

Childrens' Department.

CHRIST THE HEALER.

SOME of you may perhaps remember that when, eight hundred years ago, Saxon Harold and Norman William strove for the crown of England, there was one living who, though a child, had a better right to it than either. It was Edgar Etheling, Edgar the noble one, grandson to the stout old Saxon king Edmund Ironsides. And in fact, when Harold was slain on the field of Hastings, some of the English did proclaim Edgar king; but they were too weak to withstand the powerful William, so laying down their weapons, they gave the helpless boy into his hands. The conqueror received him kindly, and promised protection to him and his two young sisters. During two years they did live at his court, but then the times grew troublous; and their friends, thinking them scarcely safe there, made a plan for conveying them out of the country. They managed to get them on board a vessel, but it was driven out of its course by the winds, and finally cast on the shores of Scotland.

Scotland was at this time a wild, uncivilized country, but its people were not wanting in kindness, and Malcolm its king, having been an exile in his youth, could feel for the poor wanderers. He welcomed them heartily to his castle at Dumfermline, and gave them protection and shelter.

It is of Margaret, Edgar's eldest sister, that we are going particularly to speak. She was a gentle and lovely princess, and her beauty and goodness so won upon King Malcolm, that he asked her hand in marriage. Rough, untaught warrior as he was, less polished in manner than the Saxon princes she was accustomed to, he had a kind heart, and a noble, truthful nature; and Margaret saw those good qualities and did justice to them. So they were married, and she never had cause to repent it, for her future life was full of happiness as he could make it.

She had her difficulties, however. Many of the chiefs who formed her husband's court were rude, savage men, and the power they were accustomed to exercise at will over their vassals made them haughty and turbulent. They often broke out into brawls, such as unknown among noblemen in our own happier times; nor were their wives at all the companions to whom Margaret was accustomed. However, her lot was cast among them, so she took no offence at their rough ways, but quietly went on in her own, till her gentleness and sweetness wrought a change among them. She used to gather the younger ladies about her, and sit with them at needlework and embroidery, receiving visits at the same time from such of the nobles as bore an unblemished character. So the ladies learnt courtesy and gentle manners, while over the nobles she gained such influence, that none of them would dare say a profane word or utter a foolish jest in her presence. There was one rude, and ungodly custom of theirs which shocked her at first a good deal. They used to get so weary of sitting still, that impatient of control, they would start up before grace was said, and rush away from the table. However, she devised a way to break them of this rudeness, in her own cheerful pleasant manner, by sending round, the last thing, a cup of choice wine to all that remained after grace was said.

King Malcolm took great delight in all she did for his people. Under his authority she provided clergymen for every part of the country, caused Sundays and holydays to be religiously observed, and reformed many bad customs. But her chief virtue, and that which connects her history with this day, was her charity, her tender love for the poor. She called herself their mother, and she really behaved as such, not merely giving them alms, but attending herself to their wants, and supplying them with her own hands.

Every morning before her own breakfast, she washed, fed and clothed nine orphan babies, and waited on twenty-four poor people while they breakfasted. She interested her husband in her good works, and got him to help her in them. They often opened the great hall of their castle to as many as three hundred poor people at a time, and, after ranging them, the men on one side and the women on the other, the king would wait on the men and the queen on the women, serving them from the same dishes which were provided for the royal table. Queen Margaret also founded hospitals for the sick, and used to visit them constantly, and assist in the nursing. She set apart some of her hospitals for poor strangers, whom she pitied exceedingly, remembering perhaps how she had been a stranger and an outcast in the country where she was now lady and queen. She used to spend large sums of money in ransoming captives, especially poor Englishmen, whom she would supply with all they needed, and then send to their home. It is said she used to inquire particularly what captives were under harsh masters, and would ransom them first. In this way she would empty her own purse, and then go to the king's. This he freely allowed her to do, though sometimes, when she pretended to take money by stealth, he would catch her by the wrist, and, carrying her off to the chaplain, would ask if she were not a little thief who deserved well to be punished?

When you hear that Queen Margaret had eight children of her own, whom she brought up with great care, and that she was a good wife and an attentive mistress of her family, you will wonder how she found time for so many other good works. The truth seems to be that she prayed so much and so earnestly to God, that God gave her strength and wisdom to do so much for Him and His poor.

Such was Queen Margaret's life: her death must be briefly related. She had been stretched for some months on a bed of sickness, when her husband was forced into war with William Rufus of England. She wished to keep him with her, but he thought it his duty to take command of the army, and bidding her farewell, he set out with his two eldest sons to besiege his own castle of Alnwick, in Northumberland, which the English had taken from him. He was slain there by treachery, and his eldest son was killed while avenging him, but the other escaped and returned home. When he entered his mother's room, she inquired after his father and brother. Dreading to alarm her, he answered, "They are well," but she was not deceived. "I know how it is," she said, "they are gone." And lifting up her hands to God, she thanked Him even for this heavy sorrow. She knew that the parting from her loved ones could not be a long one, and so it proved. She died four days afterwards, on the 16th of November, 1093, her last words being these, "O Lord Jesus Christ, who by Thy death hast given life unto the world, deliver me from all evil."

We hear in to-day's Gospel of our Saviour's compassion to the sick and afflicted, and are led to think of Him as the Consoler, the Healer, the Comforter of sorrowing humanity. Surely something of His spirit was caught by the Christian lady of whom we have been telling you. Let us strive to win a measure of it too.

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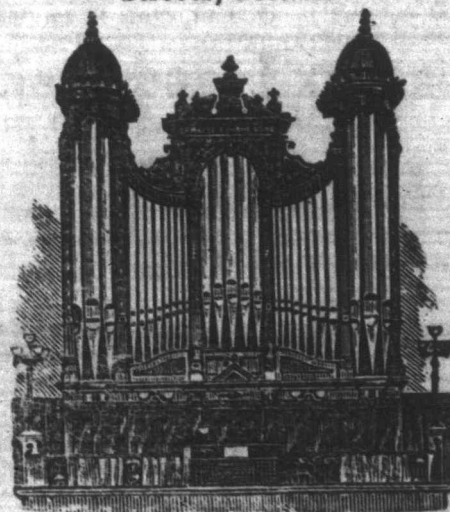
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