

HISTORIC ROYAL NURSES.

By ISABEL MACDONALD.

ELEANOR OF CASTILE.

The Queen of the Snowflake Crosses.

(Concluded from page 183.)

As he rides to London, behind his Queen, the King's thoughts wander to many incidents on the first journey to Spain, with his mother, the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, and forty nobles, in the fine ship provided for him by the men of Winchelsea. In memory he rehearses again his meeting with haughty Alphonso, the tournaments, and the wonderful pageantry connected with the ceremony at which the King bestowed the order of knighthood upon him; there are so many memorable incidents of his marriage in Spain with the Donna Elyanore, celebrated with such chivalric pomp—a marriage between a handsome lad of fifteen and a little maid of ten, with the flowing hair that is still the pride of the women of her race. Memory takes the king again on that journey through France and back to splendid festivities in Paris that marked its close. Then she had gone to complete her education in a convent in France and he to practices of knight errantry and to fresh experiences in war and the tournament. A year later he had gone into residence at the Palace of the Savoy, built by Peter the Provençal, and she had come at last to England, to the Castle of Guildford, prepared with much care for her by Henry III.

A few years later than this there occurred the interesting incident that marked the commencement of the warlike career that won for Edward the admiration of his people long before he ascended the throne. He had gone to inform the King that the men of Wales were invading his lands in Chester and there came the reply of the Majesty of England to his young son:—"What is it to me? The land is now yours. Exert yourself. Gain fame in your youth. Make your enemies fear you. As for me—I am occupied with other matters."

It had been the custom of his Queen to accompany him on many warlike expeditions, and so, as he follows her bier, he remembers the days when, with King Louis of France, he planned his great crusade. Her ladies had tried to dissuade her from accompanying him and the king remembers her reply—"Nothing ought to part those whom God hath joined and the way to heaven is as near from Syria as from England or from Spain." And thus as he rides the King passes on in memory through one scene and another of his glorious but ineffective crusade. She had said goodbye to the two beautiful boys, whom she was never to see again, and gone before him to France to make his preparations for the crusade while he made provision for the administration of his lands in England during his absence. There was that memorable day, early in the Crusade, when news came that the Turks were besieging Acre and that the French were unable to join forces with him for its relief, owing to the spread of fever. She had stood by his side, when his captains had advised the abandonment of the expedition, and heard his haughty reply to his nobles:—"Sangue de Dieu, if all should desert me I would lay siege to Acre if only Fowler my groom accompany me." But she had accompanied him and his army through Ptolemais to Nazareth, had gone with him to Cyprus and to Acre, a journey through country richly reminiscent of the great deeds of King Richard; Lord Edward, with his beautiful Elyanore, returned home from Palestine, by way of Rome, with a reputation not less great than that of Cœur de Lion himself. Then came the exultant welcome from his people and the coronation,

the first occasion upon which a Queen had been crowned with the King in the history of the kingdom. She had worn then, as always, the rich flowing garments in which he liked to see her; more than one commentator has referred to her graceful robes and described them as a fitting model for any Queen to follow. Unlike many of the ladies of her time she refused to wear the ugly headdress then so common.

Many shifting memory pictures such as these throng one upon the other, around the King as he rides on through those December days of the year of our Lord twelve hundred and ninety; it is hard to realise that the Queen who has accompanied him on many a gallant adventure is lying there, lifeless and still, under the rich pall that covers her coffin. At St. Albans the whole convent comes out in procession to meet her and, when she has been carried to a place before the high altar, the King rides on so that, in London, he may gather together the chief citizens and wait with them for the coming of the "Chère Reine."* They wait, the citizens in black robes and hoods, and from the last resting place of the coffin, she is carried over the final stage of their thirteen days' pilgrimage to Westminster to her place near the tomb of the Confessor where she is buried with all ceremonial and solemnity.

The King brings together his "imagineurs" as they used to be called, Master Crundale, the architect, Master Will Torel, chief goldsmith of London, Master Thomas de Leighton, skilled in working with iron; there is Walter of Durham, Thomas de Holkyntone, Alexander of Abingdon and Will of Ireland—others too, and all are commanded to come and take counsel with the King so that he may combine all that is best in the art of his time to raise what must be no mere transient impression of the greatness and nobility of the dead Queen—the Queen of good memory—as the people came to call her. And Master Crundale, perhaps it was, who had the inspiration to copy the snow crystals for the ground plans of the crosses to be erected at Lincoln, Grantham, Stamford, Geddington, Northampton, Stoney Stratford, Woburn, Dunstable, St. Albans, Waltham, West Cheap and last of all at that spot where the bier had rested last and the King looked across it to the Confessor's Church and the Palace of Westminster. It was decreed that the "imagineurs" must, in their work upon the crosses, let their imagination flow through the forms that the snow crystals take and thus there grew out of these thirteen days in December the most beautiful series of crosses ever erected in Europe where, at the end of each day, the bier had rested before entering the church. But three remain—those at Geddington, Northampton and Waltham Cross; that near Westminster was in all likelihood the most beautiful and probably too the most short lived and yet it has become, in a sense, the best memorial of all. For in London, throughout the Empire, and indeed the whole world over, in the present time and in ages to come, when there is pronounced the name of one of the busiest thoroughfares in the kingdom, what is this but the echo of the King's own voice when he spoke of the "Chère Reine"? The dear Queen's cross—every time we speak of Charing Cross are we not, consciously or otherwise, keeping alive the memory of Eleanor of Castile?

Many pilgrims, most of them artists we are told, come to the Abbey of Westminster solely to see the lovely effigy of Queen Eleanor. One looks down on its quite detached beauty there in this circle of kings and queens, the work of the other artists (in the composition of the complete memorial) making for it such a harmonious and artistic setting. Round the tomb runs the Latin inscription—which being translated reads as follows:—"Here lies

*King Edward always referred to his Queen as the "Chère Reine."

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)