

Blanche of Castile and her jealousy of Marguerite was to cast many a shadow indeed over the lives of Louis and his Queen. And Marguerite? Well, was she not but fifteen and was it not from Provence that they brought her to the austere court of France? Could you ask or even wish for overmuch discretion in her? Truly a king's responsibilities sometimes begin at home, and yet, quarrelsome and provocative as Marguerite could be, still she was kind, charitable, merciful, even at times she played the part of peacemaker in patching up the quarrels at the court.

But now another rose would vie with its neighbour by disclosing a rumour of how the King once gave to his Queen—well, might we call it "a lesson in deportment"? In her youth especially did she love to dress richly but, except on occasions of state, the king wore the simplest garments. One day the Queen remonstrated with him and begged him to choose more kingly attire. King Louis replied, "Madame, pour vous plaire, je me vétirai donc d'étoffes précieuses; mais de votre côté, vous vous mettez à mon gout et quitterez vos beaux atours." The King heard no more from Marguerite on the subject of his clothes, for his hint might easily become a command; Louis demanded implicit obedience from his family. More and more, it is said, from this time on did Marguerite occupy herself among the poor and the sick.

"But yes, it is of that I would have you tell us," I whisper to the roses. "Your tale has been too gay so far." "Too gay, you say! But we are of Provence, Mademoiselle! Yes, yes, you will hear of the sick, but first, surely, mademoiselle will listen to the noble tale of Damietta?" The only hope of the French army crusades, at one time, was that the Queen could continue to hold Damietta. And day by day Marguerite did hold it with a valour and a courage that gives her high place, for ever more, in the annals of the heroism of the Crusades. At last, three days before the birth of her child, the report came to her of the King's defeat and imprisonment—John Tristan she later named her baby for the great sorrow in which he was born. Again and again she thought the Saracens were in her room and an old knight of eighty sat holding her hand and repeating reassuringly through the long sultry night of pain, "Madame, I am here, fear not." Once she bade all leave the room but him, and then she asked him for a promise that, if the Saracens were about to take her, he would cut off her head. That gallant old gentleman made the amiable and not unknighly reply, "Rest assured I will do so willingly, for I had already thought I would do so before they captured you." Thus did Marguerite choose death rather than dishonour. Next she heard that the sailors of the communes were about to take flight. This meant the loss of the fleet and the loss of Damietta. She had these rough men brought to her sick room until it was full and she begged them not to leave the town. How could they stay? Were they not already starving? "Stay," said she, "and I will buy all the food there is in the town. It cost her 360,000 livres, but she saved Damietta. Her gallant defence alone it was that preserved the lives of many Christians between the 2nd and 8th of May in the days of King Louis' first Crusade. Then another rose is whispering of some other episode in the story of that Crusade. A vessel seems as though it must surely be wrecked and someone asks the Queen whether they will wake her children. "By no means," comes the answer calmly, "let them go to God in their sleep."

Of the deeds of Louis and Marguerite for the sick in their kingdom there is much to tell; consistently, year by year and day by day, these take prominent place in the annals of the court. Louis built a fine hospital at Compiègne, and, when it was opened, the king, with Thibault, King of Navarre and husband of Louis' favourite daughter, carried on a litter, into the hospital, the first patient

wrapped in a sheet of silk. Then came Monseigneur, the eldest son of King Louis, and Philip, his second son, carrying another, and so also did all the princes and nobles of France who were with them. Thus did the great King Louis demonstrate to his people the place that the care of the sick held in his conception of rulership. And ladies, richly dressed, watched the procession as princes, nobles and knights carried the sick to the hospital of Louis; among those ladies was one who wore an old-time bonnet of gold, one who came to the hospital, when all the sick had been laid in the newly made beds, and distributed gifts to them with her own hands. And often in the hospital she would cut the bread and meat for the feeble ones and wait upon them until they had finished. For Marguerite was ever kind and charitable and full of sympathy.

But the roses have so much to tell of what was done for the sick that my pen cannot follow it all. There were additions and endowments for the hospital of Paris; in that town also the king built and endowed the Hospital of St. Honoré for three hundred indigent blind. The Hospitals of Vernon and Pontoise he founded also and endowed. For the hospital at Medun he provided an annuity of thirty pounds annually to give soup to eighty blind beggars. In all, it is claimed, close upon seventy hospitals owed their foundation to the charity of Louis and of Marguerite and it is interesting to us as nurses to know that Louis and Marguerite were patrons of the Béguines. Never was there a town where the King and Queen held court but there the poor and the sick were remembered. How about those poor folk gathered daily into the palace that they might be fed and have their ailments attended to? "And the King was not repelled by their uncleanness." One leprous old monk was his especial care, this man was hideous to look upon, for his nose was eaten away by disease and his eyes were swollen and sore. When the king departed on his last crusade the Queen became head of an important Fraternity (Confrérie Hospitalière) which bore the name of "Notre Dame"; she and the members of this visited the poor and nursed the sick in the hospitals.

A stillness falls. One's thoughts pass to the day when the news of Louis' martyrdom in the crusades is told to the Queen. Philip her son ascends the throne of France. And what of Marguerite? You see a figure pass often to and fro among the homes of the poor; or in the hospitals you find her caring for the sick, feeding the feeble ones and dressing their sores. But never again the crown of France—she has exchanged that for the veil of a nun and the little old bonnet of gold for a coif. For twenty-five years after the death of Louis she continued her works of charity to the poor and the sick in France. And if I have written but inadequately of your Marguerite, blame not your roses of Provence, but just my halting pen. It could not record all that they had to tell and my ears were dull and my eyes very dim to all that they might have revealed. I lay the pen down to go to the window that I may think of a sentence or two in which to epitomise your Queen. Above the sky is blue and the stars are shining just as, close on seven centuries past, they shone that night on Sens. Suddenly the room seems full of fragrance. Is it that on the soft wind of the morning comes the scent of the may from the gardens close by? But no, this is not the breath of the hawthorn, the scent of roses is here—rich, rich roses from the land of Provence. But surely never were they so fragrant before! Was it possible that, as I turned from the window, I glimpsed, but for a moment, a lovely head—bent low among the roses, a head in an old time bonnet of gold; almost it seemed as though those proud roses of Provence turned and caressed the face of the Queen. It is past the midnight hour and you say that, if just for the space of time that a petal takes to fall, I slept as I stood by that window. Be this as it may the roses have finished

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