

The District Nurses of The London Biblewomen and Nurses Mission.

2, Adelphi Terrace, Strand, W.C.



This is the badge all the nurses wear and it recalls the origin of the Mission to which they belong, for the letters L.N.R. taken boldly across it are those by which its founder, Mrs. Ranyard, the author of "The Book and its

Story," was known to the reading public of fifty years or more ago.

L.N.R. was a very remarkable woman, her character was a striking combination of intense religious fervour and of the shrewdest, most sagacious common-sense. Naturally, as she was born so long ago as 1809 some of her views would now seem old-fashioned, although many of them were a good deal in advance of her own time. She was essentially an explorer, of the Scriptures, of human character, of the homes and lives of the poor. When quite a girl she found out something of the good that may follow if you can get people to believe that the means of raising themselves are really in their own hands, if they will only use them. She was a diligent collector of the cottagers' pence; a great believer in the magic penny-a-week subscription whether for Bibles—always her first thought—or for clothing.

In her country home, busy with her children, her house, her poor neighbours and her ever active pen, she led the life of a simple gentlewoman until she was well on in middle life. And then, in the year of the Indian Mutiny, 1857; the immense success of "The Book and its Story," her children's education and her own increasing work for the Bible Society, brought her to London.

Early in the summer of 1857, guided by a retired physician who knew the neighbourhood well, she explored St. Giles's as it was fifty years ago.

It was to her the revelation of undreamed of horrors. She has left on record one of the most graphic descriptions of the Seven Dials ever written. For the first time in her life she felt that here were human beings degraded below even her thought; women, mothers, with whom she could herself never get into touch without one whom she afterwards quaintly enough called "The Missing Link," some woman who

knew the place and people thoroughly, and whom she found as soon as she looked for her. This was Marian, the first Biblewoman. On the 10th of June, 1857, L. N. R. sent this one woman out into St. Giles's to explore its recesses with a bag of Bibles to sell by penny-a-week subscriptions. That was the origin of the Mission, and it is the event which the Mission's Jubilee, to be inaugurated at the Aeolian Hall on June 18th of this year, will celebrate. No one but L. N. R. would of thought of such a beginning. It was quite natural for her to do so, and the attempt was immediately as well as permanently successful. Long before the first year had expired L. N. R. had added two terms to the English language describing two distinct agencies for good—the Biblewoman and the Mothers' Meeting.

Her women, soon to be found in many a degraded district, were missionaries in a London then very little explored. Her graphic pen described the scenes they witnessed. She appealed to "the lovers of the Book and of the poor" with astonishing results. Everywhere her pioneers reported the sad state of "the desolate sick" untended in their wretched homes, in those days when the trained district nurse was not. Through eleven years L. N. R. longed to help the sick, but she did not see how it was to be done. She, like many others, was groping her way.

Then a great religious revival in the North of Ireland drew Mrs. Ranyard to Ulster, where she met a young Irish lady, Agnes Jones. Mrs. Ranyard describes her as "one of those serene, unselfish, and helpful women who seem to be born nurses."

How Agnes Jones afterwards took charge of the Liverpool Infirmary and, to quote Miss Nightingale, "tamed her lions, reducing in less than three years one of the most disorderly hospital populations in the world to something like Christian discipline," is now a matter of history.

A strong friendship sprang up between Agnes Jones and L. N. R. For a year they worked side by side in the London Mission, planning a nursing branch which they hoped to organise together.

But it was not to be. Until within a few weeks of the death of Agnes Jones, the nursing scheme, although most carefully thought out and its fulfilment ardently desired, seemed impracticable, and then quite suddenly it was an accomplished fact.

In the January of 1868 an unknown friend came to L. N. R. with a scheme she was unable to carry out, but her own plans were ripe; she laid them before him and he accepted them.

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