

NURSE ON HORSEBACK RIDES THE LONELY KENTUCKY TRAILS

Day and Night the Women of the Frontier Service Are on Duty To Answer the Calls Received From Isolated Cabins

TO the "forgotten frontier," the lonely, almost trackless counties high up in the Kentucky mountains, has penetrated a new heroine, who almost daily encounters danger and hardship. She is the nurse-midwife of the Frontier Nursing Service.

Her uniform, from its jaunty overseas cap to its smartly tailored riding breeches, is as dashing as the scarlet coat of the royal mounted policeman in the magazines. And with as little concern for her own safety as that gallant fellow would show, she leaps into her saddle at a moment's notice and rides wherever duty calls. Often, in the Winter, her trail leads through snow and treacherous ice, over mountain paths that hardly deserve the name even in the best of seasons. In the Spring she must ford the swollen mountain streams. In the Summer her faithful horse picks his way through the dried-up beds of those same streams, stumbling now and again in the dark, good mountaineer though he is.

Many of the calls for aid which the frontier nurse receives, Winter or Summer, come to her lonely cottage in the middle of the night. Her saddle-bags are ready packed. She lights her kerosene lantern, saddles her horse swiftly and rides into the night. And, again like the mounted police, she always gets her man. Only in her case it is usually a woman. For the principal work of the Frontier Nursing Service is midwifery.

Conditions Before.

Before Mrs. Mary Breckenridge founded the service the duties of the midwife in these mountains were performed by old women who had taken up the work to aid their neighbors. Their intentions were the best in the world, but their ignorance and superstition were boundless. Charms served in the place of medicines, scientific instruments and skillful hands. And there was no resident doctor in the whole of Leslie County (where the first station of the series was opened), no doctor for a population of 10,000 and an area of 375 square miles.

Since 1925 the frontier nurse has been gradually taking the place of the old midwife—never offending her, however, and never supplanting her against the wishes of the expectant mother. The service had its beginning at Wendover. It has already spread to Hyden, Asher and Confluence in Leslie County; Red Bird River, Creekville and Brutus in Clay County; Bowling Town in Perry County; and Beverly, in Belle County. The largest of these hamlets, Hyden, has only two streets.

In these lonely outposts the service has established centres with picturesque names taken from the country round about, like Beech Fork, Possum Bend, Flat Creek and Red Bird River (the last-named centre being the gift of Mrs. Henry Ford). In each centre lives a frontier nurse, never with more than one other nurse to keep her company.

But she has no time to feel lonely or bored. Her mountaineer neighbors are cut off from civilization; it is an endless task to bring them up to date in matters of health. All

day long the nurse is busy calling on expectant mothers and mothers of recently born children, giving advice on pre-natal care, seeing the latest arrivals through the early days of their lives. She drops in at cabins to attend all who may be ill—a 1-year-old with "Summer complaint," an older child suffering from hookworm, a mountaineer who has met with an accident while felling trees.

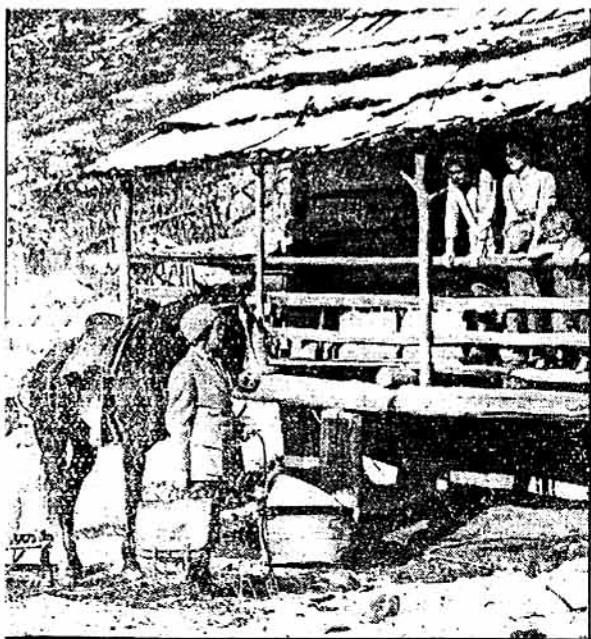
Everywhere she goes she teaches the mountain mothers—about food, what to give their children and how to prepare it; about sanitation and prevention, how to protect their families from unsafe water, from flies, from the poisonous rattlesnakes and copperheads that abound.

On certain days she must ride back to the centre in time for an after-

By the light of an open fire and her lantern, nothing more, she must safely usher a new being into the world. Two lives are in her hands. If the case proves difficult, if complications set in, she can never be sure that a doctor can be summoned in time, or even that he can be reached at all.

It took three days to get a doctor on one occasion for a serious case. But for the nurse the patient would have died before he reached her bedside—which he did after a ride of thirty-three miles without stopping except to change horses.

So far nurses of the frontier service have won through without a serious accident to themselves or their mounts and with the loss of only one mother's life, although they



The Mountain Nurse Arrives.

noon clinic. There will be vaccinations against smallpox, pneumonia and influenza, and inoculations against typhoid and diphtheria. There will be school children's eyes and teeth to be examined and their condition reported to the State Board of Health. There will be cases of minor illness, for people ride miles on muleback to seek the nurse's help. Every question of health that arises within five miles in any direction from her station is the concern of the frontier nurse.

At long last, very weary, the nurse can go to bed. But always one ear must be open for the rap on the window. If it comes, no matter the hour, then must she get up and light her lantern, peer through the window at the worried father standing outside in the dark, and shout: "How is she?" And very likely he will shout back: "Come on, woman! My woman's mighty bad!"

Then will she follow him back to his cabin, no matter what the weather, for it is part of the frontier nurse's code.

have handled more than 900 maternity cases.

One of the nurses has figured in a Kentucky blood feud, but only, of course, in a neutral capacity. A small boy summoned her to a lonely place in the forest, where a mountaineer lay with a bullet in his stomach. The nurse did not stop to inquire whether he had really killed the man whose death had nearly cost him his own life. She dressed his wound and sent the boy for help. Mountaineers improvised a stretcher and carried the wounded man sixteen miles on foot to the Frontier Nursing Service hospital at the Hyden centre, where surgical care was obtained for him from the nearest mining town, twenty-two horseback miles away.

In the five years since it was founded the Frontier Nursing Service has spread its work to cover an area of more than 700 square miles and a population of some 12,000. It will be extended until it can provide nursing for all the people among the 200,000 in the Kentucky mountains who need it and cannot get it now.