

With the Hop Pickers.

One often longs for a thing, and, when one least expects it, it drops at one's feet, and the reality is very different to one's preconceived ideas.

This was my experience (and, I believe, that of others) with regard to nursing amongst the hop pickers; it was strange, interesting, and delightful, but not in the least what we expected or imagined. The brief accounts published gave us nurses, at all events, a very inadequate impression of the work, and we came to the conclusion that other new workers were equally surprised.

The Mission to the Hop Pickers started thirty years ago, but it is only of recent years that it has developed to its present proportions, and that the medical branch has been started. It works in some 28 parishes, in 16 of which are nurses who give their services. The other workers are voluntary, clergy, who volunteer, as well as the local clergy, the Church Army, and lay workers of both sexes. Some of these organise concerts, magic lantern entertainments, or superintend coffee stalls, or tea carts of the coster kind, which they wheel about into the different fields, and sell hot tea and coffee and provisions at cost price.

The largest parish is Paddock Wood, where 10,000 men were employed last year; next in size comes East Peckham, with 7,000 hop pickers. The latter place was where I worked. We got out at Paddock Wood Station, and had a drive of four or five miles to Peckham through a rather flat, uninteresting country, now lively with the immigrants.

What a strange sight met our eyes at every turn: the fields were covered with camps of workers, the different growers or farmers providing various impromptu or permanent shelters for the strangers. Rows of sheds made of wood, barns, discarded army tents, and here and there carts with awnings, vans belonging to tinkers, travellers' or gipsies' wigwam little tents, hedges closed in with sticks

and awning. The floors of the barns were strewn with straw, and cubicles for the different families were made out of sheep hurdles. Straw seemed to form the only bedding of thousands, though here and there one saw sacking provided. Oil-cloth was considered a very good covering, as it kept rain and damp out.

The luggage of the hoppers seemed to consist of bags, pails, and

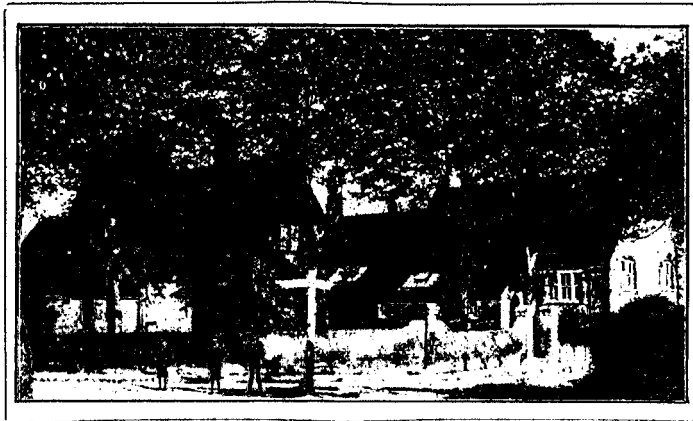
perambulators. It certainly was marvellous how those perambulators held all the babies and luggage. The babies were so muffled up that they rattled along with the pails, bags, and old clothes

on them, over them, in absolute stillness.

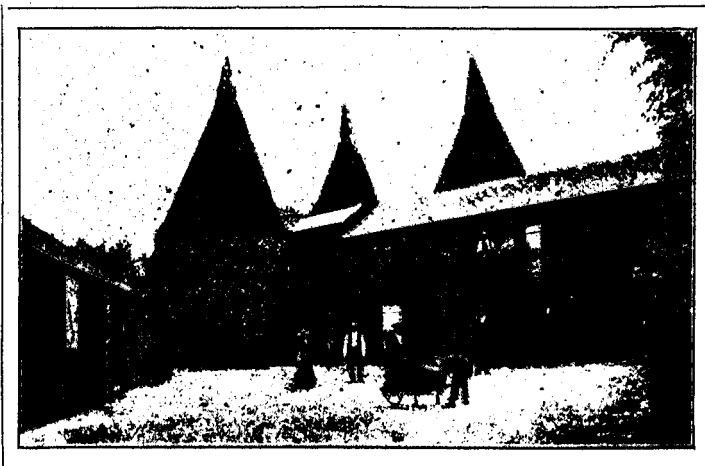
Nothing astonished me more than the class of arrivals — hawkers, costers, cockneys, travellers, Romanies, ticket-of-leave men, women, children, and infants, all arrived together. If they came by train, they filled the carriages from the floor to the roof, and crowded at the windows. The men were always drunk, and

bottles stuck out of their pockets, from which their thirst was assuaged until they could reach the next public house.

The caravan people, of course, arrived in state, their little ponies or gaunt old horses conveying a sense of wealth and property in contrast with the poverty of those who had to "tramp it" or



The Schools, East Peckham. Nurses' Head-quarters and Surgery.



Oast Houses for Drying Hops.

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