

Royal British Nurses' Association.

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A PILGRIMAGE TO OXFORD.

The Nurses and Queen Margaret's Book of the Gospels.

On July 23rd the Ramblers made a pilgrimage to that venerable seat of learning, the City of Oxford. Everywhere we found beauty and constantly the words of one guide or another, as we passed through the different colleges, seemed to lead us back into a world of old tradition.

But the real Mecca of our pilgrimage was a certain glass case in the Manuscript Room of the Bodleian Library, that there we might view Saint Margaret's Book of the Gospels. Most nurses are aware that this great Queen has her place in the annals of nursing. As the Empress Helena and the great Roman Deaconesses of old built their hospices on the way to the Holy City of Jerusalem so did Margaret build hers on the road to Scotland's city of Dunfermline, a great centre of the Christian Church. As Saint Elizabeth carried bread to the poor and her loaves, on one occasion, were changed into roses so also there runs a legend of how Queen Margaret's bread was changed to woodland flowers in circumstances very similar to those related of the former saint. Tradition relates how Margaret would nurse the poor round Malcolm Canmore's Towers at Dunfermline and she may be said to have anticipated the work of John Howard and Elizabeth Fry, for she had her representatives to visit her husband's prisoners and to enquire into their conditions. Queen Margaret also appears to have been the first British infant welfare worker because she made herself responsible for a number of poor orphans, and throughout the year on certain feast days she and the King and the priests served food, with their own hands, to numbers of poor children. We need scarcely refer to the fact that this lady, shipwrecked on the coast of Scotland nearly a thousand years ago, has not only earned the titles of Saint, Queen and Nurse, but was also a great Statesman, Judge, Theologian, Reformer, Artist and Architect.

Fascinating is the story of Queen Margaret's Book of the Gospels which she is said to have "ever fondled lovingly above the rest in which she used to read and study." Her Father Confessor has written what might be called a biography of his Queen and he tells us how King Malcolm loved to have her books bound in gold and gems and then to give them to her himself. The story of how this particular volume was lost and recovered uninjured from under the waters of a ford is well known.

When we went into the Manuscript Room we told a very courteous attendant what we had come to see and he immediately pointed out the beautifully illuminated book in one of the glass cases. We asked whether it would be possible for us to have it out of its case, explaining that we were nurses and that Queen Margaret was to be regarded as one of the very earliest of British nurses. He immediately said that he would see what could be done, and later came to tell us that Dr. Craster (Doctor of Literature and a Fellow of All Souls) who is Keeper of the Manuscripts of the Bodleian Library would come down to show us the book. Sure enough he arrived and, having

unlocked the case, he turned over the pages of this, one of the very greatest of the treasures of the Bodleian, with its beautiful illuminated representations of the Evangelists. Also we were shown the Latin lines on its fly leaf, telling the story of the miracle of its lying lost and undamaged in a river, and that it had been the property of a King and his holy Queen. As Dr. Craster related to us the romance of the book, many others besides the nurses gathered to listen to him. He told of how, at a sale of books in a little country library in Suffolk in the early nineties, the Bodleian Library had procured this treasure for the sum of ten pounds, of how the ownership of the book had been traced back to Lord William Howard and then to an Elizabethan antiquary, John Stowe, but he explained that from there a chapter of the story remained untold. Where was the precious volume during the five centuries that separated the Royal Saint of Scotland from the Elizabethan antiquary? And then Dr. Craster proceeded to give us strong evidence as to how the missing links of history could be filled in from the writings of Turgot (at one time Confessor to Queen Margaret, later Prior of Durham, and subsequently Bishop of St. Andrews), from a chapter in the works of Richard of Coldingham (monk of Durham) and from certain old Records of Durham.

It was indeed a most fascinating hour that, which we spent over this strange old volume, listening to a cultured and scholarly exposition on the art it displayed and the beautiful traditions connected with it. We thanked the learned doctor for his great kindness and courtesy in giving us such a "charmed hour," managed to take that book for just a minute from his fingers into our own and, as we bade him good-bye, he remarked with a smile, "It has been a real pleasure to show one of our greatest treasures to people so interested and who know so much about it." We departed feeling that the object of our pilgrimage had been attained and our long journey rewarded.

MISS CATTELL AT HOME.

On Wednesday, July 16th, Miss Alice Cattell was "At home" to Members and friends and a most pleasant afternoon was the result. Numbers of the Members have told us how much they enjoyed themselves and have asked us to thank Miss Cattell very warmly for her hospitality.

OBITUARY.

Miss Margaret Hazelton.

It is with very deep regret that we have to report the death of Miss Margaret Hazelton. She underwent a serious operation and appeared to be making good progress until about a fortnight after the operation, when she passed away quite suddenly. Miss Hazelton was a Member of the Society of Chartered Nurses and was well known to many of our members. Hers was a very bright, happy personality, and she was the centre of many friendships. Great sympathy is felt for her sisters, who are also members of the Association.

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