

CLOISTER AND HEARTH.

READ AT THE CATHOLIC CONGRESS.

Woman in Medieval Life as Pictured by Anna T. Sadlier.

The interesting paper read by Mrs. Healy for Anna T. Sadlier, pictured the cloister and the home of the middle ages. She says:

Previous to the medieval era Christianity had raised womanhood from the slough of paganism. Already an astonished world had begun to cry out "Ye gods of Greece, what women have these Christians!" During the middle ages, from the sixth to the middle of the fifteenth century, woman attained, as it were, her full growth under the aegis of the Church, the Church which serenely held sway over the mad chaotic world struggling into civilization. It would be an impossible task here to classify medieval woman by distinctions of race or epoch. Rather let us examine her condition, personal qualities and the tone of society toward her on the broad lines of cloistered, royal, saintly and learned women.

The nun played such a part in the drama of medieval life as to raise woman to the climax of her power. The nun was a chief factor in procuring the emancipation of women and proclaiming her equality, in a Christian sense, with man, by giving her a separate, individual existence. Immured in her cloister, the nun exercised a protective influence over the wife and mother and caused them to be revered on account of the possibilities of heroic virtue which she displayed. To the rudest warrior she was "a thing enskied and ensainted." In short, by her ideal of consecrated virginity, the Church secured the elevation of woman.

The Anglo Saxon cloisters were thronged with nuns of the blood royal; Ethelburga, the first royal widow to enter religion, Etheldreda, of the strange, romantic story, Elfrida, who aided Wilfrid in his struggle to fix the Roman discipline upon the Celts, Earcontha, Domneva, Eanpleda, Ermenburga, Hereswida, Eadburga, Wereburga. Ermenilda and Sexburga, were all nuns of royal birth—in one instance three generations, grandmother, mother and daughter, met in the cloister. Some were widows, some had, by permission, separated from their husbands, some had entered religion in early youth, being in the forcible Saxon word, veritable "Godes-Bryds,"—"Brides of God."

In Ireland, land of saints and scholars, where learning at the darkest periods found asylum, St. Bridget, of the royal house of Leinster, exercised much the same patriarchal sway over men and women as Hilda at Whitby. Many poetic legends cluster about that spot dedicated to virtue and learning, and for a thousand years after Bridget's death a lamp burnt at her tomb. "That bright lamp which burned at Kildare's holy fane."

The attainments of the nuns appear to have been, for the time, considerable. They studied philosophy and belles-lettres, the scriptures and the fathers. Their correspondence was kept up in Latin, and sprinkled with quotations, proving their acquaintance with the classics. Many of them knew Greek. They reached, in fine, the highest degree of culture then possible. Like their contemporaries, they were ignorant, no doubt, of much that we know. Probably they also knew much that would surprise our "sweet girl graduates," and knew it thoroughly and well. Many nuns were proficient as copyists, adorning manuscripts with gold and gems. They were accomplished needlewomen, skilled in rare tapestries and embroideries.

Deaconesses were a recognized order in the Church till the ninth century, as were also recluses, who inhabited caverns and mountains. Such was Rosalie, of Palermo, whose name has remained in veneration through the centuries.

The queens of the middle ages are a numerous and important class. Among the Anglo-Saxons, who in common with the other Teutonic races assigned a lofty part to woman, the queens possessed territorial rights and rights of jurisdiction, having separate courts and affixing their names to all public documents. Like the nuns of their race they were ardent as apostles.

The queens of the Norman period, beginning with the wife of the conqueror, continued the high tradition of learning sometimes of sanctity. For instance,

the sisters and the two queens of Henry Beauclere are mentioned as being accomplished scholars. "There is, perhaps, no more beautiful character recorded in history," says the Protestant Skene, in his Celtic Scotland. "For purity of motives, for an earnest desire to benefit the people among whom her lot was cast, for a deep sense of religion and great personal piety, for the unselfish performance of whatever duty lay before her, and for entire self-abnegation she is unsurpassed."

The Frankish dynasty furnishes us with such lovable types of women as Clotilda, who obtained the somewhat dramatic conversion of her husband on the battlefield, and Bathildis, who labored for the abolition of slavery and the spread of learning, who founded and afterward became abbess of Chelles.

The life of Matilda, wife of Henry I. of Germany, reads like romance from the moment her royal lover beholds her, the pupil of Hereward convent, through the long years when they were "one in mind and heart, prompt to every good work," as through her regency and her widowhood, passed so holily.

Queen Elizabeth, of Portugal, who won by her unceasing efforts to promote peace the title of *Pacis et Patrie Mater* and Saint Isabel de Pax, is only less interesting than that other Elizabeth, whose marriage to her beloved Landgrave Louis, her pathetic efforts to lead a saint's life at a court, the cruel persecutions she endured and her widowhood are so familiar to us. Of such a type was Hedwiga, of Poland, who married against her inclination to promote the peace of christendom.

Bridget, Princess of Sweden, sanctified her husband, eight children, and edified a court before founding the Order of the Brigidines. Agnes of Bohemia, wife of Frederick II., Cunegonde of Bavaria, good Queen Maud of England, Hildegarde, Empress of Charlemagne, Agnes, wife of the German Henry III., so successful a regent, are among those who led a life of nun-like austerity upon thrones. Many medieval queens belonged to the Third Order of St. Francis.

The medieval households are, in the main, beautiful pictures of Catholic life. There, "at the fireside of the heart, feeding its flame," woman's true place, the mistress of the family shone. Wise, intelligent, loving and beloved, respecting and respected, she was troubled by no theories of female suffrage or equal rights or divided skirts. Her own rights, thanks to the church, were too secure, her duties too sacred. A helpful wife, a conscientious mother. "Happy the ages," cries Digby, "when men had holy mothers." She trained sons to fill high places and daughters to vigorous practical utility, and she gained the love of her servants. Every woman in those days was made acquainted with every detail of household duty. With high-born women the duties were simply wider and more onerous. She had to know medicine and surgery and church music and embroidery, as she was fitted to exercise the splendid hospitality of the times, with that exquisite courtesy to strangers, which was a rigid social law. But she had to sew and spin and cook and keep a time apart for reading. Spinning was a favorite occupation, by the way, of all classes of medieval women. Dante represents the women of Florence as spinning while "they listened to old tales of Troy, Fesole and Rome."

Charity toward the poor, the suffering, the afflicted was eminently characteristic of medieval women. Always munificent, their charity chose a thousand tender and delicate modes of manifesting itself, seeing even in the mendicant the person of Jesus Christ. Mary, the mother of God, was the first great cause of the elevation of women. Divinely fair and holy, ever present to the medieval mind, she taught man to reverence and women to deserve reverence. She appeared upon the pennons of knights or in their war cries, particularly if the cause were holy. Upon her they framed their ideal. The maiden in the cloister, with her consecrated teacher, placed Mary's image in miniatures or illuminations. The lady of the castle, with her bondswomen, uttered the transcendent prayer: "Hail, full of grace." The wandering glee women or the serf fresh from toil bent the knee at Mary's wayside shrine. Even the gypsies in their midnight celebration of Christmas joined with the generations in calling her blessed.

Everywhere that ideal, divinely human,

before which all mere earthly perfection fades. Therefore, any summary of the women of the middle ages must be faulty, even as a matter of philosophical or ethical inquiry, which ignores the omnipresent and almost omnipotent influence of Mary, mother of God.

The following poem was handed to us on the 18th instant for publication in THE TRUE WITNESS; on the 21st the proofs were read and handed to the author, and strange to say the poem appeared in the Gazette of the 22nd. We merely make this remark in case it might be supposed the poem was taken second-hand.—Ed. T. W.]

THIS CANADA OF OURS.

[Lines suggested by the Queenston Heights Celebration of 1893.]

By W. O. FARMER.

'Mid heart-felt praise the standard raise
Of Canada, our glory—
Bid her "God speed," since she's decreed
To live in song and story!

Where, where's the land whose hopes expand
In brighter hues or purer—
Whose future lies 'neath calmer skies,
Whose march to fame is surer?

What aims so high as to defy
Her genius from attaining?
May she a queen not yet be seen
Amongst the nations reigning!

Unbounded wealth is her's in health,
Her's youth, too, self-reliant—
Limbs lithe and free as limbs need be,
A spirit fresh and buoyant.

Then, look around—where can be found
Such subterranean treasure—
Such varied store of priceless ore,
Store, rich beyond all measure?

Or richer soil—the yeoman's toil
In golden produce glowing—
From farm and field the harvest yield,
In streams Pactolean flowing?

Let the Swiss boast his wild crags most,
His mountains that, careering
Grand and sublime, upward still climb,
In cloudland disappearing.

That peerless place for every grace,
"Killarney's Lakes" may woo us—
Thro' heart and eye its magic sky
With Tempe's charms may sue us,—

But Celt and Swiss may boast the bliss
Their lakes and mountains tender,
Canada can as boastful scan
Her Saguenay's scenic splendor.

Her "Thousand Isles," where nature's smiles
The tourist's vision ravish—
Her Richelieu's famed landscape views,
In lovely scenes so lavish!

While far away her realms and sway,
From ocean sweep to ocean,
And to her throne stout millions own
Allegiance and devotion.

Tho' young in years her his'try cheers
Those millions by example—
Shows how to brave the foe or knave
Her freedom who'd dare trample!

Thus fought and bled, like heroes bred,
Her trusted sons and cherish'd,
At "Chateauguay" and "Lundy's" fray,
Where her invaders perish'd.

At "Chrysler's Farm," whose memories
charm,
How valiantly they bore them!
How for their rights, at "Queenston Heights,"
They bore down all before them!

There, with the flow'r of England's pow'r,
The common danger sharing,
Canadians stood, none firmer could,
Allies in deeds of daring.

But, lo! at last, fierce as a blast,
For godless conquest thirsting,
As sabres flash and cannon crash,
On them the foe see bursting!

See war-steeds plunge, fierce swordsmen lunge,
See main'd men reel and totter;
But see! they stand, yon patriot band,
Cool 'mid the strife and slaughter.

Yet, tho' hurled back on each attack,
Forward the foe keeps rushing,
With dire intent, come what may, bent
Yon "thin red line" on crushing.

But British steel and natives' zeal,
Despite the foemen's number,
Show that in vain that foeman's slain,
The battle-field encumber.

Like some cliff seen, its crest serene,
Tho' round it, fathoms under,
Are heard to break, as stout hearts quake,
The winds and waves in thunder,—

Thus, calm indeed, but fixed if need,
Dearly their lives on selling,
Fronting the foe the "red-coats" show,
Charge after charge repelling.

Until the cry is heard, "they fly!"
And "victory" is shouted,
As from the field, compelled to yield,
The foe flees, crush'd and routed.

Then, 'mid loud praise the standard raise
Of Canada, our glory,
Bid her "God speed," since she's decreed
To live in song and story!

Let them beware who trait'rous dare
To compromise her station!
Invasion failed—shall treason vailed,
Succeed in "annexation"?

To thwart this aim, that lurks in shame
'Neath "Independence" prattle,
With every breath we draw till death
We'll sue the "God of Battle."

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GENTLEMEN,—I was troubled with chronic diarrhoea for over three years and received no benefit from all the medicine I tried. I was unable to work from two to four hours every week. Hearing of Dr. Fowler's Extract of Wild Strawberry I began to use it. Am now all right.—John Stiles, Bracebridge, Ont.

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