

by working in the hospitals of Camporeggi and La Scala. She herself affirmed that she wrought no miracles, but she is said to have radiated health and happiness to her patients and was a vigorous exponent of the main principles of hygiene long before its actual importance was universally recognised. Yet, for herself, she rigorously endured penances imposed upon her by her confessor, and more often voluntarily, in days when such were of a kind that called for much bodily suffering and were regarded as essential to true religious development. It is to be noted that St. Catherine was the Patron Saint of the Italian Nurses many years before the recent proclamation referred to at the commencement of this article.

Often, at the Hospital at La Scala in particular, Catherine would work far into the night, and the little cell in which she slept in the hospital is shown to visitors and also the lamp she used when she went through its wards in the hours of darkness or was called in the night from her own home to go to some sick or dying one in the town. She spared herself never in her work for the sick; with a burning enthusiasm she declared that Christ was greater than Galen and Grace greater than Nature, indicating an outlook that might with benefit penetrate more livingly into our present scientific age, at least in so far as the care of the sick is concerned. A priest tells of how "a gentle sense of well-being" would arise for the patient when Catherine Benincasa was caring for him. She on the other hand would say in such circumstances that angels were near and helped her. There is the well-known story of her ministrations to the old woman Cecca (sometimes spelt Lecca) who suffered from a terrible form of cancer. Catherine made this woman her special care, dressed her sores and performed for her the most repulsive tasks. Little of gratitude did her patient feel for such kindness; she abused her nurse in the most bitter language and did not stop at calumny of the worst kind. When at last the patient died it was Catherine who dressed her for the grave and carried her to it; Catherine, too, it was who digged her grave and buried her. Prior to the death of her patient, Catherine contracted a condition which appeared to be the result of infection from Cecca and tradition has it that when she had buried the latter the affection miraculously disappeared and her body became fresher than before; this might well arise from natural causes on her being relieved of such strenuous duty, but it serves to indicate the physical condition to which her devotion had brought her.

Catherine was a persistent advocate of bravery and virility and her enthusiasm and courage, particularly during the plague that invaded Siena, are matters of history. The story is told of how a priest showed all the symptoms of plague in so far as those about him were able to recognise these. He was judged to be at the point of death. When Catherine was sent for she at once recognised that he was not suffering from plague but from utter exhaustion and from the interference and commiseration of anxious friends who crowded into the sick room. Gaily she said to him, "Rise, Father Matteo. Father Matteo, rise. This is no time for sluggishness," and she quickly dispersed the crowd of anxious people and the Father resumed his labours.

But it was not among the victims of plague that the most striking instance of the courage of St. Catherine arose and of her loving care for the dying. A young Italian named Nicollo Tuldo had been condemned to death for some ill-considered remark about the State. He was indignant and enraged at the injustice of his sentence and would not be persuaded to go to confession before his execution. Catherine was asked to persuade him and she paid him many visits, her heart wrung with pity for the lad. At last she prevailed upon him to yield to the claims of his religion. She took him to mass and he received the Holy Communion. Then he asked her to promise to meet

him at the place of execution. She comforted him there, and, as he lay down, she took his head in her hands, stretching his neck on the block. He murmured Jesus, Catherine, and she found herself in an instant with his head in her lap.

It is impossible in a short article to do more than refer to the magnitude of the work of St. Catherine in its religious and historical aspects. For generations after her death it drew forth the admiration of kings, great church dignitaries, statesmen and soldiers. With all her logical thinking and powers of argument she could yet rise to heights of indignation for wrongs committed and could perform the highest acts of love. As to her death we might well use the words of the gifted father of a great son (the father of Robert Browning) when people were afraid, in his last illness, to tell him the doctor's verdict. "Why?" he asked. "Death is no enemy to me." To quote St. Catherine herself—the body is a cell and the soul is a hermit dwelling there.

I. M.

We are indebted to Messrs. Longmans Green & Co., for permission to reproduce this picture from the biography of Catherine of Siena by Johannes Jorgensen.

## THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF NURSING.

There was a good deal of discussion and difference of opinion at the Annual General Meeting of the Royal College of Nursing held in the Cowdray Hall, on May 16th, on the Resolution in which it was proposed that—  
(b) "Every member of the College shall be entitled to be styled 'a Member of the Royal College of Nursing,' and such style may be indicated by the use of the letters 'M.R.C.N.' after such member's name"; and (c) "the addition of a new sub-clause to follow immediately after sub-clause 5 in Article VIII to provide for the election of members to Fellowship of the College, and conferment of Honorary Fellowship on persons whether members or not."

Dame Ellen Musson moved the adoption of the resolution part (b), and it was discussed.

Miss Cowlin spoke emphatically in opposition, and said that membership of the College did not carry with it any qualifying examination to differentiate members from State Registered Nurses, and the letters "M.R.C.N." after a nurse's name would confuse the public, conveying the impression that she was better qualified than a nurse who had only the "S.R.N." She felt the matter was being decided too hurriedly. It had been approved by two meetings of the Council, yet no report had appeared in the printed proceedings of the Council.

Mrs. Duff supported Miss Cowlin and said the new clauses were not in accordance with the wishes of many trained nurses of the rank and file, and would have the effect of separating a large number of nurses from the College.

It was recognised that as State registration was the recognised qualification for membership of the College, all members should be entitled to style themselves members.

Miss MacManus proposed an amendment to the clause to make it permissive at some future time. Seconded by Miss Rose, this was agreed.

Dame Ellen Musson moved the adoption of Part (c). Miss Cowlin opposed. Another speaker deplored bestowal of honorary Fellowship on people outside the profession.

Miss MacManus supported the resolution (Part c). The matter was put to the vote and passed. Thus the suggestions can be put in practice at some future date without further discussion and unprofessional people be made honorary Fellows of the College—the latter a very undesirable proceeding calculated to depreciate the professional status of the College.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)