

Backblocks District Nursing Scheme

Slowly perhaps, but surely, we hope, the Back-blocks District Nursing scheme is progressing. A nurse has just been appointed to the Seddon district, by the Wairau Hospital Board, and the settlers at Motu are moving to have a nurse there. Other hospital boards will soon see the wisdom of this way of caring for the sick of their outlying districts, and Dr. Valentine's scheme, which lies so near his heart, will result in what he hopes for: A net-work of nurses all round the Dominion ; so that no back- block settler, and no settler's wife will be too far away to get help in their time of trouble.

Letters from **Nurse Bilton**, the pioneer nurse in this work at Uruti, show that she is well appreciated. We quote some passages:

“The back- blockers are still keeping me busy; but they had the good grace to let me have a few days to myself while I was moving my quarters from the general store to Mrs. McKenzie's, which is about a quarter of a mile off the metal road, but a very much more comfortable home. I have a nice, large bedroom, looking out on to a pretty lawn and garden, and when off duty., there are some lovely willows weeping over a stream, where I can swing my hammock and enjoy a read.

My things were fairly straight when I was called away to a little girl with pneumonia, and had only just sponged her down and got her comfortable when the mother came and said another patient wanted me. He was in dire distress — his wife had been confined prematurely, and he brought me a vague message as to her being in danger. Needless to say, he was at the extreme limit of my district! After explaining to Mrs. Musher how to nurse her little girl, sponge, and take her temperature for the night, I left with Mr. Belsham, and on passing the Uruti store rang up the hospital to know if they could take the little girl in. They took her in next day. By this time it was 10 o'clock, and a pitch dark night, and we started off with fresh horses for Mount Messenger.

“The moon arose about 11, and there was a lovely white mist lying over all the wooded gullies; which looked very beautiful in the moonlight. The glow-worms, too, are like rows upon rows of electric light. If only I had not been anxious about my case, I should have thoroughly enjoyed the drive, as the roads are in fairly good order now.

We arrived at our destination shortly after midnight, and my patient was comfortably fixed up in bed, with her baby beside her, both just dropping off to sleep. Two neighbours, one living two, and the other eight, miles away, had acted nurse to her. They had done their best, but I gave them a good rating for not scrubbing up their grimy hands, and for not leaving the placenta for me to examine. The wee baby was six weeks premature, and only weighed five pounds; but it was quite strong, and cried lustily when I bathed it.

“The mother got on well, helped by several lysol douches; but the baby, after the seventh day, lost ground, and became very jaundiced. I rang up Dr. Walker, who had attended the mother in her previous confinement, and he advised me to take the baby in to let him see it, and to take it off the breast altogether, and give it albumin water and ten drops of brandy every two hours. The mother, knowing it was best for her baby, let me take it in, and we arrived at Dr. Walker's about 7.30 p.m. After Mrs. Walker had very kindly given me a delicious tea — I do sometimes long for the flesh-pots of Egypt and the luxuries of civilisation — and we had fed the baby again, the doctor drove us up to the hospital, and I gave “my” baby over to the Matron — quite sorry to part with the little mite. But I could not have nursed it out here, as I am due at another case, which should oblige me by coming off to-day. If it does not, and so far there are no premonitory symptoms, there will be no Xmas. in New Plymouth for me; alas!

“It is quite amusing the way the people find me out, and bring their babies for me to see. Even away out on Mount Messenger, a mother living half-way to Urenui must bring her baby for me to inspect. Fortunately, they have the common-sense to bring them just as they are beginning to go down hill, through mal feeding, so that it does not take long for them to make headway after being put on humanised milk.

“My Xmas. in the back-blocks was a strange one: No Xmas. carols; Xmas hymns, or the pastoral symphony, which are always associated in my mind with Xmas. The day began rather badly: The horse which was being harnessed to take the cream to the factory, played up, and backed right into the river, where he stuck up to his neck. The man had to leave me in charge while he went for help, and as two of our nearest neighbours were away for the holidays, he was away some time — some hours it seemed to me, for I thought the horse would drown, he made such frantic efforts to extricate himself, only to sink deeper in the mud. At last help came, and they put a chain round the horse’s body and attached it to another horse, who dragged our horse bodily out of the river, none the worse for being in it 3½ hours. I was so thankful the poor man did not lose his horse, as he is as poor as the proverbial church mouse, if not poorer. Such poverty I have never seen; it is most distressing to live in the midst of it. A philanthropic lady in New Plymouth had given me some useful articles of children’s clothing, left over from a bazaar, for me to dispose of among my poor and needy back-blockers. If she had seen the gratitude of the poor woman when I gave her some of them on Xmas. morning, it would have made her heart glad.

“To return to my Xmas. Day: Just as our horse was safely landed on the bank, a friend, the mother of my first little patient here, drove up and said she was going to carry me off to dinner. Nothing loth, I went, and we had quite a nice dinner of roast goose and plum pudding. Then the mail arrived, and there was great excitement opening all our packages. Amongst mine was a huge Xmas. cake, from Godber’s, in Wellington, and so, of course, although we did not want it in the least, we had to sample it with afternoon tea, and it was delicious. After all the children had shown me what Santa Claus had brought them, my friends drove me round to some more friends, who insisted on my staying to tea. The tea-table was prettily decorated with holly and honeysuckle, and laden with good things, and after spending a pleasant couple of hours they drove me back by moonlight. So my Xmas Day ended much more brightly than it began.”

Kai Tiaki: the journal of the nurses of New Zealand. 1 April 1915 (PP) [14/02/2020]

Farewells to the Nursing Contingent

The Trained Nurses’ Association, Canterbury Branch, gave a farewell party to their nurses who are about to leave New Zealand for the scene of war. The guests of honour were Miss Bertha Nurse, Sister Wilson, Sister Inglis, Misses Harris, Livesey, and Fanning, all of whom are being sent by the Government, and Nurses Dobson and **Bilton**, Sister Benjamin (Matron of the Sanatorium), Nurse Downer, who are also going to England. A large number of the members of the Trained Nurses’ Association were present, among them being Mr. Julius and Mrs. George Rhodes. A letter was read from Messrs. Stringer & Bridge, who, besides sending their good wishes, chose the occasion for enclosing a cheque for £3 towards the Nurses’ Benevolent Fund. Mrs. Leslie Crooke, in a very nice letter, expressed her sincere wishes for the safe return of the nurses.

Contingent leaves New Zealand

Scene at Ship's Side

In the genial sunshine of one of Wellington's most charming Indian summer days, the fifty nurses who are to serve with the British nursing service sailed from Wellington in the Rotorua for England at noon yesterday. In another land, under skies which are not so bright and mayhap in surroundings which are not conducive to gladness, these women of New Zealand will doubtless have work to do which will make the heaviest call on their courage and steadfastness. When this happens it may help them to endure bravely all that may come to them and recall their last minutes with the people of their own country. It was a magnificent farewell that was given to the nurses by the Wellington people, and by their own visiting friends, just such a send-off as everyone was prepared to say the brave little band deserved. For one could not look over the faces of these young women and have any suspicion that a single one of those grey cloaks covered a faltering soul. They looked, as they doubtless are, a capable lot of women, who were offering for the noblest work that women can do, and offering with a knowledge that the work will be trying, but also with a determination to do. It was a contingent of which New Zealand has a right to be proud, and one that will assuredly acquit itself with honour.

Surely the beneficent spirit of Florence Nightingale must have been drawn earthwards to contemplate the tribute offered by an appreciative people to her modest successors — that band of quiet workers following in the wake of her grand and noble mission.

An hour before the ship sailed the nurses had arrived or were going on board, most of them bearing bouquets or parcels, obviously the parting gifts of friends. And the whole of the wharf by the steamer's side and the decks of the ship as well were crowded with people, all proud to do honour to the nurses. No demonstration had been organised, but there was a good deal of pent-up cheering and song in that multitude that would have found ready enough expression if a lead had been given. The Patriotic Society had arranged for Jupp's Band to be present, and it played appropriate music, enlivening the last minutes and drying many a pair of eyes trying to look steadily through tears at the little grey colony over the deck railings.

The Minister of Defence (the Hon. J. Allen) and the Minister of Public Health (the Hon. R. Heaton Rhodes) both went on board the ship to wish the nurses goodbye individually. Doubtless the Prime Minister would have been there also, but he was absent in Christchurch. A presentation bouquet from the Patriotic Society — a beautiful basket of blooms — was handed to Miss Maclean, who is in charge of the party, by Sir Joseph Ward, who expressed at the same time the heartiest good wishes which the gift was intended to express. Miss Maclean said that they were all a little sad at the hour of leaving, but they were all ready to do their best to uphold the honour of New Zealand. A little knot of people had congregated while the ceremony was in progress, and after it was over there was applause and cheering.

On the wharf the cheerful strains of "Tipperary," "Soldiers of the King," "Rule Britannia," played by Jupp's Band, enlivened the last few minutes. The nurses, from the upper decks, detached from the bouquets which they held long streamers of many-coloured ribbons, the ends of which were picked up by their friends on the wharf below, and by and by, like glittering gossamers in the kindly sunshine, they tailed down in dozens — light chains of friendship. Then the band struck up "The Girl I Left Behind Me," always the most affecting of parting airs, but the whimsical incongruity of the situation brought forth smiles on faces near to tears. The order of "All ashore !" had been given, and the gangways were up. The big ship began to back out, snapping the web of ribbons, and, amid cheers and a waving of handkerchiefs and to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne" from the band, the Rotorua slid out from the wharf, and set out on her long voyage.

The trained nurses who sailed on the Rotorua other than those selected and sent by the Defence Department as part of the New Zealand Army Nursing Service, were Nurses Dobson, Gill, Benjamin and Baker, late of Christchurch Hospital. Miss Smart, late of Auckland Hospital, and well known as a private nurse in Auckland, and Nurse **Bilton**, late of Napier Hospital. These nurses have gone privately at their own expense for the purpose of offering their services at the War Office when they reach England, with the hope that they also may be permitted to help in the good work of caring for our sick and wounded soldiers. They are to be admired for their patriotic enthusiasm which has led them to make very considerable sacrifices for which they deserve the very warmest appreciation.

Extracts from "The Dominion," "N.Z. Times," and "Evening Post."

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Nurse **Bilton**, trained Napier Hospital, and the pioneer nurse for back-block district nursing has gone in the Rotorua for service during the war.

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Letters from our Nurses Abroad and at Sea

Miss **Margaret Bilton** writes from Malta, where she has been on duty since leaving the ill-fated hospital ship Dover Castle, on which she was for seven months. She writes to say how much she appreciates "Kai Tiaki," which keeps the nurses in touch with dear little New Zealand. Malta was at its best with the lovely spring flowers out; the patients from Salonika appreciate them so much.

Kai Tiaki. 1 July 1908; 1 April 1909; 1 July 1909 [x 2]; 1 Oct 1909; 1 April 1910; 1 Oct 1910; 1 January 1911 [x 2]; 1 April 1911; 1 January 1912; 1 Oct 1912; 1 January 1913; 1 Oct 1915; 1 January 1916; 1 July 1916; 1 Oct 1919