

"KING'S NURSE—BEGGAR'S NURSE."*By **SISTER CATHERINE BLACK, M.B.E., R.R.C.**

Only a very few nurses can be said to excel in the art of narrative writing, and Miss Black, by her book recently published, has proved herself to be one of the exceptions. She passes easily from one experience to another, and at the same time manages to place each one in its proper setting so that it does not get out of harmony with the chain of more descriptive writing. One does not read many pages before coming to the realisation that Miss Black has one very valuable quality—both as a writer and a nurse—a power of easy and quick perception that makes the chronicle of the quiet days in Ireland appear just as full of interest to her readers—and perhaps to herself—as those later parts of the book that deal with the varied and stirring experiences of her nursing life. Added

to an intuitive knowledge of humanity, the author obviously possesses the Celtic gift of humour in full measure, humour we used to be told (in days when its consolations were often much needed) is "The saving grace in a nurse." It is equally so in a writer, with the exception, perhaps, of those who deal with purely scientific subjects, for it really may be said to belong to art, and so it spreads the individual colouring, the "personal" touch to the work of his or her pen. It adds the personality of the writer to the matter of the book. Curiously enough, too, the gift of humour very

often comes to those who are, like Miss Black, of Calvinistic parentage; perhaps it arises as a reaction, perhaps it exists because it has been cultivated half-consciously as a kind of protection, in its way, against the enviroing austerities. We are introduced to the loveliness of Donegal, and a child's joy in a shop with its shining silks and lovely ribbons, and we are back again in an old-fashioned world where such a shop, be it ever so small, was a kind of Aladdin's cave. The custodian of the morality of the village of Ramelton is a fascinating figure, Father Collins, who bears a strong resemblance to Father O'Flynn, the hero of a famous students' song, in that, it would appear, he did not always spare the rod, according to his own showing. Miss Black did not wait for the London Hospital to show her the realities of life, and she tells us of how, as a child, she was taken by her mother to attend her first wake; it reminds us of the Fairchild family, and the father of it who, overcome with anxiety about the morality of his children after some slight

evidence of naughtiness, took them to see a corpse on the gallows.

Experiences at the London Hospital provide interesting glimpses into the past and "the Spartan indifference" to their own comfort that characterised the nurses, not only in the London but in other hospitals, thirty or more years ago. In *Sister A.* is given an interesting and very true picture of the Sisters of those days, who were often amusing characters and of a type of personality lost to the present day. A fascinating picture, too, is that which Miss Black gives us of that "Prince of Beggars," Lord Knutsford, with his arresting and original methods of charming gold out of the pockets of the community and thence into the coffers of his hospital; never surely did any beggar show greater ingenuity, industry and, judging from Miss Black's narrative, a more amusing and effective effrontery.

The descriptions given of the work of the nurses in a casualty clearing station is poignant in spite of, perhaps because of, the simplicity of the description of the terrible demands made upon them. The "human touch" is here still, and one tale after another gives evidence of the writer's interest in humanity as such, just as much as in the demands that called forth her professional skill. Back again in England we are fascinated by the story of how one of the most celebrated of our artists of recent years and one of the greatest surgeons joined their respective crafts—or rather two branches of art (for the surgeon was quite evidently



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an artist in his own sphere) and remoulded the awful ravages that war had made on the human physiognomy.

The years that Miss Black spent at Buckingham Palace while nursing King George the Fifth serve but to give us another picture of this beloved monarch with his devotion to duty, fine statesmanship and high ideals. A many-sided personality this which is portrayed to us, with all his private tastes and interests added to constant service to his country and a love for all classes of his people. Little wonder that he was a king "beloved for himself alone." The picture of the Royal Household is a very charming one and a fine archetype of what English family life should be.

Not the least fascinating chapter in the book is that which speaks of "The March of Progress." Here are intermingled indications of a realisation of the workings of a patient's mind and wonderfully concise indications at the same time of the rapid development of several of the latest and most surprising discoveries and consequential developments of medicine in that greatest of all wars—the war between science and disease. Very interesting indeed

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