

## REVIEW.

SIR ROBERT MORANT :  
A Great Public Servant.\*

To many nurses of the present day the very name of Sir Robert Morant is unknown, for they were but children when the Act conferring upon them legal status, and providing for the establishment of a definite standard of nursing education, received the Royal Assent on December 23rd, 1919. The more reason that they should know of the gratitude due to the Permanent Secretary to the newly-established Ministry of Health, who watched over the Bill on its passage through both Houses of Parliament, and safeguarded its essential provisions from the perils which threatened them.

Dr. Bernard M. Allen, M.A., LL.D., is sincerely to be congratulated on his presentment of Sir Robert Morant as "a great public servant." As we read there stands clearly before us this man of volcanic energy, of force of character, and driving power, of indomitable will, of integrity, of altruistic imagination and vision, who, to the end of his life, after all the rebuffs which he had suffered, was possessed by "the old crusading zeal which had inspired him in his early days at Winchester and Oxford, the desire to spend and be spent in the service of mankind."

Life could never be easy for a man with these characteristics imposed upon an artistic temperament, a passionate love of music, and a keen delight in the beauties of nature, and when associated with the financial stringency endured by Sir Robert Morant for so many years, deep disappointments, and buffetings of fate, only a great nature could rise superior to them and work hopefully to the end.

His mother was "a devoted adherent of the evangelical vicar of Christ Church, Hampstead, the Rev. E. H. Bickersteth, and her three children—Robert and his two sisters—were brought up in the strictest traditions of a devout Victorian household."

At the death of his father, when he was eight years old, his mother was left in straitened circumstances. She determined, however, that her boy should not be deprived of a public school education, and at thirteen and a half he entered Winchester.

While there, a visit with a friend to Hursley, where John Keble had been vicar for over thirty years, made an indelible impression on young Morant's mind. Then and there he decided that what he would most like to do when he was grown up was to be curate to the vicar, then in office, a hope which he cherished when he went up to New College, Oxford, where he ordered his life accordingly, getting through Moderations, in which he took third-class honours, as speedily as possible, and then turning his whole attention to studying for the final school in Theology, in which he took a first class.

Life in Oxford, even on restricted means, which he supplemented by taking pupils in vacations, was a delight to him. "It was a strenuous life he led, all the more so because his straitened circumstances rendered it impossible for him to avail himself of the relaxations which the ordinary undergraduate takes as a matter of course. He did not mind having to economise on games. But it was hard for him that he could not go for a row on the river, or go to a concert, or ask a friend to lunch, without making inroads on his meagre supply of half-crowns. But his friends were very good to him."

"The lectures in which he most delighted were those of Canon King (afterwards the saintly Bishop of Lincoln). Morant soon got to know him, and was captivated by the beauty and charm of his character." He also attended Canon Liddon's class, went for walks with Charles Gore,

\* Macmillan &amp; Co., Ltd.

and Canon Scott Holland became one of his closest friends. He was fond of boys and one holiday engagement was destined to have an important influence on his life. He went to be tutor to Mr. (later Sir William) Richmond's boys at Rustington, near Worthing. The Richmonds took to him at once. With Mrs. Richmond the relation became more like that of a son to a mother.

Towards the end of his four years at New College, he became more or less perplexed and unsettled in his views, and ultimately he abandoned the thought of taking Orders, and obtained a position as master in a preparatory school at East Sheen. On his return to school work, after the summer holidays he was attracted by the possibility of an appointment which his friends the Richmonds had heard of from Mr. F. W. Verney, the "English Secretary" to the Siamese Legation, that of tutor to the three little boys of Prince Narès, recently Siamese Minister in London. Mr. Verney, who was the nephew of Florence Nightingale, lived almost close to her in South Street, and consulted her as to the choice which he should make amongst six or seven candidates, so Morant was invited to visit Miss Nightingale as well as her nephew. On his receiving the appointment, she wrote both to Mr. Richmond and to Morant himself, expressing her satisfaction at the selection. To Mr. Richmond she said: "Mr. Morant is a good genius. Whether in England or Siam, he would have a great future if he does not always strain at his tether in doing over much work."

She also wrote a friendly letter, containing wise advice, and words of inspiration and encouragement, to Morant three months after he had left England, telling him how deeply interested she was in his career at Bangkok, and placing before him the example of General Gordon.

## SIAM.

In November, 1888, Morant was offered and accepted the appointment of tutor to the Crown Prince, "but," he wrote, "they require me to give up this longed-for going home for two years more. I can assure you it was an awfully hard struggle. The post holds out such a grand scope for usefulness, if one can only sufficiently adapt oneself to it; they are really anxious to give me the opportunity to do good work; and then in no other place in the world should I get £600 a year! and a furnished house! and a horse!! and only two hours' work a day!!!"

The engagement was for two years, but it was understood that it would be continued for a further period if both sides desired it.

The Crown Prince was then between ten and eleven years of age, and there was every prospect that the King might wish him to remain under Morant's charge for at least five years.

Soon he was immersed not only in his regular duties with the Crown Prince, but also with the numerous other duties which were laid upon him through the intimate knowledge which he had acquired of the Siamese language and people. He also had under his care two little brothers of the Crown Prince. He took in hand the writing of some suitable text books for their use, first of all overcoming the difficulty of "getting down to the level of the infant Siamese mind." "I don't," he wrote, "consider it is any waste of strength to spend so much time on this; for it is everything to *begin* a thing (especially a new and difficult language) in the right way."

"The work gradually grew under his hand, until it assumed the dimensions of a 'Ladder of Knowledge' series—a series which for many years to come was destined to form the basis of the Siamese educational system."

Like Gordon, he was determined to spend and be spent for the people among whom his lot was cast. The result was his house became the centre of all sorts of activities. "He had now become very much more than a tutor; he was a counsellor and adviser in matters of State."

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)