

## MARGARET ELIZABETH BURT.

**MATRON, GUY'S HOSPITAL, 1879-1882.**

In the moral reformation of Hospitals and the organisation of modern Nursing Schools, the names of half-a-dozen "warriors," who worked and suffered for us, are easily called to mind by those of us who can recall nursing history for fifty years. Alas! scant recognition and gratitude has been theirs; but now that the British College of Nurses counts the compilation of nursing history as a sacred duty, it is to be hoped that in time due recognition will be accorded to these forceful explorers and pioneers, who fought with beasts at Ephesus, and suffered many wounds. How clearly we remember the great upheaval at Guy's in 1879, when Miss Margaret Elizabeth Burt came from the Leicester Infirmary, where her devoted services had had such beneficial results for patients and nurses alike. At Guy's her proposals for reform were met with such malignant and uncompromising opposition, that the noise reverberated throughout the Hospital World. Doctors, students, nurses, servants—not to omit the meaner type of laymen literally pelted the "new Matron" with every form of insult, and, of course, at "the London," not so far away, we entered the lists for and against reform; personally we tilted with and unhorsed many a scurvy knave, unworthy of the armour and tenets of chivalry.

Fifty years ago, and, alas! how many registered nurses to-day know the name of Margaret Elizabeth Burt, and of the splendid courage with which she faced the almost superhuman task of cleansing Guy's!

One fine morning half a century ago, in peeping through the gates, forty nurses were to be seen sitting on their boxes in the quadrangle at Guy's, all under notice, given or received, and departing in high dudgeon for pastures new!

Margaret Elizabeth Burt was born July 2nd, 1839, at Southall Green, Middlesex—then a small village—where her father, the Rev. John Thomas Burt was curate. She was the eldest of fourteen children. Most of her early life, until she was eighteen, was spent with grandparents in Devonshire. On the death of her grandmother, she returned to her home at Winson Green, Birmingham, where her father was Chaplain of the Birmingham Borough Gaol.\* When about 26 years old, Margaret Burt undertook the charge of a "Home for Troublesome Girls," at Winson Green, when the foundress, Miss Weale (a most remarkable woman) was compelled from ill health to give up the work.

From early life, Margaret Burt had always loved nursing sick people, and in 1871 determined to be thoroughly trained. Her first idea was to be a Nightingale Nurse, and

\* Mr. Burt's life work was ministering to criminals. He was successively Chaplain of Pentonville Prison, the Birmingham Borough Gaol, and Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum. While at Birmingham (1834-1863) he founded the Birmingham Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society.

she went for a month's probation to St. Thomas's Hospital, then in temporary quarters in the East End. Before the month was up, she decided to be trained by the St. John's Sisters, who had charge of King's College, and Charing Cross Hospitals. She entered King's College Hospital as a "lady pupil." There her powers developed fast. One of the doctors said that she learned in three months what usually took six, and, before the year was out, she was made Sister of a Ward. She worked both at King's College and Charing Cross Hospitals until June, 1874, and during those years she twice had charge for a short time of the whole of Charing Cross Hospital.

In June, 1874, feeling it a duty to earn money for her family, Margaret Burt accepted the post of Superintendent of a Home for Private Nurses in Leicester. Of this Home she says: "Seeing no prospect of improving the Institution without some training place for the Nurses, I made a proposal to the Committee and to the leading medical men in the town, that the Institution should nurse part of the Infirmary. This proposal was accepted, and in six weeks the whole Hospital was under my care." The Medical Staff of Leicester Hospital, as well as the members of the Committee, remained her firm friends to the end of her life.

On November 1st, 1879, at the earnest request of the then Treasurer of Guy's Hospital, Mr. E. H. Lushington, Margaret Burt reluctantly gave up her post at Leicester to become Matron of Guy's Hospital.

Some day, perhaps, the inner history of her work there may be placed on record—but not now.

In January, 1883, Margaret Burt married Mr. Alfred Field, of Leam, Leamington. Within two years, she was left a widow. She was beginning already to suffer from rheumatoid arthritis, but nevertheless undertook for a time the charge of Charing Cross Hospital. After years of suffering, most bravely borne, she died December 29th, 1890.

### TO PRIVATE NURSES.

Will nurses engaged in Private Nursing note that there is considerable shortage of employment in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Germany and elsewhere, and although the National Associations do not wish to be inhospitable, they would prefer nurses to "Stay Home," as there is no hope of immediate success under ideal working conditions.

In England we echo "Stay Home" to those from Overseas.

### RED CROSS DAY.

"Red Cross Day" is in future to be celebrated annually on May 12, the birthday of Florence Nightingale, "the spiritual mother of the Red Cross," it has been announced.

Organisation for the day will be carried out by a British Red Cross Empire Committee, on which the following representatives have consented to serve: Sir Arthur Stanley (Great Britain), Viscountess Novar (Australia), the Duchess of Devonshire (Canada), Lieut.-Colonel H. Ross (India), and Lady Eleanor Cole (Kenya).



MARGARET E. BURT.

Superintendent, Leicester Infirmary, 1875-1879.  
Matron, Guy's Hospital, 1879-1882.

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