

ELIZA ALLEN STARR.

Sketch of One of the Most Noted Catholic Women of the Day.

Miss Eliza Starr is, perhaps, one of the most versatile of the talented Catholics of America. A poet, an essayist, an artist, a lecturer on art and poetry, she is an excellent type of an individuality whose abilities are conspicuous in various departments of human knowledge.

When I recently interviewed the frail little lady in the auditorium of her home, St. Joseph's Cottage, situated in Huron street, Chicago, I was surprised to find that she had nothing in common with the traditional blue stocking. She was most gentle and womanly as well as modest and unassuming in her demeanor. She rarely speaks of her own writings. It was with the utmost difficulty that I induced her to give me some interesting details of her life. She has no love for publicity; and hence it is that her name outside select and scholarly circles, is little known among the Catholic people of the United States. She had a sweet sympathetic face still almost untarnished by the wrinkles of age, and sparkling, intelligent eyes, eloquent of the hidden wealth of knowledge that is stored in her active brain. She is, moreover, the soul of courtesy; but it is somewhat difficult to keep up with a conversation with Miss Starr owing to her deafness. An ear trumpet is the only medium through which you can communicate with the lady. Her remarks to me were always interesting and sometimes witty, and displayed a true geniality of spirit peculiar to a happy temperament.

Miss Starr's illustrated lectures on art are well patronized by the Catholic elite of Chicago. She has made a special study of Catholic art in which she is at present recognized as the best living authority on this side of the Atlantic. In her treatment of the exquisite work of Michael Angelo she deals with his early studies in the Medical school, his career in Rome where he left behind him as proofs of his immortal genius the tomb of Julius II, the statues of Moses and the dying slave, the wall pictures of St. Peter's, the frescoed ceilings of the Sistine chapel, and the famous tableau of the Last Judgment. She also discusses Angelo, the poet, in this interesting series of lectures. Another of her intellectual entertainments is devoted to Dante, the king of Italian poets. In a preface to these essays, the author justly observes that since the Relation of St. John, whose pen seemed dipped in rainbows, as on the island of Patmos he wrote of the Heavenly Jerusalem, no one has uttered or written what brings us so near to the Beautiful Vision as a reality as Dante's *Paradiso*. What Fra Angelico did for the Heavenly fields with his brush Dante did with his pen. In addition to these lectures Miss Starr holds daily in the auditorium of her cottage an art school for Catholic pupils. She is marvellously successful in teaching her pupils to secure complete accuracy of forms, perspective, and vigor of light and shade, as well as charm of color. Your readers will be pleased to know that six prizes were awarded to her pupils' art exhibit at the World's Columbian Exposition. The commissioners expressed their regret that they had not the power to give more in view of the general excellence of the paintings. Miss Starr's qualifications as a teacher of art are unquestionable. During the tour made by her in 1875 through France and Italy she studied art at its fountain head. The Louvre galleries of Paris and those of Versailles, the art treasures of Florence, Venice, and Rome had a fascination for this American woman which gave her a valuable insight into the glorious handiwork of the great masters.

Miss Eliza Allen Starr is originally a New Englander. She was born in

Durfield in 1824. The founder of the Starr family in this country was Dr. Comfort Starr of Ashford, County Kent, England, who left that country in 1694, and settled in Cambridge, Mass. The son of this pioneer, the Rev. Comfort Starr, graduated from Harvard University in 1847, and was one of the five Fellows named in the college charter dated May 10, 1850. On the maternal side Miss Starr is descended from "the Allens of the Bars," originally of Chelmsford, Essex, England, who were distinguished in the colonial history of Durfield during the time of King Phillip's war and afterwards. They were a race of soldiers and scholars. The domestic atmosphere breathed by Miss Starr throughout her childhood, was of that rare kind in which both heart and mind alike develop vigorously, stimulated by the tenderest family affection, the union of intellectual interest and a noble ideal of social obligations, while the passionate love and knowledge of nature, so noticeable in her poems, and her highly cultivated artistic propensities found their first impulse among the beautiful woodlands, the verdant vales, and other picturesque surroundings of her pleasant New England home.

Early in life she received a broad and ample education which was subsequently developed and completed in Boston where she resided for some time. After having endowed herself with much of the culture peculiar to the "Hub," she proceeded to Philadelphia where her cousin, George Allen, LL.D., was professor of Greek and Latin in the University of Pennsylvania. While living in this Quaker city Miss Starr was privileged to number among her most intimate friends the illustrious Archbishop Kenrick, who was widely known as a translator of the Holy Scriptures. Thanks to the encouragement of his Grace, she began to woo the Muses, with the result that several high toned religious poems were printed from her pen in the pages of various magazines.

I should have mentioned that Miss Starr, who was born and trained a Protestant, was received into the Catholic Church by the late Bishop Fitzpatrick of Boston in the old cathedral on Franklin street in that city. She was thirty years old when she abandoned the communion with which her early life was so much associated. In doing so she had to part with old friends, break old ties, and give over old traditions. She willingly accepted this sacrifice on being convinced that Catholicism suited her tastes and temperament much better than the cold rigid creed of Puritanism. Moreover, thanks to constant study, she discovered that all the accusations made by unscrupulous Protestant scribes against the Catholic Church were not founded on fact, and were the most malicious of calumnies. She had asked like Pilate—but a higher and holier object than he—"Where is the Truth?" She found it eventually on the bosom of that sublime *alma mater*, the Catholic Church.

Miss Starr proceeded subsequently to Chicago, where she entered on a literary career, while at the same time developing those artistic talents which have been her most distinguished characteristics. In the latter department her work in form, scope and execution is entirely unique. It is not confined to the original and brilliant articles on art and artists that emanate from her pen with which readers of various periodicals are familiar, nor to the training of pupils in drawing and painting, but to the propagation of her ideas through conferences in the houses of friends in Chicago and other great Western cities. Miss Starr is in fact an art enthusiast, but more particularly so on its Catholic features.

In 1867 her maiden volume of poems appeared from the printing press, and

was very well received by the critics. Miss Starr's effusions are veritable gems in their way. They are the simple but yet eloquent musings of a cultured mind, and the outcome of a good and generous heart. Miss Starr could no more suppress her penchant for adding chaste ideas to verse than the bird of the forest could the tuneful faculties with which it is endowed by the God of nature. Her poems are marked with a grace of devotion truly admirable, and are confined mostly to her two favorite subjects, religion and art.

It has been said that in order to become a writer of musical prose, one must needs be a poet. The poetry in Miss Starr's nature enables her in her prose volumes to treat us to a series of pen and ink pictures which are poetically beautiful. Her style of writing is as limpid as a mountain brook, and flows along as sweetly as a calm and crystal river. Her first prose volumes were entitled "Patron Saints" in which she displayed a truly religious fervor of thought.

In 1875, Miss Starr visited the old world, spending most of her time, as I have already said, in the art galleries of that continent, but she nevertheless devoted a few weeks of recreation to sketching the vineyards of the sunny land of France, the hoary peaks of the Alpine mountains, the cathedral of Milan, the Duomo of Florence, the lagoons and the Piazza San Marco of Venice, as well as the cathedral of San Pietro in Rome. On her return to this country she immediately set to work on a volume entitled "Pilgrims and Shrines" based on the materials which she had collected during her transatlantic tour. It was on the whole a charming contribution to literature and art, and was moreover illustrated from the etchings taken by her on the most interesting of the sites which she visited. The glimpses of Western Europe, which she was thus enabled to present to the American public, were vivid and interesting, and differed from other books on the same subject by their breezy freshness and originality.

Miss Starr's later volumes were: "Songs of a Life Time," published in 1887, "Isabella of Castille," "Christmas-Tide," "Christian Art in Our Own Age," and "What We See." In 1885 the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, conferred upon her the Laetara medal as a recognition of her services to Catholic art and literature. During the Catholic Congress, held in Chicago last summer under the auspices of the World's Columbian Exposition, Miss Starr read a paper on "Woman's Work in Art."

Though this Catholic writer is entering on the seventieth year of her age, she is as active as a woman of thirty-five. Her frail frame is a mask, so to speak, for a spirit full of indomitable energy, like a gleaming sword sheathed in a delicately wrought scabbard. Miss Starr continues her work, unconscious of the march of time, for she is too enthusiastically devoted to it to have a moment to spare to count the years as they pass. She has all the charms of perpetual youth—not those of *nonne de l'Enfer* which attracted the eye—but the youth-hood of mind and temperaments.—Eugene Davis in *Catholic Columbian*.

Gladstone had 20,000 books in his library three years ago. He has given most of them away, chiefly to the general library at Hawarden Church. He claims to be able to pack more books in a given space than any man he knows.

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