

## A DELIGHTFUL FIELD FOR PIONEERS.

From time to time we have drawn attention in this Journal to the fine work carried on under the Kentucky Committee for Mothers and Babies Inc., of which Mrs. Mary Breckinridge, R.N., Wendover, above Hyden, Leslie County, U.S.A., is director.

Mrs. Breckinridge is well known to many nurses in this country for her work under the American Committee for the Devastated Regions in France after the war. Those who know her realise how profound are her sympathies, and deeply they were stirred by the high maternal and infant mortality in the mountainous districts of Kentucky, U.S.A., and her determination to help the mothers in child-birth in these isolated fastnesses, in spite of geographical difficulties, of human indifference or opposition, for even many members of the Nursing Profession in the United States of America are incomprehensibly indifferent on the question.

Mrs. Breckinridge's first step was to come to this country and obtain the certificate of the Central Midwives Board; she then returned to Kentucky to organise the work of the Hyden Centre. The purpose of this work is:—"To safeguard the lives and health of mothers and young children by providing trained nurse-midwives for rural areas where resident physicians are few and far between—these nurse-midwives to work under supervision; in compliance with the Regulations for Midwives of the State Board of Health, and the law governing the Registration of Nurses in Kentucky; and in co-operation with the nearest medical service." The reduction of the rural maternal and infant death-rate is the first objective, and the second is to afford to this rural population the same skilled generalised nursing care now regularly provided in cities only.

These nurse-midwives live in centres located within a radius of not more than five miles and cover a population of not more than eight hundred to each nurse-midwife. Their work is carried forward on horseback through a country without telegraph, telephone, bridges, automobiles or railroads. Mrs. Breckinridge tells that "this first little band of nurse-midwives, self-dedicated and self-prepared to tackle the greatest problem confronting the American Nursing World to-day, regard the danger and hardships offered them by the Kentucky Committee as a golden opportunity."

The fascinating story of heroism and gallant adventure involved in the work of the staff of the Kentucky Committee is one which has often been referred to in this Journal. It is one to make us proud of womanhood, and more particularly of the little band of nurse-midwives in far-away Kentucky. Their rule is simple. "If anyone can come for us we can go to them." That was why, when a man came to fetch Miss Halsall for a case six miles away, she rode off with him into the grey dawn, though he told her that the backwater from the river covered the road most of the last mile, and his horse had sometimes to swim.

Eight hours later her horse, Nellie Gray, came back dripping wet, saddle bags dangling, and riderless.

"If one's hair turned white *every time*," says Mrs. Breckinridge, "we should all be crowned with snow. This time the strain was not for long. As Martha Prewitt hurried off, the missing nurse came down the trail. She had been dragged off her horse but was uninjured."

And what of the horses, without whom the work of the nurses could not be accomplished? Of these gallant, understanding, willing friends Mrs. Breckinridge writes:—

"As our staff has grown we have kept one horse ahead, because horses haven't the resistance of nurses and need more frequent relief. Each nurse saddles and feeds and

grooms her own animal, and all the horses must be fed by seven in the morning so that we can get what our neighbours call a 'soon start.' The riding is always difficult and often dangerous. During the winter, when the cold spells come and the streams freeze over, the horses, shod with ice nails, slip and stumble and often crash through with bleeding hocks. Sometimes a way must be made for them out to the rapids, where one commonly finds by the fords a chivalrous mountaineer with his axe. When the 'tides' come the fords of the unbridged river are impassable. But one night Miss Rockstroh swam the river on Lady Jane—saddle bags and all—to a confinement case, following the father on his white mule.

"Our horses were all gallantly responsive to their obligations even when, as a coloured mammy of my childhood used to say, 'it don't ease them none.' Teddy Bear leaps a five-barred gate for the sheer joy of it. Sandy knew the tree Miss Caffin chose for hitching, by the precipice, wasn't safe, and demurred a bit, but stood by it so well that when Miss Caffin looked back, Sandy and the tree were disappearing over the precipice together. It took nearly an hour to revive him, for the breath was just naturally knocked out of his body. Then he quietly resumed the round of pre-natal and post-partum visits which his fall had interrupted.

"Auld Reekie, re-christened from Rick, in honour of Miss Ireland of Scotland, whose person he carried faithfully on our initial survey of births and deaths, is affectionate and biddable to the point of obsession. He trumpets aloud his grief if left alone. He it was Miss Logan rode over the twenty-mile trail from the railroad to Hyden when she came in just before Christmas, crossing three mountains and many streams and the Middle Fork with its waters up to the girths—and she never to her knowledge having been on a horse before!"

Like horses, like riders! In offering posts to its workers the Kentucky Committee for Mothers and Babies, Inc., could, with few changes, quote Garibaldi's speech to his Roman soldiers:—

"What I have to offer you is fatigue, danger, struggle, with risk of death; the chill of the cold night in the free air, and heat under the burning sun; no lodgings, uncertain provisions, forced marches, dangerous outposts—those who love humanity and their country may follow me."

"To such an appeal the workers have responded more quickly than we could receive them."

We desire to draw the special attention of those of our readers who "love humanity" and have the necessary qualifications, to the work of the Kentucky Committee, for as they will see in our Advertisement Supplement there are vacancies on the staff, as new centres are to be opened in the spring.

Before us, as we write, is a picture of twelve members of the staff mounted on their horses, and, on the front page of the same *Bulletin*, the following notice:—

### In Memoriam.

Colonel Edgewood.

(A Horse.)

Stricken suddenly in the line of duty, this devoted animal—high-spirited and eager—succumbed to an illness of unknown origin in August. He is the first horse we have lost. We had no better. We should like to put it on record that he never had to be urged, even at the end of a long day's rounds, and that more than one mother and baby owe their safety to his speed and sure-footedness on dark winter nights. *Ave atque vale!*

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)