

NURSING IN THE SUDAN.

By E. HILLS YOUNG.

The Nursing Service of the Sudan, a division of the Medical Service and the youngest service in the country, is a very small department even yet, although its growth has been very rapid during the last few years. The first British nurse came out to the Sudan twenty-four years ago and retired from the position of matron only last year, leaving, with regret shared by all who had been associated with her, a country in which she had been one of the earliest and at times the only British woman resident.

It is difficult to exaggerate the value of the work done in nursing British residents and native women, by this and other nurses in the earlier days of the British occupation. Their labours, under arduous and often primitive conditions, have contributed largely to the building-up of the present nursing service.

To-day there are twelve Nursing sisters in the country, with a matron at the Khartoum Hospital. There is also a sister service, that of midwifery at Omdurman, which is organised separately for the training of the native midwife, under the control of an inspectress of midwives and a matron. All are now Government officials, but until two years ago the sisters were under a separate committee. The terms of service are good and compare well with most overseas nursing services. The climate is very trying at times, but endurable throughout the year, and during the winter months it is delightful.

The health of the sisters is much better than that of other women in the country, because they have plenty of work and exercise, and can enjoy their games in their off-duty hours; thus they have no time to get bored or to think about the heat.

The actual nursing of the majority of the patients in the forty hospitals in the Sudan is done by the "tumargies" (native orderlies). These on joining are usually untrained. The male attendants only are expected to read and write; the female attendants for the women's wards are generally illiterate. There are a few trained girls from a Nurses Training School at Omdurman who can read and write, but these are not nearly numerous enough to supply all hospitals. Instruction in practical nursing is given to both male and female attendants, who are most anxious to learn, some being extremely quick; but it is difficult to teach them the real spirit of nursing for the work's sake only.

The training of the Sudanese girls is done at the Women's Hospital in Omdurman, where the sister-in-charge speaks fluent Arabic and is able to give lectures and classes to the girls. She has one other British sister to help her, and a few trained girls are kept on as staff nurses. The training school was opened in 1925 with ten probationers; their ages were from 14 to 52, and half of them were unable to read or write. Three more were taken on at the beginning of 1926 and given very simple classes including lessons in Arabic. At the end of three months' trial they had to sign a contract to stay on at the School for two years, and then to serve the Government for another two years. Their salary is PT150 per month (about 30s.); out of this they pay PT60 for their board, while receiving free quarters and uniform. At the end of 1927 seven of the girls were passed as trained, three being kept as staff nurses in Omdurman Hospital, the others returning to the hospital nearest their homes, or at least in their own Province, if possible. These girls are specially useful in hospitals having no British sister.

There are great difficulties in obtaining and training a suitable type of women for nursing. The reasons are as follows:

1. The women of the Sudan, with the exception of a few who may have been trained as teachers, are illiterate.
2. The nursing profession is looked upon as a very menial one by the people, and it is difficult to persuade women of a good class to undergo training.

3. Except in special cases, it is useless to train unmarried girls as they will inevitably marry at the first opportunity.

The customs and home training of the better class Sudanese girl are against any kind of rapidity. She moves and acts with affected slowness and deliberation. This may appear a minor matter, but it is of great hindrance in nursing and a difficult habit to overcome.

By degrees these difficulties are being tackled. Married women of good character, either divorced, or having divorced their husbands, and who have sustained a certain degree of disillusionment in married life and acquired a certain amount of experience of home life and matters, are often trained as useful nurses. As in the case of the boys, it is difficult to instil into these girls and women the true spirit of service for others. Very few of the trained or untrained are nurses in the real sense of the word, although some can do excellent work. Still, by degrees, with a real love for the work and the people, and by example, great things can be done.

The Midwifery School was actually started before the Nurses' Training School, also at Omdurman, adjoining the Women's Hospital. In 1921 four women who had been practising midwifery, or were daughters of midwives, were admitted to the School. None could read or write, so that a very practical course of four months duration was arranged by the British Superintendent, after which these women returned to their villages and practice. The Superintendent, or Inspectress as she is now called, had worked for many years in Egypt; she thus knew the language thoroughly and also realised the difficulties of such a move.

After the pupils returned to their villages she made an annual tour of inspection, and tried to collect pupils for the future courses.

In 1923 the course was changed to one of six months, and a fuller training given. Each pupil had to deliver 20 cases, and see 40 others. One or two of the former pupils were kept on in the School to assist, and others who were practising in Omdurman co-operated with the School in notifying their cases and in supervising the pupils. Lectures as well as practical training are now given; at the end of six months an examination is held, and the successful pupils are given a certificate and a licence to practise. The licences have to be endorsed yearly if the midwife is practising, and she has to keep a register of births. In the same year as the Midwifery School a Welfare Class and Clinic was started for the women in Omdurman, and the pupils have the advantage of experience in this work. In 1929 the work had developed to such an extent that a British matron, as well as an Inspectress, was needed for the school.

In 1930 there were 20 pupils in the School, and each delivered over 20 cases in Omdurman. In that year there were 1,630 births in the town, one of the largest native towns in North Africa, and not a single death was due to puerperal septicæmia, obstructed labour or hæmorrhage. This speaks volumes for the training and work of these women, because the home life of many of the women of Omdurman is very primitive and far from ideal.

By now there are over 100 midwives trained and practising besides the old *dayahs* (native midwives) who are still working in the towns and villages throughout the country. These latter have to be licensed, and have to present themselves for renewal of their licence yearly.

The work of the British sisters in the hospitals is chiefly that of nursing British officials and their wives and families, supervising the women's wards and out-patient department, and assisting in the theatre. In Khartoum Hospital there are five sisters, each doing night duty for a fortnight in rotation. There are nine untrained native girls, one of whom can just read and write and take temperatures. When she is off duty the sister has to take temperatures, give medicines, etc. As yet the number of British sisters is not sufficient to permit of their supervising in the native men's wards. The matron inspects these wards, as well

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