

part with good wishes for Christmas, and we now send our greeting, and hope for the best of Yule-tide joys for all our readers who cannot be present. Many of you will be decorating hospital wards and planning happy surprises for little children, many more will spend the holiday time in arranging festivities for Indian Christians ; all happy, but arduous, work. And for those of us whose homes are far away there will be an undertone, perhaps almost loud enough to drown the music, of longing for loved ones, and memories of other Christmas Days. Seven years ago in St. Paul's, we heard Canon Newbolt preach a Christmas sermon full of joy and good cheer. In it he said, "Happiness notoriously evades those who laboriously seek it," but Christmas tasks, however laborious, seem always to bring happiness, because the keynote of Christmas work is happiness with some one else.

While we are writing this a gramophone in the distance is playing "Nothing Venture, Nothing Have," "'Tis Love that makes the World Go Round," and we pass it on to our readers with the advice that they venture to throw off their cares and nursely dignity, and have a rollicking old-fashioned Christmas ; it would do us all good. Mr. Chesterton says, "Let us be consistent about Christmas, and either keep customs or not keep them. If you do not like sentiment and symbolism, you do not like Christmas, go away and celebrate something else. No doubt you could have a sort of scientific Christmas with a hygienic pudding and highly instructive presents stuffed into a Jaeger stocking ; go and have it then. If you like those things, doubtless you are a good sort of fellow, and your intentions are excellent. I have no doubt that you are really interested in humanity ; but I cannot think that humanity will ever be much interested in you."

THE WORK OF BOMBAY MUNICIPAL NURSES.

By MRS. MICHAEL.

THE majority of your readers have probably never heard of the Bombay Municipal Nurses or their work, and yet their work is quite as important in its way as that of any official in the Health Department. There are ten Districts under the Bombay Municipality from Colaba to Mahim. Each District has its own Municipal dispensary, doctor, nurse and general staff. Municipal nurses help in the registration of births and bring to the notice of the District Registrar the names of parents whose infants over six months old are still unvaccinated. By helping to get these children vaccinated they prevent the spread of small-pox. The Nurse also reports all infectious diseases that come to her

knowledge—for instance, I was visiting the residents of a particularly filthy *chawl* when my attention was drawn to an anxious looking woman who stood near a corner of her room, holding her *sari* out on either side like a fan—of course I looked to see what she was screening and there behind her in a market basket lay a small babe suffering from confluent small-pox. This woman was a bazar coolie. That ended my visiting for the day, as I had to report the case at once in order that the house, woman's clothes etc., should be thoroughly disinfected and the child taken to hospital, and also to get myself disinfected. During the plague time one of our nurses was asked to inquire at a certain house whether anyone had died there of plague. The people of the house were apparently playing cards when she entered, and seemed quite surprised at her question "Has anyone died of plague here"? "Oh, no," they replied "no one has died here at all." But the fixed gravity of one of the players who was sitting propped up against the wall attracted her notice, and she went over to him and shook him by the arm repeating the question. The nurse screamed as the body slowly toppled over; all the people ran out of the room and so did the nurse, for she discovered to her horror that the solemn card player was the plague corpse she had set out to find. Every mother in the ten Districts is visited shortly after her confinement by the nurse in charge of that particular District, who gives the relatives a few simple practical hints as to the care and management of both mother and infant. But the most important part of her duty is to attend the confinements of poor women in her district who, on account of home ties such as a sick husband, or very young children are unable to go to hospital. The Municipal nurse is a God-send to these poor mothers, as she steps in, in the place of the ignorant native *dhais*, the "Mother Camps" of India, whose dreadful and criminal practices are one of the main factors of infantile mortality in the East. The attendance of *dhais* at confinements is responsible in nine cases out of ten for the death of the expecting mother and her infant, through their ignorance of even the A. B. C. of midwifery. Some day in the near future, it is to be hoped that the administrators of law in this country will be in a position to deal with the *dhais* as severely as they deserve—at present unfortunately they cannot legally be prevented from practising. When I was a Municipal nurse I made it my duty to get to know the *dhais* of my Sections, and to give the more intelligent ones a course of simple instruction in what not to do, and it was wonderful how easily they learnt and how willing they were to listen to my advice. They always sent for me when they had a difficult case as they hadn't to pay me anything, and I never interfered with their getting their own fees. There are not nearly enough Municipal nurses and it would be a good thing if they made it part of their duty to give a course

of instruction to the more intelligent *dhais* and their daughters. For in India what the mother is, the daughter will surely become. It is *dastur* (i. e. custom) to engage *dhais* and until the people are educated to see the folly of entrusting the lives of those nearest and dearest to them, to unskilled women, *dhais* will continue to flourish. To instruct these women in a true knowledge of midwifery will confer a lasting boon on the poor women of India. But it would be a wise thing to root out stupid and careless *dhais*, who are the cause of much loss of life. I know of a case where a *dhai* ran screaming out of the room when the child was born. The child, who was born with a loop of the cord round his neck, died; the mother with the help of an intelligent neighbour happily recovered. Another *dhai* after cutting the umbilical cord went home, not troubling to attend to the mother. Post partum haemorrhage set in, and the mother died. On inquiry the *dhai* told me she had only been engaged to tie and cut the cord. No fees had been paid her to look after the mother. Such women should not be allowed to practise. The practices of *dhais* are crude in the extreme. The day after the confinement the *dhai* makes her patient lie on the ground on a mat, and proceeds to massage her in the most violent manner, not only does the *dhai* use her hands but her feet are also brought into requisition, no preliminary washing being deemed necessary. She stands with one foot on her patient's back and presses it with all her might up and down the spine "to render the muscles supple". After the massage, (just as well too), the patient is bathed or rather tin potted with the very hottest water she can bear. Then she is wiped, any old rag serves the purpose, and is made to hunch herself up on a low string cot devoid of a mattress. She has nothing on, but an old *sari* is thrown over her shoulders "to keep the cold out". Under the cot a tray of blazing charcoal is placed, incense and "*Berree sep*" is thrown on it, and clouds of choking smoke envelop the poor mother, who is soon bathed in perspiration. All the doors and windows are closed during this performance and the bed is hung round with heavy curtains, usually made of old sacking which smells abominably. The room is full of smoke and the atmosphere is absolutely poisonous. This is "*dastur*," the greatest stumbling block to the advance of civilization in the East. It is done "because it is usual to do so". This blocking up of what little ventilation there is, is mainly responsible for the deaths from bronchitis and convulsions that occur amongst infants within a month of their birth.