

HISTORIC ROYAL NURSES.

By ISABEL MACDONALD.

ELEANOR OF CASTILE.

The Queen of the Snow Flake Crosses.

A study of history in the ordinary sense soon brings us to the conviction that it is not therein that we shall find any but the most fleeting impressions of Eleanor of Castile. Indeed history, as we regard it, did not exist in her time, nor indeed until centuries after it. Chroniclers there were but not historians, and the former are those who have left us the props upon which history has been built. But, even after searching through the works of several such as those, we come to the conclusion that it is her husband, and he alone, who has given to the world the most enduring remembrance of Queen Eleanor. He it is who has placed her among the immortals, but he does it neither as a chronicler nor as an historian. Instead he sets in time one of the most remarkable pageants ever placed upon the stage of history. No words, no eulogy on his Queen could have conveyed to his people and to their posterity all that he symbolised by that progress from Herdeby to London and by the memorials he established after it. He took religion, art, imagination and beauty, and united these in rearing visible forms to keep us reminded of what manner of woman was this princess of old Spain. History can tell us little relating to her until, at the close of her story, the King himself lifts it above and beyond the realm of mere incident. When one thinks of the means and the imagination he used to place Queen Eleanor in her peculiar niche in history and in the chronicles of England, there constantly recurs in one's memory those closing and very difficult lines of Faust:—

All things perishable
Are but a symbol
Life's insufficiency
Here finds attainment
The indescribable
Here it is done
The eternal feminine
Draws us above.

In this great poem on the psychology of man—using the word psychology in the sense of its original meaning—these lines are among the most beautiful. The reference to the "eternal feminine" has nothing to do with male and female, but it was used in very olden times to indicate something that lives above sense, "indescribable," quite sinless, something that has in it the best of idealism, devotional imagination, pure goodness and beauty. It was something of the "indescribable" that led King Edward to place that in the history of his kingdom, which, in its completeness, has remained unequalled by any memorial raised to a king or queen since his reign. It lifts her out of any question of having been merely the wife of King Edward of England or of being overshadowed by his powerful personality; he has given to her her own place in national memory and she loses nothing when set in comparison with her husband—that sovereign

"Discrete and wise and true of his worde
In arms a giant."

The king chose the script of pageantry, architecture, sculpture and several other arts to perpetuate the Queen's memory, and yet we can find scarcely a sentence of his having reference to her. We can remember but one—his historic utterance to the Abbot, "I have loved her while she lived and I shall not cease to love her now that she is dead." Thus this thirteenth century monarch spoke the epilogue to one of the happiest marriages in the story of the English throne. And Eleanor of England, Princess

of Castile and Leon, and Countess of Pontheiu, could ask for none more dignified. It indicates respect as well as devotion, sentiment but not sentimentality, and it is in that spirit that the King proceeds, on her death, to place in the memory of his people his grief for the loss of his Queen; he builds up in imagery his feelings of how they should think of her to whom the chroniclers refer as "a woman pitiful, modest and benevolent to all, . . . one who consoled the sorrowful." Benevolence, artistic knowledge and scholarship, all these we can, on historical evidence, attribute to Eleanor of Castile. And it is to history that we must go also for our justification for placing her among the Royal Nurses. We find that she gave large endowments and grants of manors and lands to the Royal Hospital and Chapel of St. Katherine's by the Tower. Then there is the tradition, never really authenticated and probably untrue, that she sucked the poison from her husband's wound when he was struck by the dagger of an assassin during his great crusading campaign. People have clung tenaciously to this tradition, for there are few things that we like so ill to lose as an illusion. The story really appears, however, to have arisen in Spain long after the crusade and, if we have to question its authenticity, it at least indicates the estimation in which the Princess was held in her native country. In any case there is no doubt that she nursed the king devotedly and that he attributed his recovery very largely to her care. Furthermore, by this time female branches of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem were instituted and ladies of the nobility joined those. It is, therefore, probable that those who followed their lords to the crusades would participate in some way in the nursing of the wounded. We must remember, also, that there was a very wide gulf between the ruling and cultured people of that time and the labouring classes and a Queen like Eleanor, who was of a disposition to be "pitiful" and who had the inclination to "console the sorrowful," would regard it as a sacrifice to her religion and a duty to her people to care for the well-being of the sick and the poor.

We may go on surmising on the manner in which Eleanor played out her part as Queen of England. Existing records will not take us very far, but we can deduce with certainty from them that she was one of those, in the long line of Queens of England, who upheld all the best traditions of queenship. Here and there are chance indications, in chronicles and records of the reign of Edward I., which give us glimpses of her in her splendid Castle of Conway and at Windsor Castle, at Carnarvon Castle with its great towers and gateway, at Guildford and other castles and manors; these glimpses indicate that there was already no lack of art, of beautiful gold and silver plate and of luxury in other respects at that time, despite the hardships and dangers that had undoubtedly to be endured by the Queen when she accompanied her husband on his crusade or followed him faithfully in his expeditions against his enemies or his somewhat refractory subjects in Wales. Yet, as we have indicated, it is by none of these that the Queen has found her way into the folk memory of her people. She has passed to it after a manner unparalleled in any Royal progress before or since. No more lasting and impressive spectacle has been put on the stage of history in England than that whereby the greatest of the Plantagenets gave expression to his devotion to his Queen and to his grief on losing her, when he took her to rest, one in a circle of kings and queens, around the tomb of the holiest of their line.

In retrospect you can let your imagination play about that procession of the year 1290 as it passes on the highways to London under the gloomy skies, reaching each night some holy place there to wait for the morning in a consecrated peace, broken at times by the prayers of the

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