

PLEASANT HOURS

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FELICITA AND HER SONS.

BY ANNETTE L. NOBLE.

MANY stories of saints and martyrs are purely legendary, but there is reason to believe the history of Felicita a true record.

In the reign of the Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, there was a great persecution of Christians. There was living at the time in Rome a widow who had seven sons. She was a woman of devoted piety, and her sons were trained in virtue and true Christian manliness. She spent her life in their instruction at home, or in works of charity among the poor and afflicted. Living so simply in that age of splendour, she might have passed her years in peace and died among her loved ones; but, unfortunately, she was very rich. There were in Rome those who shared in the spoil of the martyrs whom they accused, and soon they found out the piety and the wealth of this noble lady. She was cited before the tribunal of Publius, the Prefect of Rome, who first mildly, then sternly, bade her deny Christ Jesus and sacrifice to the false gods. She firmly refused. He said then: "If thou hast no pity for thyself, have it for thy sons, and tell them to yield to the law."

She replied that her sons would know how to choose between everlasting life and death. The Prefect summoned them to "abjure Christ on pain of torments and death."

The mother cried to them: "My sons, be strong in heart. Look up to heaven where Christ and his saints await you! Defy this tyrant boldly."

The angry Prefect had her smitten on the mouth, but she continued to exhort them to die rather than to yield.

Accordingly, one after another of the seven were tortured and put to death before her eyes; not one of them, from the oldest, who were men grown, to the tender stripling, flinching from suffering. The oldest, Januarius, was scourged to death. Felix and Phillip were beaten with clubs. Sylvanus was flung from a rock, while Alexander, Vitatis, and Martial had their heads cut off.

The mother saw it all. During their agonies she never ceased her comfort, encouragement, and prayer. When the seven were laid dead before her she lifted up her voice and blessed the Lord that she "had borne seven sons worthy to be saints in Paradise." Her hope was to be slain with them, but perceiving this, the Prefect imprisoned her for four months, thinking that a course of daily torture would subdue her spirit; but meekly and persistently she "kept the faith." At last she was dragged from prison, tortured unto death, then, some day, beheaded, others say flung into a caldron of boiling oil. The date is given in old chronicles as November 23, A.D. 173. There is a curious old fresco of Felicita and her sons (now in the Vatican), which was taken from the Catacombs. She stands praying for them, and the name of each son is written under his figure. It was during this same persecution of the Christians that Polycarp was slain in the East and Justin in the West.

There are Roman Catholic churches, both in Florence and Rome, dedicated to St. Felicitas, and Raphael, and also lesser painters, have painted representations of her martyrdom.

In the second book of Maccabees is a story of a Jewish mother with seven martyred sons, and pictures of these are often confused with pictures of Felicita and her sons. At this late day it is impossible to

separate legends from facts, but this we do know: that scores of noble women and brave men endured agonies untold for love of the Lord who redeemed them. Their names may be forgotten here, but they suffer no loss. They are forever with the Lord, and glorious is their reward.

PERSEVERANCE.

The following story is told of a manufac-



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turing firm in Glasgow. Thirty years ago a barefoot, ragged urchin presented himself before the desk of the principal partner and asked for work as errand boy.

"There's a deal o' rinnin' to be duone," said Mr. Blank, jestingly, affecting a broad Scotch accent. "Your first qualification wud be a pair o' shoon."

The boy, with a grave nod, disappeared. He lived by doing odd jobs in the market, and slept under one of the stalls. Two months passed before he saved enough to buy the shoes. Then he presented himself before Mr. Blank one morning, and held out a package.

"I hoo the shoon, sir," he said quietly. "Oh!" Mr. Blank with difficulty recalled the circumstances. "You want a

place? Not in those rags, my lad, you wud disgrace the house."

The boy hesitated a moment, and then went out without a word. Six months passed before he returned, decently clothed in coarse but new garments. Mr. Blank's interest was roused. For the first time he looked at the boy attentively. His thin, bloodless face showed that he had stunted himself of food for months in order to buy these clothes. The manufacturer now questioned the boy closely, and found to

take mine if he made up his mind to do it. Men rise slowly in Scotch business houses, but he is now our chief foreman."

THE FIVE PEACHES.

This old story, translated from the German, is worth reading again and again.

A countryman, on returning from the city, took home with him five as fine peaches as one could desire to see. As his children had never beheld the fruit before, they rejoiced over them exceedingly, calling them the fine apples with rosy cheeks, and soft plum like skin. The father divided them among his four children, and retained one for their mother. In the evening, ere the children retired to their chamber, the father questioned them by asking:

"How did you like the soft, rosy apples?"

"Very much, indeed, dear father," said the eldest boy. "It is a beautiful fruit—so acid, and yet so nice and soft to the taste. I have preserved a stone that I may cultivate a tree."

"Right and bravely done," said the father. "That speaks well for regarding the future with care, and is becoming in young husbandman."

"I have eaten mine and thrown the stone away," said the youngest; "besides which, mother gave me half of hers. Oh! it tasted so sweet and melted in my mouth."

"Indeed," answered the father; "thou hast not been prudent. How ever it was very natural and child like, and displays wisdom enough for your years."

"I have picked up the stone," said the second son, "which my brother threw away, cracked it and eaten the kernel; it was as sweet as a nut to my taste; but my peach I have sold for so much money that when I go to the city I can buy twelve of them."

"The parent shook his head reproachfully, saying:

"Beware, my boy, of avarice: prudence is all very well, but such conduct as yours is unchildlike and unnatural. Heaven guard thee, my child, from the fate of a miser."

"And you, Edmund?" asked the father, turning to his third son, who frankly replied:

"I have given my peach to the son of our neighbour, the sick George, who has the fever. He would not take it, so I left it on the bed, and have just come away."

"Now," said the father, "who has done the best with his peach?"

"Brother Edmund!" the three exclaimed aloud.

Edmund was still silent, and the mother kissed him with the tears of joy in her eyes.

A SINGULAR BOOK.

The most curious book in the world is neither written nor printed. Every letter of the text is cut into the leaf, and as the alternate leaves are of blue paper it is as easily read as the best print. Every character was made by hand. The book is entitled "The Passion of Christ." It was a curiosity as long ago as the year 1610. It now belongs to the family of the Prince de Ligne, and is kept in a museum in France.—Selected.

The more time we spend in criticizing others the less time we will have to ever come our own faults.