

# KATHERINE ELEANOR CONWAY

THE CATHOLIC POETESS, ESSAYIST AND JOURNALIST.

A Splendid Sketch of One of America's Most Brilliant Stars in the Literary Firmament—Life and Labors of a Most Charming and Versatile Writer—An Ornament to Catholic Literature.

"Next room to that of Roche's," said the dear O'Reilly, showing me his nest of poets, "is a gentle poetess."

The door was wide open. It is a question with my mind if the room ever knew a door. Be this as it may, there sat, with her chair close drawn to her desk, a frail, delicate-looking woman. The ordinary eye might see nothing in a face that was winsome, if not handsome; yet, let the dainty mouth curve in speech, and at once a subtle attraction, lit up by lustrous eyes, permeated the face. One characteristic that made itself felt, in the most sparse conversation with this woman, was her humility, a rare virtue among American literary women. I have known not a few, among that irritable class, who, no sooner had they sipped the most meagre draught of fame, than they became intoxicated with their own importance, and for the balance of life wooed that meretricious goddess—notoriety.

IN FIERY PROSE AND TUNEFUL SONG

they told of the dire misfortunes that had been heaped upon their sex by that obstinate vulgar biped, man. Their literature—for that is the name given to the crudest offspring of the press in these days—is noisy, and, says a witty writer, a noisy author is as bad as a barrel organ,—a quiet one is as refreshing as a long pause in a foolish sermon. Clergymen, who have listened to a brother divine on grace, will be the first to see the point. Our authoresses—(a female filled with the vanity that troubled Solomon says I should write female author)—is a quiet and unobtrusive writer. Of the tricks that catch, and the ways that are crooked, in literature, she knows nothing, and, what is better, no amount of bawdy fame could induce her to swerve a jot from the hard stony road that leads to enduring success, the only goal worth striving for in the domain of letters. I am well aware that in the popular list of women-writers, mouthed by the growing herd of flippant readers, that have no other use for a book than as a time-killer,—a herd to whom ideas are as unpalatable as disestablishment to an English parson—you will fail to find the name of Katherine Conway. The reason is simple. She has no fads to air in ungrammatical English, no fallacies to adduce in halting metre. It was a Boston critic who echoed the dictum of the French critic—that grammar has no place in the world of letters. Only have ideas, that is, write meaningless platitudes, grandiose nothings, something that neither man, the angels above, nor the demons down under the sea, may decipher, and this illusive verbiage will make you famous. A school of critics will herald your work with such adjectives as "noble," lofty, absorbing, soul inspiring; nay, more, a pious missionary friend may be found to translate the verbiage into Syriac, as a present for converts.

BORNE ON THE TIDE OF SUCH CRITICISM, not a few women writers have mistaken the plaudits of notoriety, that passing show for fame. It was a saying of De Musset that fame was a tardy plant, a lover of the soil. Be this as it may, it is safe to assert that its coming is not proclaimed by far-fetched similes, frantic metaphors, sensuous images, ranting style, ignorance of metre, want of grammar. The dishes are not of the voluptuous, morbid or the monstrous kind. Its thirst is not slaked at sewers of dullness spiced with immorality. These symptoms savor of one disease known to all pathologists as notoriety. In an age of this dreaded disease it is surely refreshing to meet with works that breathe gentleness and repose,—a beautiful trust in religion, and a warm, natural heart for humanity. These traits will the reader find in abundance in the pages of Katherine Conway. "What kills a poet," says Aldrich, "is self-conceit." Of all the forms self-conceit may assume none is more foolish

or detrimental, especially to a woman-poet, than the pluming of oneself as the harbinger of some renovating gospel, some panacea for human infirmities. What is the burden of your message? Says the critic to the young poet. Straightaway the poet evolves a message, and as messages of this kind ought to be mysterious, the poet wraps them in a jargon as intelligible as Garnier's monkey dialect. Thus in America has risen a school of woman poetry, deluded by false criticism, calling itself a message to humanity, dubbed rightly the school of passion, and one might add, of pain. This school may ask am I to be debarred from treating of the passions on the score of sex. By no means, the passions are legitimate subjects. Love, one of them, is your most attractive theme, but as Lilly has it, love is not to you what it is to the physiologist, a mere animal impulse which man has in common with moths and mollusca. Your task is to

EXTRACT FROM HUMAN LIFE,

even in its commonest aspects, its most vulgar realities, what it contains of secret beauty; to lift it to the level of art, not to degrade art to its level. Few American writers more fully realized these great artistic truths than the master under whose fatherly tuition Miss Conway had long been placed. Boyle O'Reilly was a Grecian in his love for nature. As such it was his aim to seek the beautiful in its commonest aspects, its most vulgar realities. No amount of claptrap or fine writing could make him mistake a daub for a Turner. In the bottom of his soul he detested the little bardlings who had passed nature by, without knowing her, those carvers of cherry-stones who wove into the warp and woof of their dullness the putridity of Zola and morbidity of Marie Bashkirtseff. Under such a guide, the poetic ideal set before Miss Conway has been of the highest and the highest is only worth working for. This ideal must be held unwaveringly even if one sees that books that are originally vicious are "placarded in the booksellers' windows; sold on the street corners; hawked through the railroad trains; yea, given away, with packages of tea or toilet soap, in place of the chromo, mercifully put on the superannuated list." These books are but foam upon the current of time, flecking its surface for a moment, and passing away into oblivion, while what Miss Conway happily calls the Literature of Moral Loveliness, or what might as aptly be called the literature of all time, remains our contribution to posterity. Its foundations, to follow the thought of Azarias, are deeply laid in human nature, and whose structure withstands the storms of adversity and the eddies of events. For such a literature, O'Reilly made a life struggle; his pupil has closely followed his footsteps in the charming, simple, melodious volume that lies before me,

"A DREAM OF LILIES."

Rarely has a Catholic book had a more artistic setting, and one might add, rarely has a volume of Catholic verse deserved it more. Here the poetess touches her highest point, and proves that years of silence have been years of study and conscientious workmanship. In her poem "Success" may be found the key to this volume:

"Ah know what true success is; young hearts dream,  
Dream nobly and plan loftily, nor deem  
That length of years is length of living. See  
A whole life's labor in an hour is done,  
Not by world-tests the Heavenly crown is won,  
To God the man is what he means to be."

"Dream nobly and plan loftily" has been the guiding spirit of this volume. It is a book of religious verse in the true sense, not in the general acceptance of modern religious verse, which is generally dull twaddle, egotism, mawkishness, blind gropings and haunting fears. The gentle spirit of Christ breathes through the volume, making an atmosphere of peace and repose. There is no bigotry to jar, no narrowness to chafe us but the broad upland of Christian charity and truth. Nor has our author forgotten that even truth if cast in awkward mould may be passed over. To her poems she has given a dainty setting without sacrificing a jot of their strength. After reading such a book a judicious bit of Miss Conway's prose comes to my mind. "And as that

**NO OTHER** Sarsaparilla can produce from actual cures such wonderful statements of relief to human suffering as **HOOD'S** Sarsaparilla.

Catholic light, the only true vision, brightens about us, we realize more and more that literary genius, take it all and all, has done more to attract men to good than to seduce men to evil; that the best literature is also the most fascinating, and even by its very abundance is more than a match for the bad; that time is its best ally; that it is hard, if not impossible, to corrupt the once formed pure literary taste; and, finally, that as makers of literature or critics or disseminators of it, it is our duty to believe in the best, hope in the best, and steadfastly appeal to the best in human nature: for we needs must love the highest when we see it.

KATHERINE ELEANOR CONWAY

was born of Irish parents, in Rochester, the 6th of Sept., 1853. Her early studies were made in the convent schools of her native city. From an early age she had whisperings of the muse. These whisperings, at the age of fifteen convinced her that her true sphere of action was literature. In 1875 she commenced the publication of a modest little Catholic monthly, contributing poems and moral tales, under the *nom-de-plume* of Mercedes, to other Catholic journals, in the spare hours left from editing her little venture and teaching in the convent. In 1878 she became attached to the Buffalo Union and Times, then, as now, under the vigorous management of Father Cronin. To this journal she contributed the most of the poems to be found in her maiden volume,—*"On the Sunrise Slope,"*—a volume whose rich promise has been amply fulfilled in the *"Dream of Lilies."* Her health failing, she sought a needful rest in Boston. Her fame had preceded her, and the gifted editor of the Pilot, ever on the lookout for a hopeful literary aspirant of his race, held out a willing hand to the shy stranger. "Come to us," he said, in a voice that knew no guile, "and help us in the good fight." That fight—the crowning glory of O'Reilly's noble life—was to gain an adequate position for his race and religion from the puritanism of New England. How that race and religion were held before his coming, may be best told in the language of Miss Conway, taken from a heart-sketch of her dead master and minstrel:—

"Notwithstanding Matignon and Cheverus, and the Protestant Governor Sullivan, Catholic and Irish were, from the outset, simply interchangeable terms—and terms of odium both—in the popular New England mind. In vain the Irishman's prompt and affectionate acceptance of the duties of American citizenship. To but slight softening of prejudice even his sacrifice of blood and life on every battle-field in the Civil War, in proof of the sincerity of his political profession of faith. He and his were still hounded as a class inferior and apart. They were almost unknown in the social and literary life of New England. Their pathetic sacrifices for their kin beyond the sea, their interest in the political fortunes of the Old Land, were jests and by-words. Their religion was the superstition of the ignorant, vulgar and pusillanimous; or, at best, motive for jealous suspicion of divided political allegiance and threatened "foreign" domination. Their children suffered petty persecutions in the public schools. The stage and the press faithfully reflected the ruling popular sentiment in their caricatures of the Catholic Irishman."

She accepted O'Reilly's call and stood by his side with Roche, Guiney, Blake, until the hard fought battle against the prejudice to Irishism and Catholicism, planted in New England by the bigoted literature of Old England, was abated, if not destroyed; until its shadows, if cast now, are cast by the lower rather than the higher orders in the world of intellect and refinement. "And the shortening of shadow is proof that the sun is rising," proof that her work has been far from vain. And when from the grey dawn of prejudice will come forth the white morrow of charity and truth, the singer and her songs will not be forgotten.

WALTER LECKY.

CONSUMPTION CURED.

An old physician, retired from practice, had placed in his hands by an East India missionary the formula of a simple vegetable remedy for the speedy and permanent cure of Consumption, Bronchitis, Catarrh, Asthma, and all Throat and Lung Affections; also, a positive and radical cure for Nervous Debility and all Nervous Complaints. Having tested its wonderful curative powers in thousands of cases, and desiring to relieve human suffering, I will send free of charge to all who wish it, this recipe, in German, French or English, with full directions for preparing and using. Sent by mail, by addressing, with stamp, naming this paper, W. A. NOYES, 320 Powers' Block, Rochester, N. Y.

A battle took place last Saturday in Santiago between the Argentine troops and a detachment of rebels. The latter were defeated.

Poisoned by Scrofula.

Is the sad story of many lives made miserable through no fault of their own. Scrofula is more especially than any other a hereditary disease, and for this simple reason: Arising from impure and insufficient blood, the disease locates itself in the lymphatics, which are composed of white tissues; there is a period of foetal life when the whole body consists of white tissues, and therefore the unborn child is especially susceptible to this dreadful disease. But there is a remedy for scrofula, whether hereditary or acquired. It is Hood's Sarsaparilla, which by its powerful effect on the blood, expels all trace of the disease and gives to the vital fluid the quality and color of health. If you decide to take Hood's Sarsaparilla do not accept any substitute.

A tramp, who was declared by his partner to be the much-sought-for Tascott, threw himself in front of a train at Easton, Md., Thursday, and was killed.

The Western Union Telegraph Company report that telegraphic communication with Argentina is temporarily interrupted "via Galveston."

The Japanese Government intends to appoint a commission to investigate the silver question, with special reference to the needs of that country.

By the will of the late Thomas Maguire, of Philadelphia, several bequests are made to charitable institutions.

INFORMATION WANTED.

Information of the parties who about nine years ago advertised for Michael and Margaret Bracken. Any person knowing the advertiser's address or object will do a favor to send that information to H. W. BRAUKEN, 124 Ellis Street, San Francisco, Cal. 12-2

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