

THE ROYAL HOSPITAL AND COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF ST. KATHERINE'S BY THE TOWER.

Address given by Miss Isabel Macdonald, F.B.C.N., on Registration Day, 1933, at the British College of Nurses, London.

(Concluded from page 238.)

Until the reign of Henry III the Hospital and Church of St. Katherine remained under the protection and authority of the Prior of Holy Trinity, and then began a great struggle for the control of the foundation. Eleanor of Provence, wife of Henry III and sister of Marguerite of Provence, held that the authority of St. Katherine's belonged alone to the Queen Consort of England and that the Prior and Canons had grossly abused the powers delegated to them. The Prior, backed by the Pope, held that under Matilda's charter, the rights over St. Katherine's belonged to the Priory. On the death of Henry, Eleanor, as Queen Dowager, continued her claim with the support of Fulk, Bishop of London. He visited the Hospital on St. Giles' Day, 1257, examined the Prior, scanned Matilda's Charter and considered the arguments of the Prior to establish his spiritual and temporal rights to St. Katherine's. These are too long for recapitulation now. In the end, after a hotly contested case, the Prior and Canons of Aldgate executed a surrender under their seals to "the upright Ellianore" as she was described therein. It is difficult to learn much about the contest now; that each side had strong protagonists is indicated by the fact that one historian extols the "spirited conduct of Ellianore," while another characterises her behaviour, in regard to St. Katherine's, as an act of vandalism. In retrospect we can recognise one important point as emanating from these considerations and to which I have already referred—but for the "spirited Ellianore" St. Katherine's might well have disappeared three hundred years earlier than it did. Queen Eleanor is regarded historically as having refounded St. Katherine's. Her Charter was granted in the reign of her son Edward I and I would like to read to you its stately and beautiful introductory passages.

"Eleanor, by the Grace of God, Queen of England, Lady of Ireland and Duchess of Aquitaine, to all to whom the present Charter shall come greeting in the Lord Everlasting. Know ye that we in our liege widowhood for us and our heirs for ever for the health of the soul of the Lord Henry of famous memory King of England and for the health of our soul and the souls of the Kings and Queens preceding and succeeding us and of our ancestors and friends, in pure and perpetual alms have given and granted and, by this our present Charter, confirmed to God and the Hospital at St. Katherine at London without the Tower of London, and to Brother Thomas de Lethelade whom we with the consent of the venerable Father the Lord Henry Bishop of London, had preferred to be Master and Warden of the same Hospital and to the Brethren there serving God and their successors for ever to serve God there."

The Charter continues by enumerating various rich grants of lands and also the purposes of the foundation. The following passage confirms the rights of succeeding Queens in connection with the foundation.

"We do will and have ordained that all Queens after our death succeeding us have the right of advowson or patronage of the said Hospital, and the when in future times the possessions of the Hospital shall have grown larger the number of chaplains, poor persons, clerics, laics and women be increased in forms aforesaid. In testimony whereof we have caused our Seal to be affixed to the present Charter. Given at Latone on the 5th day of July in the year of the Lord 1273."

Eleanor of Castille, wife of Edward I, also made large

grants of property and lands to St. Katherine's which in time became a wealthy foundation. Eighty years after Eleanor's Charter there comes to St. Katherine's the grant of a Charter from Philippa of Hainault, wife of Edward III, and mother of the Black Prince. She also made it gifts of manors and lands; she founded, too, a Chantry at St. Katherine's, and gave to it a more collegiate character. She enters into very minute details for the management of the foundation and the regulations for its administration she expresses the hope that "the lives of those serving God in the Hospital may clearly shine forth and come to the knowledge of mankind, and that, from the strict and pious observation of the ecclesiastical orders and rules, the people may be excited to greater devotion."

Philippa actually advanced it from being a "*hospitale pauperum*" to a place of high ecclesiastical standing, but the nurses of the present day would scarcely appreciate the regulations she lays down as to the garb to be worn by her nursing community. She decrees that the Sisters shall wear "a strait coat or cloathing and over that a mantel of black colour on which shall be placed a mark signifying the sign of St. Katherine but green cloaths, or those entirely red, or any other cloaths tending to dissoluteness shall not at all be used." The brothers and clerks are to have their crowns shaved "in a becoming manner."

We have to realise that these Sisters were not nuns. They were gentlewomen who took what, under Philippa's Charter and thereafter, was a very honourable vocation. They had equal voting powers with the brethren in the business of St. Katherine's and its Precinct, and no meeting could transact business without representation of the Sisters as well as the Brethren. Indeed a Sister in St. Katherine's held a position of considerable dignity. The Charter also lays down certain directions as to masses, diet, visitations among the sick and other matters; by her special provisions for attendance on the sick in their own homes Philippa may be regarded as the official inaugurator of district nursing.

Henry VI granted to St. Katherine's perhaps the greatest of its Charters, and this was afterwards reaffirmed by Elizabeth. We might describe Matilda's Charter as the Charter of Inspiration, Eleanor's has been described as the Charter of Foundation, Philippa's as the Charter of Statutes, and Henry's as the Charter of Privileges.

Henry's Charter raised St. Katherine's to the rank of a Royal Peculiar. Thus it was free from any diocesan or provincial control. It owed allegiance neither to the Bishop of London nor the Archbishop of Canterbury. It held its own ecclesiastical court and had powers to grant probate of wills and marriage licences within the limits of the Precincts. Incidentally I might mention here that many people seem to regard St. Katherine's as having been a charity. It was never that. It was a great ecclesiastical Royal corporation ranking with Westminster and St. George's, Windsor.

Among other privileges St. Katherine's was, under this Charter, given the right to hold a fair each year for twenty-one days, on Tower Hill as from the feast of St. James's. All the merchants and their goods were here to be under the King's protection. This Charter exhibits some curious privileges for it secured to St. Katherine's "chattels of felns (*i.e.*, felons) and fugitives and all manner of cattle called strays and Chattels called manuopera" (*i.e.*, Goods found and presumed to have been stolen). In Elizabeth's reign one Wylson, a Doctor of Law, once Secretary to the Queen, became Master. He surrendered the Charter of Henry VI and drew up a new one, but in this he left out the liberty to hold the Fair. He sold this liberty for over £466 to the Lord Mayor and Commonalty of the City of London, and pocketed the price himself. Next he tried to acquire the Precinct of St. Katherine's for his property, but the dwellers there presented a manifesto to Mr. Secre-

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)