

ROYAL NURSES.

MATILDA THE GOOD.

The prisoners and women eke with child,
Lying in abject misery aye about,
She set at rest with all benevolence
And visited the sick and poor with diligence.

Old Writer.

To contemplate the life of Matilda of Scotland after having made a study of that of her mother, Queen of Malcolm Canmore, is like stepping out of the shining sunlight into a moonlit night. Margaret stands as a great figure in the centuries, and, even without Turgot's invaluable memoir, events in the progress of history would have sufficed to point to the fact that here was one of those bright spirits into whom the culture of her age could pour itself and then shine forth. Compared with Margaret, Matilda is a somewhat shadowy and elusive figure but, just as moonlight has its mystery and its beauty, so there is a certain fascination in trying to catch glimpses, pale and transitory though they may be, of the gentle Queen of Henry the First. Moreover, we have to remember that, in the history of almost any country or community, there are times of great strivings and many storms to bring about advancement, while there are others, apparently quite necessary, when little seems to take place but the reflection of the achievements of the previous age. It was into one of those more or less restful periods in the history of England that the life of Matilda was cast and thereby probably there was less opportunity for her to make any great mark on her time. But, apart from that, there was one important difference between the two Queens. Margaret was one of those great personalities who may be said to have been possessed of a *dæmon*, in the Socratic, the good sense, in the sense of being led by an inspiring angel; for it was only in comparatively recent time that a *dæmon* (now usually "demon") came to be regarded as necessarily evil in character. But whether his *dæmon* be good or evil the person so influenced will, of necessity almost, lead a more or less tempestuous life, one restless and full of active force. He need not be one of those to offer up the prayer, "Lord, give me hills to climb!" The mountains of difficulty, of desire, or of destiny will come to him and, if not, he will certainly to the mountains; such is the impelling force of his *dæmon*.

Margaret was one of those so possessed, one of those who craved the impossible and so brought it into the realm of the possible and from hence into the established order of things. Matilda was not born with such a *dæmonic* influence and so her life had little in it of the achievements of a Saint Margaret, an Alexander the Great or, to come down to more modern times, a St. Vincent de Paul or a Florence Nightingale. Yet Matilda possessed something of her mother's spirit, determination and gifts; though not endowed with the same fiery *dæmonic* force, we can readily accept her as an individuality and possessed of strong characteristics of will and intelligence. It could hardly be otherwise in any child of St. Margaret and the Warlike Majesty of Scotland, Malcolm Canmore. In Matilda we perceive a very gracious personality and there is one distinction which she holds and to which no other Queen in the long history of England can lay claim. She is the only one who has had a qualifying title added to her name; each of the others has simply been designated by her Christian name or, at most, has had added to it the name of the house, royal or noble, into which she was born. But Matilda, through the reverence and love of her people, has had superimposed upon her name of Matilda (or Maude) the title of "The Good"; thus she passes in the pageantry of history. The name first given to her was Eadgyth or Edyth, but this was changed later to Matilda, in order

to give pleasure to her godfather, Robert Courthose, the brother of William Rufus and Henry I. She is believed to have been born about 1080 and was probably about thirteen when her mother, Queen Margaret, died.

Matilda and her sister Mary, afterwards Countess of Boulogne, received their education at the Abbeys of Romsey and Wilton; their Aunt Christina, sister of Queen Margaret, ruled at different periods over both of those. They were convents of Black Benedictine Nuns and it had become a tradition that their abbesses should be ladies of royal birth and those who had in their veins the blood of Alfred the Great. It is interesting to note that this royal nurse spent so much of her childhood in the Abbey of Romsey among scenes which, to some extent at least, must have been familiar to Florence Nightingale, that Queen of British Nurses. Again and again in history do we find such connections until we are tempted to wonder whether a person's spirit leaves some intangible impression on its earthly surroundings which can inspire others in some sort of subconscious way. Whether or no that may be, it is well to bear such connections in mind for it helps to keep before us inspiration from great pathfinders throughout the ages.

Christina would appear to have wielded the crozier, in her royally endowed and very wealthy Abbey, with some degree of severity. Matilda has told how she and her sister "trembled under the rod of their Aunt Christina." That she was a lady of considerable importance is shown, not only by the fact that she ruled over one of the largest foundations of her time, but also because the lands she owned are mentioned in Domesday Book. She was undoubtedly a scholar and her nieces were given an education that compares quite favourably with that of any princess of modern times. An old writer tells that Matilda was versed in the literature of her own and preceding ages, and six of her letters (one to the Pope and others to Archbishop Anselm) are still extant; they are written in Latin. Her leanings towards scholarship may have been stimulated by the blows and taunts of her aunt, who intended that she should become a learned abbess and probably rule at either Romsey or Wilton, but her education fitted her well to become the Queen of Henry the First whom the French, in admiration of his scholarship, had surnamed Beauclerc (fine scholar) and indeed Matilda was credited with being more learned than Henry himself. As Queen she showed herself to be a generous patroness of literature and most particularly of those wandering scholars who did so much to spread culture, in the early Middle Ages, throughout Europe. No doubt it was also at the Abbey of Romsey that she became skilled in the art of music; in later years she became a great patroness of this branch of art. Happy indeed was the minstrel who could please her; she was almost indiscriminate, it has been hinted, in her generosity to anyone who did. In those days the harp was the instrument most used; organs also were much in favour but those were mostly in the churches. The harp would be passed round the members of a company and each one, who could, would contribute his share to the enjoyment of the assembly.

Matilda had inherited her share of the Celtic blood that ran in the veins of her Scottish ancestry and probably was thereby the more sensitive to the inspirations that must have come to her in a childhood spent in surroundings so bound up with the history of her Saxon ancestry; it may be taken that the impressions of her childhood carried influences fruitful of beneficent results for her people in later years. We know but little of her life in the Abbey of Romsey. Meanwhile Henry Beauclerc, disappointed for a time of the inheritance he coveted, made himself a master of scholarship, politics and the arts while his little bride-to-be played in the gardens of the Abbey of Romsey, bent

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