

THE FRONTIER NURSING SERVICE, KENTUCKY.

From its inception we have kept our readers fully acquainted with the development of the splendid pioneer work in the Kentucky Highlands under the direction of Mrs. Mary Breckinridge, and were specially interested in the following Foreword in a recent issue of the Quarterly Bulletin of the Kentucky Committee for Mothers and Babies, now the Frontier Nursing Service.

"When old Buckle wrote his History of Civilisation in the last century, he had a lot to say about the characteristics of people who live in mountains. Certain traits of character develop when people live in a rugged country with the deep silence of shadowy canyons and the austere beauty of lofty heights to be reached only with struggle. These traits determine the personality of the mountaineer in whatever range we find him. He, the most individualistic person conceivable and the most rooted, has a kinship of thought and emotion with every other man and woman bred like himself.

"From the Scotch to the Kentucky highlands was a long step in the eighteenth century, but many thousands travelled that lonely and dangerous pathway. The little sailboats of a few hundred tons burden, broke the ocean's track for the sea palaces which have succeeded them. Bold was the spirit of the men who went down to the sea in ships in these earlier times, and bolder yet the spirit of those who left the settled coast lands of Virginia to plunge into a mountain wilderness. Among the most daring of these adventurers was one Roderick MacIntosh, whose honoured grave lies in Leslie County at Hyden, and whose descendants still live in that highland country. These men of the MacIntosh breed, whether in Kentucky or Scotland, go back in their ancestry to an origin older than human recorded time, their destiny shaped always by the determining forces of mountains.

"In June of this year there is coming another Scotsman from his Highlands to ours. This is Sir Leslie MacKenzie, whose work has done more than that of any man living to make "regions, rugged, roadless and mountainous," safe for human life. He will dedicate our little hospital and nursing centre on the slopes of Thousandsticks Mountain, at the foot of which lies the grave of Roderick MacIntosh.

"In the early days when the men beat their way through a trackless forest and innumerable dangers to found Kentucky, their women came with them. We feel that these pioneer wives and mothers who lived so bravely and died so simply, will be commemorated by the presence of Lady MacKenzie with her husband.

"It is Sir Leslie who has said: 'How much the mothers and children—the most delicate and fluid part of a population—may suffer from the stresses of industry, or poverty, or isolation.'"

This outpost of the Frontier Nursing Service, in the Kentucky Mountains, which will henceforth stand as a centre for the prevention of disease, and the maintenance and promotion of health, was dedicated on June 26th by Sir Leslie Mackenzie, M.A., M.D., LL.D., ex-member of the Scottish Board of Health, and Crown nominee for Scotland on the General Medical Council of Great Britain. Most warmly do we congratulate Mrs. Breckinridge on the splendid work accomplished, and upon the realisation of her hopes for the service of the mothers and babies whose welfare is so close to her heart.

Sir Leslie Mackenzie, whose Dedication Address is published in full in *The Lancet*, spoke in part as follows:—

"The Frontier Nursing Service already know the work of the pioneers in preparing the way for this assembly of

inauguration and dedication. It is a story full of adventure, sacrifice, passionate enthusiasm and splendid initiative. When, some years ago, Mrs. Mary Breckinridge came to us in Scotland to see how we had faced a similar problem in medical service and nursing, we were filled with a new sense of the significance of the work we had tried to do in the thinly peopled and difficult areas of Scotland. When, therefore, I was invited by the Frontier Nursing Service of Kentucky to give verbal form to the dedication of the hospital and nursing system now established in these mountains, I felt, indeed, a glow of supreme satisfaction that our work in Scotland had found an echo in the great spaces and mountains of an American Commonwealth. The invitation was a call of the Highlands to the Highlands. It is a symbol of kinship in feeling and outlook. It is the lightning spark that reveals the essential unity of our culture. An invitation coming with this warmth and delicacy of imagination, I could not refuse and, in the name of the Scottish Highlands, I accepted it with my whole heart. When my wife and I, more than 35 years ago, dedicated our lives to the service of Scotland, we could not foresee that now, when our work is nearing its end, we should be gladdened and newly inspired by this fine compliment to our Northern Kingdom. But the privilege and honour you have conferred upon us will make it easier for us to pass into the twilight of our lives, remembering the lights and sounds and silences of these historic creeks and mountain passes and pathways."

Sir Leslie then spoke of the fundamental unity of the Scottish and Kentucky problems, the biological groundwork of medical and nursing services, and of how Scotland had faced the problem of the Highlands and Islands, and concluded:—

"I have been speaking of Scotland, but I have been thinking of Kentucky. With you, as with us, the mother and child demand intensive care. With you, as with us, there is the ever recurring tragedy of hardship and death. Think what it means when a family loses the mother. The infant is robbed of its nurse; the other children are robbed of their first friend and teacher; the husband is robbed of his companion and confidant. The death of the mother means the maximum of unhappiness to the family she leaves. It is in this light that we must study the facts and in this light the facts are like no others. To preserve the life of mother and child is the problem before the Frontier Nursing Service. It needs only to be put into words to command the interest and sympathy of every humanist.

"This hospital is the radiating centre of the nursing service in these mountains. The maxim of the trained nurse is: "You need me? I am ready." The hospital is a temple of service where the lamp never goes out. There will always be a waking ear listening for the distant cry of a mother in distress. There will always be an officer ready to go forth in the spirit of help and loving kindness. Here, in this temple of humanism, every hour is filled with a clear ideal. The mothers and the fathers know that here they have friends that they can come to and speak to, and live with. Through these mountains and forests the Frontier Nursing Service will become a gracious presence transfiguring the individual lives. It makes an appeal that no one in the end can resist. The Service draws its life from an unending fountain of human sympathy and love. That is what inspires the skilled and brave nurses to face the day's duty without misgiving; to feel that the least of duties is a great and holy thing and to live for all their working days in the atmosphere of creative friendship. Here, in their hours with one another and their tales of adventure, they will keep warm the fires of woman's social genius. They will always feel that, here on the frontier outposts, they are living out the true purpose of the

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)