Our Foreign Letter.

PRIVATE NURSING IN MAURITIUS.

"Bonjour, Maman!" and three youngsters of 6, 5, and 4 years respectively, precipitate themselves into their mother's room before the pursuing black Zénéne can capture them. Baby and I sleep in the dressing room adjoining, and the "tapage" (I have an affection for this word, it is so expressive) has awakened me. I look at my watch, which points to 6.25, and lifting my net scramble out. "Sleep on, fair maid," I whisper as I peep at the occupant of the cot. I wash my hands, give my face a splash, and put on my clothes at hospital speed. Occasionally I time myself in dressing; it is most exhilarating to put one's clothes on like "greased lightning"; I feel I am back in hospital again, and have slept until the last minute. I enquire if my patient has slept since baby's last feed, and, putting the thermometer in her mouth, lift and loop up the mosquito net. I give a sigh of relief as I read C. 36.9 degs. on the thermometer, and go gaily off to the "salle à manger" to make our "café au lait." The cups, sugar, coffee and milk are waiting; the latter, instead of being piping hot, is tepid. Running out to the back verandah I clap my hands, and in response the black visage of the domestic emerges from the kitchen door. Very sternly I tell him to come and heat the milk again for the coffee; every alternate day he is careless in this respect; the day following a scolding he is more careful. Preparing Madame's coffee, I take it to her, then I make my own and drink it on the verandah. It is so delightfully fresh and dewy at this hour of the morning, and the aroma of the coffee is pleasing. To have this beverage "par excellence" one must come to Mauritius.

"Mademoiselle!" and the little Pierre toddles out of the nursery, which opens on the verandah, and climbs behind my chair. "Let me taste *your* coffee," he says in a coaxing voice, and, filling my spoon, I accede to his request, but, as there is no sugar in it, he does not relish it. Meanwhile, I have a little kettle of water on a spirit lamp boiling, and, after coffee is discussed, I must give an enema. That being over, I take the key basket and go to the pantry to give orders and materials for "déjeuner." Everything is locked up here, so that it takes some time to unlock all the cupboards, and watch the cook as he measures out the different articles. "Enough!" I occasionally have to say, as cook helps himself rather too liberally. Then I descend to the store, which is in the back court, where the kitchen is situated, give out the daily supply of charcoal to the kitchen, and wait until "Mootoo" has filled the lamps from the petroleum cask. "Have you got the hot water for Madame's toilet?" and telling cook to bring it up to the back verandah, I retrace my steps to my patient's room. I am just beginning the ablutions when a tap comes to the door, and, on demanding what is required, find that soap is wanted. That entails another visit to the pantry, and I return to the interrupted toilet, and just get nicely straight when "bébé" wakes. Then I perform her ablutions, and give her to her mother to feed. The mattress and pillow from the cot, I place in the sun on the verandah, and clear off basin and soiled linen. Then I enquire if my bath is ready, bathe, and dress. There remain 15 minutes, and I take "bébé" into the garden before the bell rings for déjeuner, at 10 o'clock. This meal I have with the children, whilst their Zénéne hovers round serving them; one must keep an eye on the meals, as frequently the servants would serve the food of the children badly, were they not watched, and even deprive them of what was ordered.

Dejeuner over, I give out the materials for dinner and tiffin, and go over the daily expenditure with the cook. His items are jotted down in some Indian lingo, so that I have to ask "and what is this 30 cents for?" etc. The children's daily governess has arrived, the Zénéne has gone off, and also the other servants, for their two hours off duty, and if my baby is sleeping I take my cap and apron off and have a siesta.

Tiffin, which is at two o'clock, consists of tea, bread, butter, jam, and porridge for the little ones, with, occasionally, biscuits or cake. The little ones dine at 5.30, and the grown-ups at 7.30; if possible, I like to have everything settled up at 9 o'clock, as one never can foretell what the night has in store, where a baby is.

THORNS.

"Ugh!" and quite impatiently I fling myself into a big cane and wood Chinese chair, as I mutter "There have been few roses on the pathway to-day, but numerous thorns." Well! well! I have a little while to myself now, and I am going to enjoy it." Madame and bébé are settled up; both have dined, and are now enclosed in their respective mosquito nets. The words of Mr. Ross, in one of his lectures to the nurses of my training school, come back forcibly to me—"in hospital, the patients' relatives are a plague of locusts, but in private work they are a veritable nightmare." How true!

This morning, after performing my patient's toilet and arranging her bed, I opened the window. With a swoop, old Madame, who had been watching narrowly all I did, made for it, but, seeing her intention, I quietly intercepted her with my outstretched arm. Then issued a hot argument. "Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!" said the old lady, as with hands upraised she informed me that, when she had *her* baby (pointing to the patient) every window was not only shut, but paper pasted over the chinks to prevent the air entering. The previous confinement of my patient I learned had been very difficult, and she had become septic. The remembrance of that, and the fear of sepsis recurring, had completely put the old dame "off her head."

previous page next page