their feet towards the pole, a small space only being left to enter by. The children were sleeping peacefully, and the women more or less awake and sympathising with the sufferer. We administered some simple remedies, and when we went again at 8.30 a.m. the same morning our lady was gaily hop-picking. On other occasions we were more needed, and on one occasion were called upon to assist a baby into the world under much the same circumstances, except that a hut in that case took the place of a tent.

Much illness is, of course, caused by bad weather, as the hoppers come at the best with a very small stock of clothes, and often have absolutely no change of garments, so a wetting entails real suffering and often serious results. In a fine season there is less then for the nurses to do, and more time to go into the hop-fields, where they are sure of a pleasant reception. Indeed, at all times we met with a welcome and unfailing respect. Even when the hoppers had spent too many hours at the public-house, and were in consequence more conversational than one could wish, their attitude towards the "nurses" was invariably civil. My experience of the work lasted only seventeen days, I regret to say, but during that time I never heard an oath or saw a fight, which shows how much has already been done to influence the hop-pickers for good, even if this restraint were partly due to one's cap and apron. The work was started over ten years ago, and during that time, according to the accounts of the residents, great changes have been effected, but each year brings its own opportunities. This season was all too short from my point of view. The usual time, however, is from three to four weeks, which would give one a better chance of lending a helping hand, not only to the hoppers, but to those by whose kindness the work is being carried on.

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