

DOMESTIC LIFE ON A NATAL FARM.

BY A LATE RESIDENT.



HOUGH Natal has been so much heard of lately, on account of the Zulu and Transvaal wars having taken place on its borders, very little seems to be known about the every-day life of the colonists, and it would greatly surprise many English ladies if they had to experience some of the hardships and inconveniences of their countrywomen on the up-country farms out there. The difficulty and expense of travelling and getting goods through the country cannot readily be imagined, the only means of transport beyond Maritzburg being the bullock-wagon, which jolts along the fearfully rough roads at the average rate of a dozen miles a day. The post-cart, drawn by four or more horses, goes to the principal towns once or twice a week, and can accommodate a few passengers with a very limited amount of luggage: this is a quicker means of travelling than by wagon, but the shaking and jolting is even more terrible, the driver having continually to warn the passengers to hold on, to prevent their being thrown out.

Houses in Natal, especially those on the farms up-country, have not been built with any idea either of comfort or beauty, the early Dutch settlers evidently considering they answered every reasonable requirement if they afforded any degree of shelter. The English colonists who have since occupied them have made many improvements, but as building is expensive—much of the material having to be imported—and there being great difficulty in getting skilled white labour, the houses remain in an uncomfortable state.

Of course the colony has advantages to counteract these discomforts: a bright climate, quantities of flowers and fruit, and to those who are fond of riding every facility for doing so, although riding in the colony is more difficult and dangerous than in England, on account of the bad roads and the numerous ant-bear holes concealed by the long coarse grass on the Veldt.

The trees and flowers are of great beauty and rapid growth: the Australian willow, the weeping willow, blue and black acacia, or wattle, blue and red gum-trees; the oleander, considered by the Dutch to be unlucky on account of its poisonous properties; the loquat, syringa, banana; the ombur, or shadow-tree; the orange-tree, one kind bearing a small fruit called the naautch, resembling the Tangerian orange; the lemon, peach, and apricot, besides the usual ornamental and fruit-

trees one is accustomed to see in England. The holy thorn grows in great profusion, bearing a beautiful bright crimson flower; roses, geraniums, verbena, and a variety of begonia come to great perfection. Growing wild on the Veldt are the Arum lilies and other bulb flowers, and near the "spruits," or streams, huge tree-ferns, and a variety of mosses and ferns.

The mistress of a farm has to lead a very busy life, and unless she can cook, iron, manage poultry, make butter, and is a good needlewoman withal, she will find herself rather a useless member of society; for though the Kaffirs, if kindly treated, make willing and cheerful servants, they are not remarkable for intelligence, and can only do the very roughest household work. The lady at whose farm I visited had only lived in the colony two years, and when I considered how far from practical her life had been before she left England, it was surprising to find her such a clever manager. It was amusing to watch her fold the linen after it had been washed by the Kaffir in the nearest stream, pile one garment above another, fold all in a cloth, and then instruct the Kaffir boy to jump upon the bundle for a few minutes—an occupation he seemed greatly to enjoy; this process was a capital substitute for mangling.

Bread-making is often a trial to new-comers; in the first place, the yeast must be made at home, and the sudden changes of temperature affect the rising of the dough so much that it is no uncommon thing to have to cover it with blankets, or even feather pillows, and even then the baking is not always a success. After the conveniences of English kitchen ranges, the stoves, with often a limited supply of fuel, make cooking a very difficult task. Fire-wood is scarce in many parts of the country, and coal too expensive for general use; on one occasion we had a small supply of coal brought us by wagon, at the cost of four shillings per cwt. There can be little interest or pleasure for the farmer's wife in butter-making or in the dairy department here, the farms being so far from a market, and the means of transport so slow, that in the summer-time dairy and garden produce is often worthless by the time it reaches the sale-room.

The insects are a never-ending source of annoyance to housekeepers, and require an amount of patience and industry unknown in England to keep them down; fleas and white ants abound; and if the house be situated near water, mosquitoes are numerous. Snakes are occasionally found in-doors, and it is as well to take a careful survey of one's bed-room before retiring for the night.

On returning to England, the comforts and luxuries with which we are surrounded strike us more forcibly than ever, and we feel that this is indeed a favoured land. Would that many of us were more grateful than we are,