

Always however her thoughts turned to Kentucky, and to the mothers and children in its mountains, where there was dire need for doctors and nurses. In America the death rate for women in childbirth is the highest in the civilised world, and Mrs. Breckinridge states that more mothers have been lost there in childbirth than men in all its wars.

So when she returned home she proposed to make a demonstration of what intelligent nursing could do in Eastern Kentucky, and with her usual thoroughness made a survey of conditions in a region of about 1,000 square miles, affecting the plan she had in mind. She found girls were married at fourteen, and were "old mothers" at twenty-five. There were very few good physicians in the hills. Ignorant quack doctors and "granny women" nursed the sick, and said: "Hit was God's will"—when they died.

She learnt where the midwives lived, finding fifty-three of them in all. Most could neither read nor write, and what midwifery they knew had been learned by watching other old crones. They told Mrs. Breckinridge they had not begun their practice, it had been thrust upon them. As neighbours they had been called in. "Somebody had to be around to catch the babies," one of them said, and two had performed this service up to ninety years of age.

In spite of the high maternal mortality in the United States of America it is a regrettable fact that the nursing profession there has little appreciation of its opportunities and its responsibilities in this connection, nor are midwifery training schools available as in this country. Nothing daunted, her survey complete, Mrs. Breckinridge crossed the Atlantic and obtained the certificate of the Central Midwives Board in England, then returning home, with funds which she herself provided and obtained from her relatives and friends, and with the backing of the Kentucky State Board of Health, she formed her organisation in 1925 "to provide trained nurse-midwives for neglected regions, to work in co-operation with the nearest medical service and public health authorities, to deliver women in childbirth and safeguard the lives of little children, to care for the sick of all ages, and take measures to prevent disease, and to work for economic conditions less inimical to health." It was a splendid venture, and since her purpose was to work through the people, in opening her first nursing centre she began by organising a strong local committee of the mountaineers, the staff of the centre consisting of herself and two nurse-midwives.

Now there is a staff of thirty nurses in the Service in addition to herself, and their rule of work for themselves and the sure-footed horses who carry them, is simple. "If the father can come for the nurse, the nurse will get to the mother."

And over steep ice-covered mountain tracks, through snow and storm, through the raging torrents of icy rivers, holding their equipment over their heads while the horses swim across them, they go gaily, gladly, at the risk of their lives at any hour of the day or night.

"My woman's punishing mighty bad," said one husband as he roused the sleeping centre. "We didn't aim to ask you to ride out on such a terrible night, but—"

"That's all right. I'm used to it. I'll be right down," the nurse replied. And a few minutes later out she came, dressed in a heavy sheepskin coat, and boots and breeches, forty-pound saddle bags over her shoulder, and a layette under one arm."

Again Mrs. Breckinridge told the author "We never could have come so far as we have in these first six years if it had not been for the spirit shown by our nurses from the start. In the Great Drought, when many of them were in the saddle literally day and night, we grew so hard pressed for funds to relieve the terrible suffering that reluctantly I asked each nurse to take a postponement

of one month's salary. Their agreement was unanimous. 'The Frontier Nursing Service means more to us than anything in the world,' wrote one. And another asked me 'Am I not old enough in the Service to share in its sacrifices?'"

That is the spirit of the Frontier Nurses.

It is splendid to realise that many British nurses helped to build up this fine Force. M. B.

## THE PUBLIC HEALTH.

### All-India Institute of Hygiene.

From Calcutta comes the welcome news that the All-India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health has been opened there.

The Institute marks in a sense the completion of the School of Tropical Medicine, which adjoins it. By research and teaching it will bridge the gulf between knowledge and practice by providing adequate equipment for fighting disease in India. The enterprise has been made possible by a munificent gift from the Rockefeller Foundation, which gave the site, the building, and the equipment on condition that India furnished the staff and provided for the maintenance of the Institute.

### Mental Defectives.

A committee of members of the House of Commons, of which Wing-Commander James is the secretary, has circulated a memorandum upon a permissive Bill to legalise the voluntary sterilisation of certain mental defectives. The Bill proposes voluntary and permissive sterilisation for mental defectives for whom it is now illegal as an adjunct, and not as an alternative, to segregation. It is urged that the operation involves negligible risks to life and leaves the physical, mental and sexual powers unchanged. Sterilisation, it is also pointed out, has been in effective operation in other countries and in one part of the British Empire, and if properly safeguarded it can be employed as an economical and humane extension of the principle of preventive medicine.

### A Horrible Experiment.

We are glad to note that some members of Parliament are taking action to prevent dental vivisection of dogs, and will, we have no doubt, receive active support when the truth is known of the process of experiment.

It may be recalled that in July last the International Dental Federation of Zurich offered a prize, open for competition to the dentists of the world, for research in root canal technique of teeth, the experiments to be carried out on dogs.

The experiment is thus described:—The dog's jawbones are laid bare, and pus is injected. At the end of three months the lower jaw is treated. The upper jaw remains untreated for another 15 months, after which the dog is killed and a comparison is made between the treated and untreated jaws.

Repeated protests have been made in France by various animal protection societies, but unfortunately there is no control over vivisection in France.

Dog lovers need to be alert in protecting these dear animals.

### The Slaughter of the Innocents.

It was announced in the House of Commons that during the period January 1st, 1931, to September 30, 1932, 391 persons aged 15 or less were killed in the Metropolitan Police District. We are glad to note indignation is rising day by day at the callous lack of traffic control in London. No person under 20 years of age should be permitted to drive heavy vehicles in the streets.

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