

NURSES OF MERCY TO THE LONE FUR-TRAPPERS.

BY FELIX J. KOCH.

Away up on the lonely Labrador Peninsula there ply the profession of trained nurse, a number of women—angels of mercy they might be termed—who have learned the art not alone of caring for the sick, but sometimes, even, of healing as well—not as a means of livelihood, for their husbands provide for that, but out of pure milk of human kindness and pity for the suffering. These are the wives of the *factors* or general masters of the Hudson Bay Company's lone outposts in the wilderness.

You, who have been away from the haunts of men, even for a brief summer's vacation camping, or who have been out on a sight-seeing journey for a couple of weeks, come to feel how you have been made an Ishmael with every man's hand raised against you, to bleed you, if he can but get the chance. And then, how good it *does* seem, simply to get back to the company of lovely woman, and feel her presence near! Multiply this loneliness and soul hunger a thousand-fold, and the anguish of the dying or the very sick, and you will appreciate, faintly, what it means to the lone trapper, sick and weary, to know that, as his illness grows apace, he can hitch up the dogs and have himself borne to the post of the *H.B.C.*, and there the factor's wife, the "lady," as they know her, will minister to his wants.

Curious cases, indeed, these self-appointed

nurses sometimes have to deal with, not wholly outside their own kin, either, at that.

We were strolling with one of them—Mrs. Swaffield, wife of the *factor* at Cartwright—down the long broad walk which is built through the *muskeg*, so as to lead past all the several Company buildings and out to the cemetery of the post, when the splendid Eskimo dogs came up, fawning.

"Don't touch them!" she warned us.

"Some of my meanest, saddest cases have come from the dogs. This so much so that now Dr. Grenfell, the mission doctor for the fishermen, is advocating abolishing the Eskimo dog altogether, in favour of the gentler reindeer.

"My own boy gave me a case of nursing I shall never forget," she continued.

Stuart, a lad of eleven now, it seems, was almost eaten alive by those dogs some seven years ago.

Mrs. Swaffield was busy about the post, looking after other self-imposed patients, when, suddenly, she heard the dogs yelping wildly—for the Eskimo dog, you know, does not bark.

For a time she thought nothing at all of it, for dogs are dogs the world over, you know. By and by, as the noise continued, however, her curiosity got the better of her, and she went out to see why so much noise.

To her consternation she found that the entire pack had fallen upon her child. A Scotch dog, brought along from home, was alone doing what he could to protect him. It was a herculean task to beat the dogs off—they are much like wolves once they've tasted human blood; and when finally the little fellow was taken in he was



A PATIENT.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)