

Royal British Nurses' Association.

Incorporated by



Royal Charter.

THIS SUPPLEMENT BEING THE OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE CORPORATION.

THE KING'S ILLNESS.

Her Royal Highness, the President, was graciously pleased to convey to Her Majesty the Queen a message of sympathy from the Royal British Nurses Association and an expression of our hope that His Majesty would soon be restored to health. Her Royal Highness has sent to us a gracious message of thanks, and says that Her Majesty was much touched by the kind message from the members in this time of great anxiety.

GOOD WISHES FROM H.R.H. THE PRESIDENT.

DEAR MISS MACDONALD,—Will you please convey to all our members my best wishes that they may have a happy Christmas and that the New Year may bring to them many joys. I hope that this first year in its own fine property may be one of much prosperity to our Association.

I am,
Yours sincerely,
ALEXANDRA, President.

CHRISTMAS AND ITS MYSTERIES.

Christmas is coming again and, once again, we would send to all our members, the old, old wish, "A Happy Christmas to you." The words conjure up many a tradition, many a quaint custom, and there is about them all the fragrance that such associations give. The winter festival of the year did not have its beginnings, as many suppose, in centuries subsequent to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem; it was indeed a sacred festival long before the Christian era. It lies, the origin of this feast of the darkness of the year, in an age-long past, in a time when man, in his consciousness, was much more closely related to nature, her times and her seasons, her growth, and her decay. Then man's life and his religion interpreted themselves in quite a different way from that of the present time, and it was the mission of the Initiates, in the Mystery Temples of ancient Egypt and pagan Rome for instance, to guide the people by what, in a dim clairvoyant way, they learnt in those temples, from all that the starry heavens had to tell them and from what they could cull of the secrets of nature. Thus, from the Mysteries, flowed the wisdom that was to lead man in his ascent to the gods and the season of the winter solstice was one of great importance in this respect.

To the ancients, the idea of "the sleep of winter," as we express it, was a thing unthinkable; on the contrary winter was to them a time of special activity for the earth, the season, in fact, when she was drawing to herself, setting in action, forces that later would bring about her blossoming and her harvest. These darkest days of winter were to them as a time of inspiration for the earth. In Rome, the Saturnalia was held at this season and at this feast the

different classes of the Roman population met in good will and many wore masks in order that the restraint might be avoided which would naturally arise from recognition. Slaves were released, many gifts were made, particularly to the children and this predecessor of our modern Christmastide was a scene of revelry and tumult; it was the feast of the god Saturnus, an old Italian deity, who was supposed to be wedded to the earth goddess at the winter solstice and, for the rest of the year, to preside with her over all forms of agriculture. Thus did the ancients, in their mystery teaching, try to depict their joy in the drawing into the earth of forces that were to bring the beauty and the fruitfulness of summer and autumn.

It is not therefore surprising that, in the sixth century, the Church should have fixed the festival commemorating the birth of our Lord at a season which, for centuries, had been regarded as one of inspiration; for the early Christians saw, in the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, the drawing to the earth of an impulse for what was to be her special mission in the future—the development of Love. And so it happens that, about the Christmas, festival there has grown up a great wealth of symbolism, some of it dating to the earliest ages of our era. The mystics of the Renaissance were responsible for instituting many of the customs and legends of the Christmas season. In the first place, this was so because they often found language quite inadequate to convey the truths which they themselves had apprehended; in the second place, they knew all too well the false impressions that language and written characters can convey; while, in the third place, very few people of their time could either read or write, and the spread of book-learning was discouraged as fraught with danger to the unwary and so unsuitable for the common people. Therefore, the priests and teachers of Christianity gave the profound lessons of their religion by symbols and in the portrayal of the events in religious history as, for instance, when a child was laid in a manger and the priests took the other parts as Members of the Holy Family or the wise men. Later came a further advance, and the mystery plays were inaugurated to teach the people, who came to them in a spirit of wonder and reverence, to glean and ponder truths conveyed in such performances.

In the old nativity and other plays of the Middle Ages, only youths and maidens, whose morality was known to be of the highest, were allowed to participate; they commenced the work of production in October and, while they were preparing the plays, they partook of no alcohol, they gave up wrestling and junketing, and the rehearsals were undertaken in a spirit of great solemnity; probably, the bands of mystics in the Middle Ages were very largely recruited from those who, in their youth, worked at the production of the mystery plays.

Doubtless many of our Christmas customs had their origin in the plays and, hidden in the legends of those olden times, many of the lessons of Christianity were spread abroad. The story of the Holy Grail is one of the greatest of these, and no one has interpreted it so beautifully perhaps

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