EFFINGER JOHN ROBERT

WOMEN OF THE ROMANCE COUNTRIES (ILLUSTRATED)

John Effinger

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Содержание

John R. Effinger
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PREFACE

No one can deny the influence of woman, which has been a potent factor in society, directly or indirectly, ever since the days of Mother Eve. Whether living in Oriental seclusion, or enjoying the freer life of the Western world, she has always played an important part in the onward march of events, and exercised a subtle power in all things, great and small. To appreciate this power properly, and give it a worthy narrative, is ever a difficult and well-nigh impossible task, at least for mortal man. Under the most favorable circumstances, the subject is elusive and difficult of approach, lacking in sequence, and often shrouded in mystery.

What, then, must have been the task of the author of the present volume, in essaying to write of the women of Italy and Spain! In neither of these countries are the people all of the same race, nor do they afford the development of a constant type for observation or study. Italy, with its mediæval chaos, its free cities, and its fast-and-loose allegiance to the temporal power of the Eternal City, has ever been the despair of the orderly historian; and Spain, overrun by Goth, by Roman, and by Moslem host, presents strange contrasts and rare complexities.

Such being the case, this account of the women of the Romance countries does not attempt to trace in detail their gradual evolution, but rather to present, in the proper setting, the most conspicuous examples of their good or evil influence, their bravery or their cowardice, their loyalty or their infidelity, their learning or their illiteracy, their intelligence or their ignorance, throughout the succeeding years.

Chroniclers and historians, poets and romancers, have all given valuable aid in the undertaking, and to them grateful acknowledgment is hereby made. JOHN R. EFFINGER.

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PART FIRST
ITALIAN WOMEN

CHAPTER I
THE AGE OF THE COUNTESS MATILDA OF TUSCANY

The eleventh century, which culminated in the religious fervor of the First Crusade, must not on that account be considered as an age of unexampled piety and devotion. Good men there were and true, and women of great intellectual and moral force, but it cannot be said that the time was characterized by any deep and sincere religious feeling which showed itself in the general conduct of society. Europe was just emerging from that gloom which had settled down so closely upon the older civilizations after the downfall of the glory that was Rome, and the light of the new day sifted but fitfully through the dark curtains of that restless time. Liberty had not as yet become the shibboleth of the people, superstition was in the very air, the knowledge of the wisest scholars was as naught, compared with what we know to-day; everywhere, might made right.

In a time like this, in spite of the illustrious example of the Countess Matilda, it cannot be supposed that women were in a very exalted position. It is even recorded that in several instances, men, as superior beings, debated as to whether or not women were possessed of souls. While this momentous question was never settled in a conclusive fashion, it may be remarked that in the heat of the discussion there were some who called women angels of light, while there were others who had no hesitation in declaring that they were devils incarnate, though in neither case were they willing to grant them the same rights and privileges which they themselves possessed. Though many other facts of the same kind might be adduced, the mere existence of such discussion is enough to prove to the most undiscerning that woman's place in society was not clearly recognized, and that there were many difficulties to be overcome before she could consider herself free from her primitive state of bondage.

In the eye of the feudal law, women were not considered as persons of any importance whatever. The rights of husbands were practically absolute, and led to much abuse, as they had a perfectly legal right to punish wives for their misdeeds, to control their conduct in such a way as to interfere with their personal liberty, and in general to treat them as slaves and inferior beings. The whipping-post had not then been invented as a fitting punishment for the wife beater, as it was perfectly understood, according to the feudal practices as collected by Beaumanoir, "that every husband had the right to beat his wife when she was unwilling to obey his commands, or when she cursed him, or when she gave him the lie, providing that it was done moderately, and that death did not ensue." If a wife left a husband who had beaten her, she was compelled by law to return at his first word of regret, or to lose all right to their common possessions, even for purposes of her own support.

The daughters of a feudal household had even fewer rights than the wife. All who are willing to make a candid acknowledgment of the facts must admit that even to-day, a girl-baby is often looked upon with disfavor. This has been true in all times, and there are numerous examples to show that this aversion existed in ancient India, in Greece and Sparta, and at Rome. The feudal practices of mediæval Europe were certainly based upon it, and the Breton peasant of to-day expresses the same idea somewhat bluntly when he says by way of explanation, after the birth of a daughter: *Ma femme a fait une fausse couche.* Conscious as all must be of this widespread sentiment at the present time, it will not be difficult to imagine what its consequences must have been in so rude a time as the eleventh century, when education could do so little in the way of restraining human passion and prejudice. As the whole feudal system, so far as the succession of power was concerned, was based upon the principle of primogeniture, it was the oldest son who succeeded to all his father's lands and wealth, the

daughter or daughters being left under his absolute control. Naturally, such a system worked hardship for the younger brothers, but then as now it was easier for men to find a place for themselves in the world than for women, and the army or the Church rarely failed to furnish some sort of career for all those who were denied the rights and privileges of the firstborn. The lot of the sister, however, was pitiful in the extreme (unless it happened that the older brother was kind and considerate), for if she were in the way she could be bundled off to a cloister, there to spend her days in solitude, or she could be married against her will, being given as the price of some alliance.

The conditions of marriage, however, were somewhat complicated, as it was always necessary to secure the consent of three persons before a girl of the higher class could go to the altar in nuptial array. These three persons were her father or her guardian, her lord and the king. It was Hugo who likened the feudal system to a continually ascending pyramid with the king at the very summit, and that interminable chain of interdependence is well illustrated in the present case. Suppose the father, brother, or other guardian had decided upon a suitable husband for the daughter of the house, it was necessary that he should first gain the consent of that feudal lord to whom he gave allegiance, and when this had been obtained, the king himself must give his royal sanction to the match. Nor was this all, for a feudal law said that any lord can compel any woman among his dependants to marry a man of his own choosing after she has reached the age of twelve. Furthermore, there was in existence a most cruel, barbarous, and repulsive practice which gave any feudal lord a right to the first enjoyment of the person of the bride of one of his vassals. As Legouvé has so aptly expressed it: *Les jeunes gens payaient de leur corps en allant à la guerre, les jeunes filles en allant à l'autel.*

Divorce was a very simple matter at this time so far as the husband was concerned, for he it was who could repudiate his wife, disown her, and send her from his door for almost any reason, real or false. In earlier times, at the epoch when the liberty of the citizen was the pride of Rome, marriage almost languished there on account of the misuse of divorce, and both men and women were allowed to profit by the laxity of the laws on this subject. Seneca said, in one instance: "That Roman woman counts her years, not by the number of consuls, but by the number of her husbands." Juvenal reports a Roman freedman as saying to his wife: "Leave the house at once and forever! You blow your nose too frequently. I desire a wife with a dry nose." When Christianity appeared, then, the marriage tie was held in slight consideration, and it was only after many centuries and by slow degrees that its sanctity was recognized, and its rights respected. While, under the Roman law, both men and women had been able to get a divorce with the same ease, the feudal idea, which gave all power into the hands of the men, made divorce an easy thing for the men alone, but this was hardly an improvement, as the marriage relation still lacked stability.

It must not be supposed that all the mediæval ideas respecting marriage and divorce and the condition of women in general, which have just been explained, had to do with any except those who belonged in some way to the privileged classes, for such was not the case. At that time, the great mass of the people in Europe-men and women-were ignorant to the last degree, possessing little if any sense of delicacy or refinement, and were utterly uncouth. For the most part, they lived in miserable hovels, were clothed in a most meagre and scanty way, and were little better than those beasts of burden which are compelled to do their master's bidding. Among these people, rights depended quite largely upon physical strength, and women were generally misused. To the lord of the manor it was a matter of little importance whether or not the serfs upon his domain were married in due form or not; marriage as a sacrament had little to do with these hewers of wood and drawers of water, and they were allowed to follow their own impulses quite generally, so far as their relations with each other were concerned. The loose moral practices of the time among the more enlightened could be but a bad example for the benighted people of the soil; consequently, throughout all classes of society there was a degree of corruption and immorality which is hardly conceivable to-day.

So far as education was concerned, there were but a few who could enjoy its blessings, and these were, for the most part, men. Women, in their inferior and unimportant position, rarely desired

an education, and more rarely received one. Of course, there were conspicuous exceptions to this rule; here and there, a woman working under unusually favorable circumstances was really able to become a learned person. Such cases were extremely rare, however, for the true position of woman in society was far from being understood. Schools for women were unknown; indeed, there were few schools of any kind, and it was only in the monasteries that men were supposed to know how to read and write. Even kings and queens were often without these polite accomplishments, and the right of the sword had not yet been questioned. Then, it must be taken into consideration that current ideas regarding education in Italy in this early time were quite different from what they are to-day. As there were no books, book learning was impossible, and the old and yellowed parchments stored away in the libraries of the monasteries were certainly not calculated to arouse much public enthusiasm. Education at this time was merely some sort of preparation for the general duties of life, and the nature of this preparation depended upon a number of circumstances.

To make the broadest and most general classification possible, the women of that time might be divided into ladies of high degree and women of the people. The former were naturally fitted by their training to take their part in the spectacle of feudal life with proper dignity; more than that, they were often skilled in all the arts of the housewife, and many times they showed themselves the careful stewards of their husbands' fortunes. The women of the people, on the other hand, were not shown any special consideration on account of their sex, and were quite generally expected to work in the fields with the men. Their homes were so unworthy of the name that they required little care or thought, and their food was so coarse that little time was given to its preparation. Simple-minded, credulous, superstitious in the extreme, with absolutely no intellectual uplift of any kind, and nothing but the sordid drudgery of life with which to fill the slow-passing hours, it is no wonder that the great mass of both the men and the women of this time were hopelessly swallowed up in a many-colored sea of ignorance, from which, with the march of the centuries, they have been making slow efforts to rise. So the lady sat in the great hall in the castle, clad in some gorgeous gown of silk which had been brought by the patient caravans, through devious ways, from the far and mysterious East; surrounded by her privileged maidens, she spun demurely and in peace and quiet, while out in the fields the back of the peasant woman was bent in ceaseless toil. Or again, the lady of the manor would ride forth with her lord when he went to the hunt, she upon her white palfrey, and he upon his black charger, and each with hooded falcon on wrist; for the gentle art of falconry was almost as much in vogue among the women as among the men of the time. Often it happened that during the course of the hunt it would be necessary to cross a newly planted field, or one heavy with the ripened grain, and this they did gaily and with never a thought for the hardship that they might cause; and as they swept along, hot after the quarry, the poor, mistreated peasant, whether man or woman, dared utter no word of protest or make moan, nor did he or she dare to look boldly and unabashed upon this hunting scene, but rather from the cover of some protecting thicket. Scenes of this kind will serve to show the great gulf which there was between the great and the lowly; and as there was an almost total lack of any sort of education in the formal sense of the word, it will be readily understood that all that education could mean for anybody was that training which was incident to the daily round of life, whatever it happened to be. So the poor and dependent learned to fear and sometimes to hate their masters, and the proud and haughty learned to consider themselves as superior and exceptional beings.

With society in such a state as this, the question will naturally arise: What did the Church do under these circumstances to ameliorate the condition of the people and to advance the cause of woman? The only answer to this question is a sorry negative, as it soon becomes apparent, after an investigation of the facts, that in many cases the members of the clergy themselves were largely responsible for the wide prevalence of vice and immorality. It must be remembered that absolution from sin and crime in those days was but a matter of money price and that pardons could be easily bought for any offence, as the venality of the clergy was astounding. The corruption of the time was great, and the priests themselves were steeped in crime and debauchery. In former generations,

the Church at Rome had many times issued strict orders against the marriage of the clergy, and, doubtless as one of the consequences of this regulation, it had become the custom for many of the priests to have one or more concubines with whom they, in most cases, lived openly and without shame. The monasteries became, under these conditions, dens of iniquity, and the nunneries were no better. The nunnery of Saint Fara in the eleventh century, according to a contemporary description, was no longer the residence of holy virgins, but a brothel of demoniac females who gave themselves up to all sorts of shameless conduct; and there are many other accounts of the same general tenor. Pope Gregory VII. tried again to do something for the cause of public morality, in 1074, when he issued edicts against both concubinage and simony-or the then prevalent custom of buying or selling ecclesiastical preferment; but the edict was too harsh and unreasonable with regard to the first, inasmuch as it provided that no priest should marry in the future, and that those who already possessed wives or concubines were to give them up or relinquish their sacred offices. This order caused great consternation, especially in Milan, where the clergy were honestly married, each man to one wife, and it was found impossible to exact implicit obedience to its requirements.

So far as the general influence of women upon the feudal society of Italy in the eleventh century is concerned, it is not discoverable to have been manifest in the ways which were common in other countries. It will be understood, of course, that, in speaking of woman's influence here, reference is made to the women of the upper classes, as those of the peasant class cannot be said to have formed a part of social Europe at this time. It is most common to read in all accounts of this feudal period, which was the beginning of the golden age of the older chivalry, that women exerted a most gentle influence upon the men about them and that the honor and respect in which they were held did much to elevate the general tone of life. In Italy, however, chivalry did not flourish as it did in other countries. Since the time of the great Emperor Charlemagne all Italy had been nominally a part of the imperial domain, but owing to its geographical position, which made it difficult of access and hard to control, this overlordship was not always administered with strictness, and from time to time the larger cities of Italy were granted special rights and privileges. The absence of an administrative capital made impossible any centralization of national life, and it was entirely natural, then, that the various Italian communities should assert their right to some sort of local government and some measure of freedom. This spirit of citizenship in the free towns overcame the spirit of disciplined dependence which was common to those parts of the empire which were governed according to the usual feudal customs, and, as a result, Italy lacks many of those characteristics which are common to the more integral parts of the vast feudal system.

The most conspicuous offspring of feudalism was chivalry, with its various orders of knighthood; but chivalry and the orders of knighthood gained little foothold in Italy, where the conditions necessary for the growth and development of such a social and military order were far from propitious. Knights, it is true, came and went in Italy, and performed their deeds of valor; fair maidens were rescued, and women and children were given succor; but the knights were foreign knights, and they owed allegiance to a foreign lord. So far, then, Italy was without the institution of chivalry, and, to a great degree, insensible to those high ideals of fealty and honor which were the cardinal virtues of the knightly order. Owing to the absence of these fine qualities of mind and soul, the Italian in war was too often of fierce and relentless temper, showing neither pity nor mercy and having no compassion for a fallen foe. Warriors never admitted prisoners to ransom, and the annals of their contests are destitute of those graceful courtesies which shed such a beautiful lustre over the contests of England and France. Stratagems were as common as open and glorious battle, and private injuries were revenged by assassination and not by the fair and manly *joust à l'outrance*. However, when a man pledged his word for the performance of any act and wished his sincerity to be believed, he always swore by the *parola di cavaliere*, and not by the *parola di cortigiano*, so general was the acknowledgment of the moral superiority of chivalry.

It was in the midst of this age of ignorance that Matilda, the great Countess of Tuscany, by means of her wisdom and intelligence and her many graces of mind and body, made such a great and lasting reputation for herself that her name has come down in history as the worthy companion of William the Conqueror and the great monk Hildebrand, later Pope Gregory VII., her most distinguished contemporaries. Matilda's father, Boniface, was the richest and most powerful nobleman of his time in all Italy, and as Margrave and Duke of Tuscany, Duke of Lucca, Marquis of Modena, and Count of Reggio, Mantua, and Ferrara, he exerted a very powerful feudal influence. Though at first unfriendly to the interests of the papal party in Italy, he was just about ready to espouse its cause when he fell under the hand of an assassin; and then it was that Matilda, by special dispensation of the emperor, was allowed to inherit directly her father's vast estate, which she shared at first with her brother Frederick and her sister Beatrice. Generally, fiefs reverted to the emperor and remained within his custody for five years-were held in probate, as it were-before the lawful heirs were allowed to enter into possession of their property. Frederick and Beatrice were short-lived, however, and it was not many years before Matilda was left as sole heir to this great domain; she was not entirely alone, as she had the watchful care and guidance of her mother, who assisted her in every emergency.

As the result of this condition of affairs, both mother and daughter were soon sought in marriage by many ardent and ambitious suitors, each presenting his claims for preferment and doing all in his power to bring about an alliance which meant so much for the future. Godfrey of Lorraine, who was not friendly to the party of the Emperor Henry III., while on a raid in Italy, pressed his suit with such insistency that the widowed Beatrice promised to marry him and at the same time gave her consent to a betrothal between Matilda and Godfrey's hunchback son, who also bore the name of Godfrey. This marriage with an unfriendly prince, after so many years of imperial favor, and this attempt at a consolidation of power for both present and future, so angered Henry that he insisted that Beatrice must have yielded to violence in this disposition of her affairs. Finally, in spite of her repeated denials, she was made a prisoner for her so-called insubordination, while Matilda was compelled to find safety in the great fortress at Canossa. In the meantime, Godfrey had gone back to Lorraine, more powerful than ever, to stir up trouble in the empire.

In this same year, 1054, Henry III. died, and his son, Henry IV., won over by the prayers of Pope Victor II., made peace with Godfrey and restored Beatrice to liberty. They, being more than grateful to Victor for this kindly intervention, invited him to come to their stately palace in Florence and tarry with them for a while. From this time on, in the period when Matilda was growing into womanhood, the real seat of the papal power was not in Rome, but in Florence, and Godfrey's palace became an acknowledged centre of ecclesiastical activity.

Matilda was a girl of a mystic temperament, credulous, it is true, and somewhat superstitious like all the other people of her time, and yet filled with a deep yearning for a greater knowledge of the secrets of the universe. Her ideal of authority was formed by intercourse with the various members of her own circle, who were all devoted heart and soul to the cause of the Holy See, and it was but natural that, when she became old enough to think and act for herself, all her inclinations should lead her to embrace the cause of the pope. While it is beyond the province of the present volume to describe in detail the exact political and religious situation in Italy at this time, it should be said that the pope was anxious to reassert the temporal power of his office, which had for a long time been subservient to the will of the emperors. He desired the supremacy of the papacy within the Church, and the supremacy of the Church over the state. Early filled with a holy zeal for this cause, Matilda tried to inform herself regarding the real state of affairs, so that she might be able to act intelligently when the time for action came. Through skilful diplomacy, it came to pass that Matilda's uncle-Frederick-became Pope Stephen X.; and then, of course, the house of Lorraine came to look upon the papal interests as its own, and the daughter of the house strengthened the deep attachment for the Church which was to die only when she died. Nor must it be thought that the priestly advisers

of the house were blind to the fact that in Matilda they had one who might become a pillar of support for the fortunes of the papacy. The monk Hildebrand, for a long time the power behind the pope until he himself became pope in 1073, was a constant visitor at Matilda's home, and he it was who finally took her education in hand and gave it its fullest development. She had many teachers, of course, and under Hildebrand's guiding genius, the work was not stopped until the young countess could speak French, German, and Latin with the same ease as she did her mother tongue.

Finally, in 1076, when she was thirty years of age, her mother-Beatrice-died, and also her husband, Godfrey le Bossu. The great countess, acting for the first time entirely upon her own responsibility, now began that career of activity and warfare which was unflagging to the end. No other woman of her time had her vast power and wealth, no other woman of her time had her well-stored mind, and no other, whether man or woman, was so well equipped to become the great protector of the Holy Church at Rome. People were amazed at her ability-they called her God-given and Heaven-sent, and they felt a touch of mystery in this woman's life. Surely she was not as the others of her time, for she could hold her head high in the councils of the most learned, and she the only woman of the number! Nor was she one-sided in her activity and indifferent to all interests save those of the papal party, as her many public benefactions show her to have been a woman filled with that larger zeal for humanity which far transcends the narrow zeal for sect or creed. For, in addition to the many temples, convents, and sepulchres, which she caused to be scattered over the northern part of Italy, she built the beautiful public baths at Casciano, and the great hospital of Altapascio.

Never strong physically, Matilda was possessed of remarkable vitality and an iron will, and she showed great powers of execution and administration, never shirking the gravest responsibilities. A part of her life was spent in the rough camps of her devoted feudal soldiery, and-weak woman though she was-she led them on to battle more than once, when they seemed to need the inspiration of her presence. Women warriors there have been in every day and generation in some part of the world perhaps, but never one like this. Clad in her suit of mail, and urging on her battle horse at the head of her followers, her pale face filled with the light of a holy zeal, it is small wonder that her arms triumphed, and that before her death she came to be acknowledged openly as by far the most important person in all Italy.

It happened at one time that the emperor-Henry IV. – deserted by his friends in Germany, and excommunicated by the pope, found that his only hope for restoration to popular favor lay in a pardon from his enemy and the lifting of the ban of excommunication. He set out, therefore, alone and without an army, to meet the pope and sue for peace. Gregory, uninformed as to Henry's intended visit (for news did not travel quickly in those early days), was at the time on his way to Germany, where an important diet was to be held, and with him was his faithful ally Matilda. When they learned of the emperor's approach, however, the papal train turned aside to the nearby fortress of Canossa, one of Matilda's possessions, there to await the royal suppliant. In the immense hall of that great castle, all hung with armor, shining shields and breastplates, and all the varied accoutrements of war, the frowning turrets without and the dark corridors within swarming with the pope's defenders, Henry, the great emperor, who had once tried to depose Gregory, was now forced to his greatest earthly humiliation and was compelled to bend the knee and sue for pardon. Matilda it was who sat beside the pope at this most solemn moment, and she alone could share with Gregory the glory of this triumph, for she it was who had supplied the sinews of war and made it possible for the pope to impose his will.

On their return to Rome, to insure a continuance of papal success and give stability to the ecclesiastical organization, she made over by formal donation to the Holy See all her worldly possessions. This was not only an act of great liberality, but it was a very bold assertion of independence, as it was not customary to make disposition of feudal possessions without first gaining the emperor's consent. As it was a foregone conclusion that he would never give his consent to this arrangement, Matilda thought best to dispense with that formality.

Henry's submission was the distinct recognition of papal supremacy for which Matilda had been battling, but Gregory, in his exactions, had overstepped the bounds of prudent policy, as he had shown himself too arrogant and dictatorial. In consequence, all Lombardy rose against him, Tuscany soon followed suit, and, in 1080, Matilda herself was forced to take refuge in the mountains of Modena. Henry, who had regained in part his power and his influence at home, descended upon Rome in 1083, and in revenge for his former disgrace, expelled Gregory, who retired to Salerno, where he died soon after. Now comes a period of conflict between popes and anti-popes, Matilda sustaining the regular successors of Gregory, and Henry nominating men of his own choice. The long period of warfare was beginning to weigh heavily upon the land, however, and in a solemn assembly at Carpinetto, the friends and barons of Matilda implored her to cease her struggles, but she refused to listen to their entreaties because a monk of Canossa had promised her the aid of heaven if she should persevere in this holy war. Before long, Lombardy, which had long been restless, revolted against the emperor, and Matilda, by great skill and a display of much tact, was enabled to arrange matters in such a way that she broke Henry's power. This victory made Matilda, to all intents and purposes, the real Queen of Italy, though in title she was but the Countess of Tuscany. Then it was that she confirmed her grant of 1077, giving unconditionally to the pope all her fiefs and holdings. While the validity of this donation was seriously questioned, and while it was claimed that she had really intended to convey her personal property only, so ambiguous was the wording of the document that the pope's claims were in the main allowed, and many of her lands were given over to his temporal sway.

After the death of Henry IV. (1106), she continued to rule without opposition in Italy, though recognizing the suzerainty of his successor, Henry V. In 1110, this emperor came to visit her at Bibbianello, where he was filled with admiration for her attainments, her great wisdom, and her many virtues. During this visit, Henry treated her with the greatest respect, addressing her as mother; before his departure, he made her regent of Italy. She was then old and feeble, physically, but her mind and will were still vigorous. A few years later, during the Lenten season in 1115, she caught cold while attempting to follow out the exacting requirements of Holy Week, and it soon became apparent that her end was near. Realizing this fact herself she directed that her serfs should be freed, confirmed her general donation to the pope, made a few small bequests to the neighboring churches, and then died as she had lived, calmly and bravely. Her death occurred at Bendano, and her body was interred at Saint Benoît de Ponderone. Five centuries later, under the pontificate of Urban VIII., it was taken to Rome and buried with great ceremony in the Vatican.

As to Matilda's character, some few historians have cast reflections upon the nature of her relations with Pope Gregory, their stay together at Canossa, at the time of Henry's humiliation, being particularly mentioned as an instance of their too great intimacy. Such aspersions have still to be proved, and there is nothing in all contemporary writings to show that there was anything reprehensible in all the course of this firm friendship. Gregory was twice the age of the great countess, and was more her father than her lover. During her whole lifetime, she had been of a mystic temperament, and it is too much to ask us to believe that her great and holy ardor for the Church was tainted by anything like vice or sensuality. By reason of her great sagacity and worldly wisdom she was the most powerful and most able personage in Italy at the time of her death. If her broad domains could have been kept together by some able successor, Italian unity might not have been deferred for so many centuries; but there was no one to take up her work and Italy was soon divided again, and this time the real partition was made rather by the growing republics than by the feudal lords.

A consideration of the life of the Countess Matilda points to the fact that there was but this one woman in all Italy at this time who *knew* enough to take advantage of her opportunities and play a great rôle upon the active stage of life. Many years were to pass before it could enter the popular conception that all women were to be given their chance at a fuller life, and even yet in sunny Italy, there is much to do for womankind. Then, as now, the skies were blue, and the sun was bright and warm; then, as now, did the peasants dance and sing all the way from water-ribbed Venice to fair

and squalid Naples, but with a difference. Now, there is a measure of freedom to each and all-then, justice was not only blind but went on crutches, and women were made to suffer because they were women and because they could not defend, by force, their own. Still, there is comfort in the fact that from this dead level of mediocrity and impotence, one woman, the great Countess of Tuscany, was able to rise up and show herself possessed of a great heart, a great mind, and a great soul; and in her fullness of achievement, there was rich promise for the future.

CHAPTER II
THE NEAPOLITAN COURT IN THE TIME OF QUEEN JOANNA

If you drive along the beautiful shore of the Mergellina to-day, beneath the high promontory of Pausilipo, to the southwest of Naples, you will see there in ruins the tumbling rocks and stones of an unfinished palace, with the blue sea breaking over its foundations; and that is still called the palace of Queen Joanna. In the church of Saint Chiara at Naples, this Queen Joanna was buried, and there her tomb may be seen to-day. Still is she held in memory dear, and still is her name familiar to the lips of the people. On every hand are to be seen the monuments of her munificence, and if you ask a Neapolitan in the street who built this palace or that church, the answer is almost always the same-"Our Queen Joanna."

Who was this well-beloved queen, when did she live, and why is she still held in this affectionate regard by the present residents of sunny Naples? To answer all these questions it will be necessary to go back to a much earlier day in the history of this southern part of the Italian peninsula-a day when Naples was the centre of a royal government of no little importance in the eyes of the mediæval world.

Some three hundred years before Joanna's birth, in the early part of the eleventh century, a band of knightly pilgrims was on its way to the Holy Land to battle for the Cross. They had ridden through the fair provinces of France, in brave array upon their mighty chargers, all the way from Normandy to Marseilles, and there they had taken ship for the East. The ships were small, the accommodations and supplies were not of the best, and it was not possible to make the journey with any great speed. Stopping, as it happened, for fresh stores in the south of Italy, they were at once invited by the Prince of Salerno to aid him in his fight against the Mohammedans, who were every day encroaching more upon the Greek possessions there. Being men of warlike nature, already somewhat wearied by the sea voyage to which they were not accustomed, and considering this fighting with the Saracens of Italy as a good preparation for later conflicts with the heathens and the infidels who were swarming about the gates of Jerusalem, they were not slow to accept the invitation. While victory perched upon the banners of the Normans, it was evident at once that for the future safety of the country a strong and stable guard would be necessary, and so the Normans were now asked to stay permanently. This the majority did with immense satisfaction, for the soft and gentle climate of the country had filled their souls with a sweet contentment, and the charms and graces of the southern women had more than conquered the proud conquerors. Just as Charles VIII. and his army, some hundreds of years later, were ensnared by the soft glances of soft eyes when they went to Italy to conquer, so the Normans were held in silken chains in this earlier time. But there was this difference-the Normans did not forget their own interests. Willing victims to the wondrous beauty of the belles of Naples, they were strong enough to think of their own position at the same time; and as the French colony grew to fair size and much importance, they took advantage of certain controversies which arose, and boldly seized Apulia, which they divided among twelve of their counts. This all happened in the year 1042.

It may well be imagined that Naples at this time presented a most picturesque appearance, for there was a Babel of tongues and a mixture of nationalities which was quite unusual. After the native Neapolitans, dark-eyed and swarthy, there were countless Greeks and Saracens of somewhat fairer hue, and over them all were the fierce Normans, strangers from a northern clime, who were lording it in most masterful fashion. The effect of this overlordship, which they held from the pope as their feudal head, was to give to this portion of Italy certain characteristics which are almost entirely lacking in the other parts of Italy. Here there was no free city, here there was no republic, but, instead, a feudal court which followed the best models of the continent and in its time became famed for its brilliancy and elegance. Without dallying by the way to explain when battles were fought and kings

were crowned, suffice it to say that, early in the fourteenth century, Robert of Taranto, an Angevine prince, ascended the throne of Naples, and by his wisdom and goodness and by his great interest in art and literature made his capital the centre of a culture and refinement which were rare at that time. This was a day of almost constant warfare, when the din of battle and the clash of armor were silencing the sound of the harp and the music of the poet, but Robert-*Il buon Rè Roberto*, as he was called-loved peace and hated war and ever strove to make his court a place of brightness and joy, wherein the arts and sciences might flourish without let or hindrance.

These centuries of feudal rule had, perhaps, given the people of Naples a somewhat different temper from that possessed by the people in other parts of Italy. There had been a firm centre of authority, and, in spite of the troubles which had rent the kingdom, the people in the main had been little concerned with them. They had been taught to obey, and generally their rights had been respected. Now, under King Robert, the populace was enjoying one long holiday, the like of which could have been seen in no other part of Italy at that time. The natural languor of the climate and their intuitive appreciation of the lazy man's proverb, *Dolce far niente*, made it easy for them to give themselves up to the pleasures of the moment. All was splendor and feasting at the court, and the castle Nuovo, where the king resided, was ever filled with a goodly company. So the people took life easily; there was much dancing and playing of guitars upon the Mole, by the side of the waters of that glorious bay all shimmering in the moonlight, and the night was filled with music and laughter. The beauty of the women was exceptional, and the blood of the men was hot; passion was ill restrained, and the green-eyed monster of jealousy hovered over all. Quick to love and quick to anger, resentful in the extreme, suspicious and often treacherous, Dan Cupid wrought havoc among them at times most innocently, and many a *colpo di coltello* [dagger thrust] was given under the influence of love's frenzy. But the dance continued, the dresses were still of the gayest colors, the bursts of laughter were unsubdued.

The fair fame of the court of Naples had gone far afield, and not to know of it and of its magnificence, even in those days of difficult communication, was so damaging a confession among gentlefolk, that all were loath to make it. Here, it was known, the arts of peace were encouraged, while war raged on all sides, and here it was that many noble lords and ladies had congregated from all Europe to form part of that gallant company and shine with its reflected splendor. King Robert likewise held as feudal appanage the fair state of Provence in southern France, rich in brilliant cities and enjoying much prosperity, until the time of the ill-advised Albigensian Crusade, and communication between the two parts of Robert's realm was constant. Naples was the centre, however, and such was the elegance and courtesy of its court that it was famed far and wide as a school of manners; and here it was that pages, both highborn and of low estate, were sent by their patrons that they might perfect themselves in courtly behavior. The open encouragement which was accorded to the few men of letters of the time made Naples a favorite resort for the wandering troubadours, and there they sang, to rapturous applause, their songs of love and chivalry. Here in this corner of Italy, where the dominant influences were those which came from France, and where, in reality, French knights were the lords in control, the order of chivalry existed as in the other parts of Europe, but as it did not exist elsewhere in Italy. Transplanted to this southern soil, however, knighthood failed to develop, to any marked degree, those deeper qualities of loyalty, courtesy, and liberality which shed so much lustre upon its institution elsewhere. Here, unfortunately, mere gallantry seemed its essential attribute, and the gallantry of this period, at its best, would show but little regard for the moral standards of to-day. No one who has read the history of this time can fail to be struck with the fact that on every hand there are references to acts of immorality which seem to pass without censure. As Hallam has said, many of the ladies of this epoch, in their desire for the spiritual treasures of Rome, seem to have been neglectful of another treasure which was in their keeping. Whether the gay gallant was knight or squire, page or courtier, the feminine heart seems to have been unable to withstand his wiles, and from Boccaccio to Rabelais the deceived and injured husband was ever a butt

of ridicule. Of course, there was reason for all this; the ideals of wedded life were much further from realization than they are to-day, and the sanctity of the marriage relation was but at the beginning of its slow evolution, in this part of the Western world.

But within the walls of the huge castle Nuovo, which combined the strength of a fortress with the elegance of a palace, it must not be supposed that there was naught but gross sensuality. Court intrigue and scandal there were in plenty, and there were many fair ladies in the royal household who were somewhat free in the bestowal of their favors, sumptuous banquets were spread, tournaments for trials of knightly skill were held with open lists for all who might appear, but in the centre of it all was the king, pleasure-loving, it is true, but still far more than that. He it was who said: "For me, I swear that letters are dearer to me than my crown; and were I obliged to renounce the one or the other, I should quickly take the diadem from my brow." It was his constant endeavor to show himself a generous and intelligent patron of the arts. The interior of his palace had been decorated by the brush of Giotto, one of the first great painters of Italy, and here in this home of luxury and refinement he had gathered together the largest and most valuable library then existing in Europe.

When Petrarch was at the age of thirty-six he received a letter from the Roman Senate, asking him to come to Rome that they might bestow upon him the poet's crown of laurel. Before presenting himself for this honor, however, to use his own words, he "decided first to visit Naples and that celebrated king and philosopher, Robert, who was not more distinguished as a ruler than as a man of learning. He was indeed the only monarch of our age who was, at the same time, the friend of learning and of virtue, and I trusted that he might correct such things as he found to criticise in my work." Having learned the reason of the great poet's visit, King Robert fixed a day for the consideration of Petrarch's work; but, after a discussion which lasted from noon until evening, it was found that more time would be necessary on account of the many matters which came up, and so the two following days were passed in the same manner. Then, at last, Petrarch was pronounced worthy of the honor which had been offered him, and there was much feasting at the palace that night, and much song, and much music, and much wine was spilled.

Not the least attentive listener in those three days of discussion and argument was the Princess Joanna, the granddaughter of the king, his ward and future heir. For in the midst of his life of agreeable employment, *Il buon Rè Roberto* had been suddenly called upon to mourn the loss of his only son, Robert, Duke of Calabria, who had been as remarkable for his accomplishments-according to the writers of chronicles-as for his goodness and love of justice. Two daughters survived him, Joanna and Maria, and they were left to the care of the grandfather, who transferred to them all the affection he had felt for the son. In 1331, when Joanna was about four years old, the king declared her the heiress of his crown; and at a solemn feudal gathering in the great audience room of the castle Nuovo, he called upon his nobles and barons to take oaths of allegiance to her as the Duchess of Calabria; and this they did, solemnly and in turn, each bending the knee in token of submission. With the title of Duchess of Calabria, she was to inherit all her father's right to the thrones of Naples and Provence.

As soon as she came under his guardianship, the education of the small Joanna became the constant preoccupation of her kindly grandfather, for he was filled with enthusiasm for the manifold advantages of learning, and spared no pains to surround the little duchess with the best preceptors in art and in literature that Italy afforded. All contemporary writers agree that the young girl gave quick and ready response to these influences, and she soon proved her possession of most unusual talents, combined with a great love for literary study; it is said that, at the age of twelve, she was not only distinguished by her superior endowments, but already surpassed in understanding not only every other child of her own age, but many women of mature years. To these mental accomplishments, we are told that there were added a gentle and engaging temper, a graceful person, a beautiful countenance, and the most captivating manners. And so things went along, and the old king did all in his power to shield her from the corrupting influences which were at work all about her. In that he

seems to have been successful, for there is every reason to believe that she grew up to womanhood untainted by her surroundings.

Various forces were at work, however, which were soon to undermine the peace and tranquillity of the gay court, and plunge it into deepest woe. It should be known that by a former division of the possessions of the royal house of Naples, which had been dictated by the whim of a partial father, the elder branch of that house had been allotted the kingdom of Hungary, which had been acquired originally as the dowry of a princess, while to the younger branch of the house Naples and Provence had been given. Such a division of the royal domain had never satisfied those of the elder branch of the family, and for many years the rulers of Hungary had cast longing eyes upon the fair states to the south. The good King Robert, desiring in his heart to atone for the slight which had been put upon them, decided to marry Joanna to his grand-nephew Andreas, the second son of Carobert, King of Hungary, thus restoring to the elder branch of the family the possession of the throne of Naples without endangering the rights of his granddaughter, and at the same time extinguishing all the feuds and jealousies which had existed for so long a time between the two kingdoms. So the young Hungarian prince was brought to the Neapolitan court at once, and the two children were married. Joanna was but five years old and Andreas but seven when this ill-fated union was celebrated, with all possible splendor and in the midst of great rejoicing. The children were henceforth brought up together with the idea that they were destined for each other, but as the years grew on apace they displayed the most conflicting qualities of mind and soul.

A careful analysis of the court life during these youthful days will reveal the fact that its essential characteristics may be summed up in the three phrases-love of literary study, love of gallantry, and love of intrigue; it so happens that each of these phases is typified by a woman, Joanna representing the first, Maria, – the natural daughter of Robert, – the second, and Philippa the Catanese, the third. Much has been said already of Joanna's love for study and of her unusual attainments, but a word or two more will be necessary to complete the picture. Her wonderful gifts and her evident delight in studious pursuits were no mere show of childish precocity which would disappear with her maturer growth, for they ever remained with her and made her one of the very exceptional women of her day and generation. Imagine her there in the court of her grandfather, where no woman before her had ever shown the least real and intelligent interest in his intellectual occupations. It was a great thing, of course, for all the ladies of the court to have some famous poet come and tarry with them for a while; but they thought only of a possible *affaire d'amour*, and odes and sonnets descriptive of their charms. There was little appreciative understanding of literature or poetry among them, and they were quite content to sip their pleasures from a cup which was not of the Pierian spring. Joanna, however, seemed to enter earnestly into the literary diversions of the king, and many an hour did they spend together in the great library of the palace, unfolding now one and now another of the many parchment rolls and poring over their contents. Three learned languages there were at this time in this part of the world, the Greek, the Latin, and the Arabic, and the day had just begun to dawn when the common idioms of daily speech were beginning to assert their literary value. So it is but natural to assume that the majority of these manuscripts were in these three languages, and that it required no small amount of learning on Joanna's part to be able to decipher them.

Far different from this little princess was Maria of Sicily, a woman of many charms, but vain and inconstant, and satisfied with the frivolities of life. Indeed, it must be said that it is solely on account of her love for the poet Boccaccio, after her marriage to the Count of Artois, that she is known to-day. Boccaccio had journeyed to the south from Florence, as the fame of King Robert's court had reached him, and he was anxious to bask in its sunlight and splendor, and to bring to some fruition his literary impulses, which were fast welling up within him. And to Naples he came as the spring was retouching the hills with green in 1333, and there he remained until late in the year 1341, when he was forced to return to his home in the north. His stay in Naples had done much for him, though perhaps less for him personally than for his literary muse, as he plunged headlong into the

mad whirlpool of social pleasures and enjoyed to the utmost the life of this gay court, which was enlivened and adorned by the wit of men and the beauty of women. Not until the Easter eve before his departure, however, did he chance to see the lady who was to influence to such a great degree his later career. It was in the church of San Lorenzo that Boccaccio saw Maria of Sicily, and it was a case of love at first sight, the *coup de foudre* that Mlle de Scudéry has talked about; and if the man's word may be worthy of belief under such circumstances, the lady returned his passion with an equal ardor. It was not until after much delay, however, that she was willing to yield to the amorous demands of the poet, and then she did so in spite of her honor and her duty as the wife of another. But this delay but opened the way for an endless succession of gallant words and acts, wherein the art of coquetry was called upon to play no unimportant part. Between these two people there was no sincere friendship such as existed later between Boccaccio and Joanna, and they were but playing with the dangerous fire of passion, which they ever fanned to a greater heat.

Philippa the Catanese, as she is called in history, stands for the spirit of intrigue in this history; and well she may, as she has a most wonderful and tragic history. The daughter of a humble fisherman of Catania in Sicily, she had been employed by Queen Violante, the first wife of Robert, in the care of her infant son, the Duke of Calabria. Of wonderful intelligence for one in her station, gifted beyond her years, and beautiful and ambitious, she won the favor of the queen to such a degree that she soon became her chief attendant. Her foster-child, the Duke of Calabria, who tenderly loved her, married her to the seneschal of his palace and appointed her first lady in waiting to his wife; and thus it happened that she was present at the birth of Joanna, and was the first to receive her in her arms. Naturally enough, then, King Robert made her the governess and custodian of the small duchess after her father's death. This appointment of a woman of low origin to so high a position in the court gave offence to many of the highborn ladies there, and none could understand the reason for it all. Many dark rumors were afloat, and, although the matter was discussed in undertones, it was the general opinion that she had been aided by magic or sorcery, and the bolder spirits said that she was in daily communication with the Evil One. However that may be, she was faithful to her trust, and it was only through her too zealous scheming in behalf of her young mistress that she was brought to her tragic end.

As the two children, Andreas and Joanna, grew up to maturity, it became more and more apparent that there was no bond of sympathy between them. Andreas had as his preceptor a monk named Fra Roberto, who was the open enemy of Philippa, and her competitor in power. It was his constant aim to keep Andreas in ignorance and to inspire him with a dislike for the people of Naples, whom he was destined to govern, and to this end he made him retain his Hungarian dress and customs. Petrarch, who made a second visit to Naples as envoy from the pope, has this to say of Fra Roberto: "May Heaven rid the soil of Italy of such a pest! A horrible animal with bald head and bare feet, short in stature, swollen in person, with worn-out rags torn studiously to show his naked skin, who not only despises the supplications of the citizens, but, from the vantage ground of his feigned sanctity, treats with scorn the embassy of the pope." King Robert saw too late the mistake he had committed, as the sorrow and trouble in store for the young wife were only too apparent. To remedy, so far as was in his power, this unhappy condition of affairs, he called again a meeting of his feudal lords; and this time he had them swear allegiance to Joanna alone in her own right, formally excluding the Hungarians from any share in the sovereign power. While gratifying to the Neapolitans, this act could but excite the enmity of the Hungarian faction under Fra Roberto, and it paved the way for much intrigue and much treachery in the future.

When King Robert died in 1343, Joanna became Queen of Naples and Provence at the age of fifteen; but on account of her youth and inexperience, and because of the machinations of the hateful monk, she was kept in virtual bondage, and the once peaceful court was rent by the bitterest dissensions. Through it all, however, Joanna seems to have shown no special dislike to Andreas, who, indeed, was probably innocent of any participation in the scheming of his followers; Petrarch

compares the young queen and her consort to two lambs in the midst of wolves. The time for Joanna's formal coronation was fixed for September 20, 1345, and some weeks before, while the palace was being decorated and prepared for this great event, the young couple had retired to the Celestine monastery at Aversa, some fifteen miles away. Joanna, who was soon to become a mother, was much benefited by this change of scene, and all was peace and happiness about them, with nothing to indicate the awful tragedy which the future held in store. On the night of September 18th, two days before the coronation was to take place, Andreas was called from the queen's apartment by the information that a courier from Naples was waiting to see him upon urgent business. In the dark corridor without, he was at once seized by some person or persons whose identity has never been made clear, who stopped his mouth with their gloves and then strangled him and suspended his body from a balcony. The cord, however, was not strong enough to stand the strain, and broke, and the body fell into the garden below. There the assassins would have buried it upon the spot, if they had not been put to flight by a servant of the palace, who gave the alarm.

This deed of violence gave rise to much suspicion, and the assertion is often made that Joanna had at least connived at her husband's unhappy end. Indeed, there is a story-which is without foundation, however-to the effect that Andreas found her one day twisting a silken rope with which it was her intention to have him strangled; and when he asked her what she was doing, she replied, with a smile: "Twisting a rope with which to hang you!" But it is difficult to believe the truth of any of these imputations. If she were cruel enough to desire her husband's death, and bold enough to plan for it, she was also intelligent enough to execute her purpose in a manner less foolish and less perilous to herself. Never, up to this time, had she given the slightest indication of such cruelty in her character, and never after that time was the slightest suspicion cast upon her for any other evil act. How, then, could it be possible that Andreas had been murdered by her order? Whatever the cause of this ferocious outbreak, the Hungarian faction, struck with consternation, fled in all directions, not knowing what to expect. The next morning Joanna returned to the castle Nuovo, where she remained until after the birth of her son. During this period of confinement, she wrote a letter to the King of Hungary, her father-in-law, telling him what had taken place. In this epistle she makes use of the expression:

"My good husband, with whom I have ever associated without strife;" and she declares regarding her own sorrow: "I have suffered so much anguish for the death of my beloved husband that, stunned by grief, I had well-nigh died of the same wounds!"

As soon as her strength would permit, Joanna summoned a council of her advisers and signed a commission giving Hugh de Balzo full authority to seek out the murderers and punish them. Suspicion at once fell upon Philippa the Catanese, and upon other members of her family, as her hatred of the Hungarians was well known, and her past reputation for intrigue and mystery only added strength to the accusation. Philippa, who, since the death of King Robert, had been created Countess of Montoni, was now more powerful than ever at the court, and seemed to invite the danger which was hanging over her, in the belief that no harm could touch her head. But her calculations went astray, as Balzo appeared one morning at the palace gate, produced evidence incriminating her and her intimates, and dragged them off to prison, where they were put to death in the most approved Neapolitan fashion-with lingering torments and tortures. From that day the character of the young queen underwent a most decided change. Hitherto she had been gay, frank, and confiding, now she became serious and reserved. She had always been gracious and compassionate, and rather the equal than the queen of those about her, – according to Boccaccio's description, – but treachery had come so near to her, and her trusted Philippa had proved so vile a character, that she never after gave her entire confidence to any person, man or woman.

Some two years after the death of Andreas, for reasons of state, she married her second cousin, Louis of Taranto, a brave and handsome prince of whom she had long been fond. But she was not to be allowed to enjoy her newly found happiness in peace, as her domains were soon invaded by Louis, the elder brother of Andreas, who had recently ascended his father's throne as King of Hungary, and

who now came to avenge his brother's death and seize Naples by way of indemnity. Joanna, deserted by many of her nobles in these dire straits, and not knowing what to do, – as her husband seems to have played no part in this emergency, – decided upon flight as the only means of safety, and, embarking with her entire household in three galleys, she set sail for Provence, where loyal hearts awaited her coming. There she went at once to Avignon, where Pope Clement VI. was holding his court with the utmost splendor; and in the presence of the pope and all the cardinals, she made answer in her own behalf to the charges which had been made against her by the Hungarian king. Her address, which she had previously composed in Latin, has been called the "most powerful specimen of female oratory" ever recorded in history; and the Hungarian ambassadors, who had been sent to plead against her, were so confounded by her eloquence that they attempted no reply to her defence.

In the meantime, Naples, in the hands of the invaders, had been stained with blood, and then ravaged by the great plague of which Boccaccio has given us a picture. Revolting at length under the harsh measures of the Hungarian governor who had been left in charge by Louis, the Neapolitans expelled him and his followers from the city, and sent an urgent invitation to Joanna to return to her former home. Right gladly was the summons answered, and with a goodly retinue of brave knights who had sworn to die in her service she returned to her people, who welcomed her homecoming with unbounded enthusiasm. Now the court resumed its gayety and animation, and again it became, as in the days of King Robert, a far-famed school of courtesy. Alphonse Daudet gives us a hint of all this in his exquisite short story entitled *La Mule du Pape*, where he tells of the young page Tistet Vedene, *qui descendait le Rhône en chantant sur une galère papale et s'en allait à la cour de Naples avec la troupe de jeunes nobles que la ville envoyait tous les ans près de la reine Jeanne pour s'exercer à la diplomatie et aux belles manières* [who descended the Rhône, singing, upon a papal galley, and went away to the court of Naples with the company of young nobles whom the city (of Avignon) sent every year to Queen Joanna for training in diplomacy and fine manners]. There was further war with the Hungarians, it is true, but peace was established, Sicily was added to Joanna's domain, and there was general tranquillity.

Twice again did Joanna marry, urged to this course by her ministers, but death removed her consort each time, and in the end she was put into captivity by her relative and adopted child, Charles of Durazzo, who had forsaken her to follow the fortunes of the King of Hungary, and who had invaded Naples and put forth a claim to the throne, basing it upon some scheming papal grant which was without legality. Charles had her taken to the castle of Muro, a lonely fortress in the Apennines, some sixty miles from Naples, and there, her spirit of defiance unsubdued, she was murdered by four common soldiers in the latter part of May, 1382, after a reign of thirty-nine years. So came to an end this brilliant queen, the most accomplished woman of her generation, and with her downfall the lamp of learning was dimmed for a time in southern Italy, where the din of arms and the discord of civic strife gave no tranquillity to those who loved the arts of peace.

CHAPTER III
WOMEN AND THE CHURCH

Near the close of the first half of the fourteenth century, after the terrible ravages of the great plague had abated, the people were prostrate with fear and terrorized by the merciless words of the priests, who had not been slow to declare the pestilence as a mark of the wrath of God and who were utilizing the peculiar possibilities of this psychological moment for the advancement of the interests of the Church. In the churches-the wondrous mediæval structures which were newly built at that time-songs of spasmodic grief like the *Stabat Mater*, or of tragic terror such as the *Dies iræ*, were echoing under the high-vaulted arches, and the fear of God was upon the people. In a great movement of this kind it is but to be expected that women played no little part; their more sensitive natures caused them to be more easily affected than were the men by the threats of everlasting torment which were constantly being made by the priests for the benefit of all those who refused to renounce worldly things and come within the priestly fold. There was a most remarkable show of contrition and penitence at this time, and thousands of persons, men and women of all classes, were so deeply moved that they went about in companies, beating themselves and each other for the glory of God, and singing vociferously their melancholy dirges. These were the Flagellants, and there were crowds of them all over Europe, the number in France alone at this time being estimated at eight hundred thousand. One of the direct results of this state of religious excitement was an increased interest, on the part of women, in religious service, and a renewed desire to devote themselves to a religious life.

The conditions of conjugal life had been such throughout the feudal period that for many years there had been a slowly growing sentiment that marriage was but a manner of self-abandonment to the world, the flesh, and the devil, and many women from time to time were influenced to put away worldly things and seek peace in the protection of some religious order. Tertullian had long before condemned marriage, and Saint Jerome was most bitter against it. The various abuses of the marriage relation were such that those of pure hearts and minds could but pause and ask themselves whether or not this was an ideal arrangement of human life; and, all in all, there was still much to be done by means of educational processes before men and women could lead a life together which might be of mutual advantage to all parties concerned. Still, it must not be supposed that this tendency on the part of women to affiliate themselves with conventual orders was a movement of recent origin.

Since the earliest days of Christianity women had been especially active in the work of the Church, and there were countless martyrs among them even as far back as the time of the Roman persecutions. In the old days of pagan worship they had been allowed their part in religious ceremonies, and with the development of the religious institutions of Christendom this active participation had steadily increased. But, more than this, when it became necessary to withdraw from the corrupt atmosphere of everyday affairs in order to lead a good life, it came to pass that near the dwellings of the first monks and hermits who had sought the desert and solitude for their lives of meditation were to be found shelters for their wives and sisters and daughters who had followed them to their retreats to share in their holy lives.

Slowly, as in the case of the men, the conventual orders for women were formed in these communities and regulated by such rules as seemed best suited to their needs. At the outset it may be stated that celibacy as a prerequisite to admission to such orders was required of women before it was of men; and so in one way the profession of a nun antedates the corresponding profession of a monk, as the idea of an unmarried life had already made much progress in the Christian Church among women before it came into vogue among the men. It may be that the women of that time were inclined to take literally that chapter in Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians wherein it is said: "There is this difference, also, between a wife and a virgin: the unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit; but she that is married careth for the things

of the world, how she may please her husband;" but, however that may be, these orders of unmarried women soon became numerous, and severe were the penalties imposed upon all those who broke the vow of chastity when once it had been made. The consecration of a nun was a most solemn occasion, and the rites had to be administered by a bishop, or by one acting under episcopal authority. The favorite times for the celebration of this ceremony were the great Church festival days in honor of the Apostles, and at Epiphany and Easter. When the nuns were consecrated, a fillet was placed in their hair-a purple ribbon or a slender band of gold-to represent a crown of victory, and the tresses, which were gathered up and tied together, showed the difference between this bride of Christ and a bride of earth, with her hair falling loose about her shoulders after the Roman fashion. Then over all was placed the long, flowing veil, as a sign that the nun belonged to Christ alone.

The ordinary rules of conduct which were prescribed for the inmates of the nunneries resemble in many ways those which were laid down for the men; and those first followed are ascribed to Scholastica, a sister of the great Saint Benedict, who established the order of Benedictines at Monte Cassino about 529; according to popular tradition, this holy woman was esteemed as the foundress of nunneries in Europe. For the regulation of the women's orders Saint Augustine formulated twenty-four rules, which he prescribed should be read every week, and later Saint Benedict revised them and extended them so that there were finally seventy-two rules in addition to the Ten Commandments. The nuns were to obey their superior implicitly, silence and humility were enjoined upon them, head and eyes were to be kept lowered at all times, the hours for going to bed and for rising were fixed, and there were minute regulations regarding prayers, watches, and devotions. Furthermore, they were rarely allowed to go out of their convents, they were to possess nothing of their own, mirrors were not tolerated, being conducive to personal vanity, and the luxury of a bath was granted only in case of sickness.

As with the ordinary rules of conduct, so the ordinary routine of daily life in a nunnery corresponded to that of a monastery. Hour by hour, there was the same periodical rotation of work and religious service, with short intervals at fixed times for rest or food. The usual occupation in the earliest times had to do with the carding and spinning of wool, and Saint Jerome, with his characteristic earnestness, advises the nuns to have the wool ever in their hands. Saint Augustine gives us the picture of a party of nuns standing at the door of their convent and handing out the woollen garments which they have made for the old monks who are standing there waiting to receive them, with food to give to the nuns in exchange. The simplicity of this scene recalls the epitaph which is said to have been written in honor of a Roman housewife who lived in the simple days of the Republic: "She stayed at home and spun wool!" Somewhat later the nuns were called upon to furnish the elegantly embroidered altar cloths which were used in the churches, and, still later, in some places girls' schools were established in the convents.

In the eleventh century, the successful struggle which had been made by Gregory VII., with the aid of the Countess Matilda, for the principle of papal supremacy exerted a marked influence upon the religious life of the time and gave an undoubted impetus to the idea of conventual life for women, as during this period many new cloisters were established. It will be readily understood that the deeds of the illustrious Tuscan countess had been held up more than once to the gaze of the people of Italy as worthy of their emulation, and many women were unquestionably induced in this way to give their lives to the Church. In the Cistercian order alone there were more than six thousand cloisters for women by the middle of the twelfth century.

It was during this same eleventh century, when a woman had helped to strengthen the power of the Church, that the influence of the Madonna-of Mary, the mother of Christ-began to make a profound impression upon the form of worship. A multitude of Latin hymns may be found which were written in honor of the Virgin as far back as the fifth century, and in the mediæval romances of chivalry, which were so often tinged with religious mysticism, she often appears as the Empress and Queen of Heaven. All through the mediæval period, in fact, there was a constant endeavor to prove

that the Old Testament contained allusions to Mary, and, with this in view, Albertus Magnus put together a *Marienbibel* in the twelfth century, and Bonaventura edited a *Marienpsalter*. Therein, the gates of Paradise, Noah's ark, Jacob's ladder, the ark of the Covenant, Aaron's rod, Solomon's throne, and many other things, were held up as examples and foreshadowings of the coming of the Blessed Virgin; and in the sermons, commentaries, and homilies of the time the same ideas were continually emphasized. A collection of the Latin appellations which were bestowed upon the Madonna during this time contains the following terms, which reveal the fervor and temper of the age: *Dei genitrix*, *virgo virginum*, *mater Christi*, *mater divinæ gratiæ*, *mater potens*, *speculum justitiæ*, *vas spirituale*, *rosa mystica*, *turris davidica*, *domus aurea*, *janua coeli*, *regina peccatorum*, *regina apostolorum*, *consolatrix afflictorum*, and *regina sanctorum omnium*.

The Benedictines had consecrated themselves to the service of Mary since the time of the Crusades, and, beginning with the eleventh century, many religious orders and brotherhoods were organized in honor of Mary. The Order of the Knights of the Star was founded in 1022, and the Knights of the Lily were organized in 1048. About the middle of the twelfth century the Order of the Holy Maid of Evora and that of the Knights of Alcantara were established, and others followed. In 1149 Pope Celestine III. chartered the Order of the Holy Virgin, for the service of a hospital in Siena; in 1218, after a revelation from on high, the Order of the Holy Mary of Mercy was founded by Peter Nolascus-Raymond von Pennaforte-for the express purpose of giving aid and freedom to captives. In 1233 seven noble Florentines founded the Order of the Servants of Mercy, adopting Saint Augustine's rules of conduct, and they dwelt in the convent of the Annunziata, in Florence. In 1285 Philip Benizio founded a similar order for women, and, soon after, the pious Juliana Falconeri instituted for women a second order of the same kind. There was a constant multiplication of these orders vowed to the service of the Madonna as the centuries passed, and the idea of Madonna worship became more firmly fixed.

No account of Madonna worship can be considered complete, however, without some reference to the influence which it exerted upon the art of the time. Madonna pictures first appeared in the East, where the worship of such images had gained a firm foothold as early as the ninth century, but long before that time pictures of the Mother of God were known and many of them had become quite famous. Saint Luke the Evangelist is generally considered as the first of the religious painters, and the Vladimir Church at Moscow is in possession of a Madonna which is supposed to be the work of his hand. The Eastern Church was the first to feel the effect of this outburst of religious art, and it is but natural to find some of its earliest examples in various other Russian cities, such as Kieff, Kazan, and Novgorod. Bronze reliefs of the Virgin were also common, and in many a crude form and fashion this newly aroused sentiment of Christian art sought to find adequate expression. The Western Church soon followed this movement in every detail, and then by slow degrees upon Italian soil began that evolution in artistic conception and artistic technique which was to culminate in the effulgent glory of Raphael's Sistine Madonna. It was the Emperor Justinian's conquest of Italy which "sowed the new art seed in a fertile field," to use Miss Hurl's expression; but inasmuch as artistic endeavor shows that same lack of originality which was characteristic of all other forms of intellectual activity at this time, the germ took root but slowly, and for a number of centuries servile imitations of the highly decorated and decidedly soulless Byzantine Virgins were very common. One of these paintings may be found in almost every church throughout the length and breadth of Italy; but when you have seen one you have seen them all, for they all have the same expression. The eyes are generally large and ill shaped, the nose is long, the face is wan and meagre, and there is a peevish and almost saturnine expression in the wooden features which shows but slight affection for the Christ-child, and which could have afforded but scant comfort to any who sought to find there a gleam of tender pity. These pictures were generally half-length, against a background of gold leaf, which was at first laid on solidly, but which at a later period was adorned with tiny cherub figures. The folds of the drapery were stiff and heavy, and the whole effect was dull and lifeless. But no matter how

inadequate such a picture may seem to us to-day, and no matter how much it seems to lack the depth and sincerity of reality, it possessed for the people of the Middle Ages a mystic charm which had its influence. These pictures were often supposed to have miraculous power, and there are many legends and wonderful tales concerning them.

The first really great master among Italian painters, however, was Giovanni Cimabue, who lived in Florence during the last part of the thirteenth century; he infused into his work a certain vigor and animation which were even more than a portent of the revival which was to come. Other Italian painters there had been before him, it is true, and particularly Guido of Siena and Giunta of Pisa, but they fail to show in their work that spirit of originality and that breadth of conception which were so characteristic of their successors. Throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries there is an evident effort after an artistic expression of the deeper things of life which shall in some way correspond to the spiritual realities. The yearning human heart which was being solaced by the beautiful story of Christ and the mother Mary, and which was filled with religious enthusiasm at the thought of this Virgin enthroned in the heavens, was growing weary of the set features and stolid look of the Madonna of Byzantine art, and dreaming mystic dreams of the beauty of the Christ mother as she must have been in real life. She became the centre of thought and speculation, prayers and supplications were addressed to her, and more than once did she appear in beatific vision to some illumined worshipper. It was in the midst of this glow of feeling that Cimabue painted his colossal and wondrous *Madonna and Child with the Angels*, the largest altar piece which had been produced up to that time. Cimabue was then living in the Borgo Allegri, one of the suburbs of Florence, and there in his studio this great painting slowly came into existence. As soon as it assumed some definite shape its fame was noised abroad, and many were the curious ones who came to watch the master at his task. The mere fact that this painting was upon a larger scale than any other picture of the kind which had before been attempted in Italy was enough to arrest the attention of the most indifferent; and as the figure warmed into life and the face of the Madonna became as that of a holy woman, human and yet divine in its pity, and with a tender and melancholy expression, the popular acclaim with which the picture was hailed was unprecedented, and Cimabue became at once the acknowledged master of his time. So great was the joy and appreciation with which this Madonna was received, that a beautiful story is told to the effect that it was only after its completion that the name Allegri [joyous] was given to the locality in which the work was done; but, unfortunately, the facts do not bear out the tale-Baedeker and other eminent authorities to the contrary notwithstanding. Before this picture was taken to the beautiful chapel of the Rucellai in the Chiesa Santa Maria Novella in Florence, where it can be seen to-day, the French nobleman Charles of Anjou went to inspect it, and with him went a stately company of lords and ladies. Later, when it was removed to the church, a solemn religious procession was organized for the occasion. Preceded by trumpeters, under a rain of flowers, and followed by the whole populace, it went from the Borgo Allegri to the church, and there it was installed with proper ceremony.

The list of holy women who, by means of their good lives and their deeds, helped on the cause of the Church during this early time is a long one; in almost every community there was a local saint of great renown and wonderful powers. Ignorance, superstition, and credulity had, perhaps, much to do with the miraculous power which these saints possessed, but there can be no doubt that most, if not all, of the legends which concern them had some good foundation in fact. The holy Rosalia of Palermo is one of the best known of these mediæval saints, and even to-day there is a yearly festival in her honor. For many years she had lived in a grotto near the city; there, by her godly life and many kind deeds, she had inspired the love and reverence of the whole community. When the pest came in 1150-that awful black death which killed the people by hundreds-they turned to her in their despair and begged her to intercede with them and take away this curse of God, as it was believed to be. Through an entire night, within her grotto, the good Rosalia prayed that the plague might be taken away and the people forgiven, and the story has it that her prayers were answered at once. At her

death she was made the patron saint of Palermo, and the lonely grotto became a sacred spot which was carefully preserved, and which may be seen to-day by all who go to visit it on Monte Pellegrino.

In the first part of the thirteenth century two new orders for women grew up in connection with the recently founded orders of the Franciscans and Dominicans; the story of the foundation of the former sisterhood in particular is one of striking interest. This organization originated in 1212 and its members were called Les Clarisses, after Clara, the daughter of Favorino Seisso, a knight of Assisi. Clara, though rich and accustomed to a life of indolence and pleasure, was so moved by the preaching of Saint Francis, that she sent for this holy man and conversed with him at great length upon religious topics. Finally, after a short but natural hesitation, she made up her mind to take the veil and establish an order for women which should embody many of the ideas for which the Franciscan order stood. The Franciscans, in addition to the usual vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, laid special stress upon preaching and ministry to the soul and body. After the conversion was complete, she was taken by Saint Francis and his brother, each one bearing a lighted taper, to the nearest convent, and there, in the dimly lighted chapel, the glittering garments of her high estate were laid upon the altar as she put on the sombre Franciscan garb and cut her beautiful hair.

In the fourteenth century the interest taken by women in the conventual life increased, and one of the most powerful influences in the religious life of the time was Catherine of Siena, a creature of light in the midst of the dark turmoil and strife which characterize this portion of Italian history. Catherine was the beautiful and high-minded daughter of a rich merchant of Siena, and at a very early age showed a decided inclination for the religious life. At the age of twelve she began to have visions and declared herself the bride of Christ; and through her firmness she overcame the opposition of her parents and the scorn of her friends, and made definite preparations for withdrawal from worldly things. A small cell was arranged for her use in her father's house, and there she would retire for prayer and meditation. At Siena, in 1365, at the age of eighteen, she entered a Dominican sisterhood of the third order, where she vowed to care for the poor, the sick, and for those in prison.

In 1374 she went out in the midst of the plague, not only nursing the sick, but preaching to the crowds in the street, giving them words of cheer and comfort, and to such effect-according to the testimony of a contemporary writer-that thousands were seen clustered about her, intent upon what she was saying. So great had her wisdom become that she was called upon to settle disputes, and invitations came for her to preach in many neighboring cities. Furthermore, on one occasion she was sent on the pope's business to Arezzo and Lucca.

At this time the popes were established in Avignon, in southern France, and thither she went on a visit in 1376. On her departure, the chief magistrate of Florence besought her influence with the pope, who had put him under the ban of the Church. At Avignon she was received with greatest consideration by the College of Cardinals, as well as by the pope, for all had confidence in her good sense and judgment. The story is told, however, that some of the prelates at the papal court, envious on account of her influence with the pope, and wishing to put her learning to the test, engaged her in a religious discussion, hoping to trip her in some matters of doctrine or Church history. But she reasoned with the best of them so calmly and with such evident knowledge, that they were compelled to acknowledge her great wisdom. In the fall of that same year, as the result of her arguments and representations, Pope Gregory XI. was induced to go back to Rome, the ancient seat of the Church. Catherine left Avignon before the time fixed for the pope's departure; but before returning to Siena, she went to Genoa, where several of her followers were very sick and in need of her care. There in Genoa, Gregory, on his way to Rome, stopped to visit her, being in need of further counsel. Such an act on the part of the pope is ample proof of her unusual ability and her influential position.

The pope once in Rome, she entreated him to bring peace to Italy. At his request, she went to Florence to restore order there. In that city, however, she found a populace hostile to the papal party, and her protests and entreaties were of little avail. Upon one occasion, the crowd demanded her life by fire or sword, and so fierce did their opposition become that even the pope's friends were

afraid to give her shelter; it was only through her great calmness and fearlessness that her life was spared. Gregory's death followed soon after, and with his demise Catherine ceased to occupy so conspicuous a place in the public affairs of her time. Gregory's successor, Urban VI., was clever enough to summon Catherine to Rome again, that she might speak in his behalf and overcome the outspoken opposition and hostility of some of the cardinals, who had declared in favor of Clement VII. in his stead, and had even gone so far as to declare him elected. Catherine was not able to effect a conciliation, however, and here began the papal schism, as the discontented cardinals continued their opposition with renewed vigor and maintained Clement VII. as anti-pope. She was more successful in another affair, as, immediately after her trip to Rome, in 1378 she induced the rebellious Florentines to come to terms of peace with Urban.

The remaining two years of her life were spent in labors for her Dominican order, and she visited several cities in its behalf. At the time of her death, it was commonly reported that her body worked a number of miracles. The authenticity of these supernatural events, however, was ever somewhat in doubt, as the Franciscans always stoutly denied the claims that were made by the Dominicans in regard to this affair. Catherine was canonized in 1461, and April 30th is the special day in each year devoted to her memory. Among the other celebrated nuns and saints of the fourteenth century may be mentioned the Blessed Marina, who founded the cloister of Saint Matthew at Spoleta; the Blessed Cantuccia, a Benedictine abbess; and the Holy Humilitas, abbess of the Order of Vallombrosa at Florence; but none of them compare in pious works or in worldly reputation with the wise and hard-working Catherine of Siena.

In the fifteenth century there was a still further increase of the religious orders for both men and women, which came with the continual extension of the field of religious activity; for the mother Church was no laggard at this time, and never ceased to advance her own interests. In this general period there were three nuns in Italy, each bearing the name of Catherine, who by their saintly lives did much for the uplifting of those about them. The first of this trio was Catherine, daughter of Giovanni Vigeo. Though born in Ferrara, she was always spoken of as Catherine of Bologna, as it was in the latter city that she spent the greater part of her long and useful life. There she was for many years at the head of a prosperous convent belonging to the nuns of the Order of Clarissa, and there it was that she had her wonderful visions and dreamed the wonderful dreams, which she carefully wrote down with her own hand in the year 1438. For more than threescore years after this period of illumination she continued in her position, where she was ever an example of godliness and piety. Her death came on March 9, 1463; and although her great services to the cause of religion were recognized at this time, and openly commended by the pope, it was not until May 22, 1712, that she was finally canonized by Clement IX.

The second Catherine was Catherine of Pallanza, which is a little town near Novara in Piedmont, some thirty miles west of Milan. During the year of the great pest, her immediate family was completely wiped away, and she was left homeless and with few friends to guide her with words of counsel. Her nearest relatives were in Milan, and to them she went at first, until the first bitterness of her great grief had passed away. Then, acting upon a decision which had long been made, and in spite of the determined opposition of her friends, she took the veil. It was not her intention, however, to enter one of the convents of Milan and live the religious life in close contact with others of the same inclination, for she was a recluse by disposition and desired, for at least a time, to be left alone in her meditations. So she went outside the city walls and established herself there upon a hillside, in a lonely place, sheltered by a rude hut constructed in part by her own hands. Living in this hermit fashion, she was soon an object of comment, and, moved by her obvious goodness, many went to consult her from time to time in regard to their affairs. She soon developed a gift of divination and prophecy which was remarkable even for that time of easy credulity in such matters, and was soon able to work wonders which, if the traditions be true, were little short of miracles. As an illustration of her wonderful power, it may be stated that it was commonly believed that by means of her prayers

children might be born in families where hitherto a marriage had been without fruit. Also, she was able by means of her persuasions to compel thieves to return stolen goods. In spite of the seclusion of her life, the fame of Catherine of Pallanza was soon so great that other women came to live about her; eventually these were banded together in one congregation, governed according to the rules of Saint Augustine. Catherine died in 1478, at the age of forty-one, and somewhat later she was given a place among the saints of the Church, April 6th being the special day devoted to her honor.

There can be little doubt that Saint Catherine of Pallanza, in her comparatively short life, really did more for the cause of true religion than did the pious Saint Catherine of Bologna, who lived almost twice as long within the walls of her quiet and tranquil convent. The one, though a recluse at the beginning of her career, came more into actual contact with people and things than did the smooth-faced, white-handed mother superior in all the course of her calm and unruffled existence. Catherine of Bologna was a model nun, a paragon of humility, devotion, and holiness, but she was something quite apart from the stirring life of the time. Her visions and trances were considered as closer ties between herself and the hosts of heaven, and she was looked upon with awe and wonderment. Catherine of Pallanza, by word and by precept, and by means of the wonderful power which she possessed, exerted a far wider influence for the good of men and women.

Catherine of Genoa, the third of this series, and a member of the old and distinguished Fieschi family, was born in 1447. Notwithstanding her decided wish to enter a convent, and in spite of her repeated protestations, she was compelled to marry, at the age of seventeen, Julio Adorno, a man of tastes uncongenial to her. On account of her slender figure and her delicate health, her parents had felt warranted in their refusal to allow her to become a nun, but the husband of their choice proved a greater trial to her strength and temper than the cloister would have been. After ten years of suffering and brutal neglect, Catherine became the mistress of her own fortunes, for at this time her husband had the good grace to die. With an ample fortune at her command, she was not slow to put it to some public good; and she at once devoted her time and energies to the great hospital at Genoa, which was sadly in need of such aid. In those days before the advent of the trained nurse, the presence of such a woman in such a place was unquestionably a source of great aid and comfort, both directly and indirectly. Nor did she confine her favors to the inmates of this great hospital, for she went about in the poorer quarters of the city, caring for the sick wherever they were to be found. When alone, she was much given to mystic contemplations, which took shape as dialogues between the body and soul and which were later published with a treatise on the *Theology of Love* and a complete life of this noble woman. She died at the age of sixty-three, on September 14, 1510.

The careers of these three women illustrate in a very satisfactory way the various channels through which the religious life of the time found its expression. The life of Catherine of Bologna was practically apart from the real life of her time; Catherine of Pallanza was sought out by people who were in need of her help, and she was able to give them wise counsel; Catherine of Genoa, representing the more practical side of the Christian spirit, went among the poor, the sick, and the needy, doing good on every hand. Membership in these women's orders was looked upon as a special and sacred office whereby the nun became the mystic bride of the Church, and it was no uncommon thing for the sisters, when racked and tortured by the temptations of the world, to fall into these ecstatic contemplative moods wherein they became possessed with powers beyond those of earth. In that age of quite universal ignorance, it is not to be wondered at that the emotional spirit was too strongly developed in all religious observances, and, as we have seen, it characterized, equally, the convent nun, the priestess of the mountain side, and the sister of mercy. The hysterical element, however, was often too strongly accentuated, and the nuns were often too intent upon their own salvation to give heed to the needs of those about them. But the sum total of their influence was for the best, and the examples of moderation, self-control, and self-sacrifice which they afforded played no little part in softening the crudities of mediæval life and paved the way for that day when religion was to become a rule of action as well as an article of faith.

CHAPTER IV
THE WOMEN OF THE MIDI

It must have been part of the plan of the universe that the sunny southern provinces of France should have given to the world a gay, happy, and intellectual society wherein was seen for the first time a concrete beginning in matters of social evolution. There the sky is bright, the heavens are deep, the sun is warm, mountainous hills lend a purple haze to the horizon, and the air is filled with the sweet perfume of thyme and lavender; and there came to its maturity that brilliant life of the Midi which has been so often told in song and story, and which furnished inspiration for that wonderful poetry which has come down to us from the troubadours. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in particular, Provence was filled with rich and populous cities, brilliant feudal courts abounded, and noble lords and ladies not only encouraged song and poetry, but strove to become proficient in the *gay science*, as it was called, for their own diversion.

Under such conditions, it is not surprising to find that women occupy no unimportant place in society and that their influence is far-reaching. Love and its pursuit were the chief concern of the upper classes; and it was but natural, when the intellectual condition of the time and its many limitations are taken into consideration. What was there to consume the leisure hours in that far-away time? There were no books, there were no newspapers, as there are now, accurate knowledge was impossible in scientific study, there was no theatre or opera-in short, there were none of the things which form the usual means of relaxation and amusement to-day; and so, as a matter of course, yielding to a most human instinct, the tender passion became an all-absorbing topic, and served without exception as the inspiration for poetic endeavor. Love they could know and feel, and of it could they sing with understanding, because they felt it to be real and personal, and subjectively true at least. Of the great external world, however, their knowledge was exceedingly crude; and the facts in nature had become so strangely distorted, through centuries of ignorance and superstition, that the solemnly pronounced verities of the time were but a burlesque upon the truth. Belief in the existence of the antipodes was considered by ecclesiastical authority as a sure proof of heresy, the philosopher's stone had been found, astrology was an infallible science, and the air was filled with demons who were ever waiting for an opportunity to steal away man's immortal soul. Geography did not exist except in fancy; history could be summed up in the three magic words, Troy, Greece, and Rome; and the general notions current regarding the world and its formation were fantastic in the extreme. In the realm of natural history wondrous facts had come to light, and it was averred that a stag lived to an age of nine hundred years; that a dove contemplated herself with her right eye and God with her left; that the cockatrice kills animals by breathing upon them; that a viper fears to gaze upon a naked man; that the nature of the wolf is such that if the man sees him first, the wolf is deprived of force and vigor, but if the wolf first sees the man, his power of speech will vanish in the twinkling of an eye. Furthermore, there were curious ideas current concerning the mystic power of precious stones, and many were the lapidaries which were written for the edification of the credulous world. The diamond was held in somewhat doubtful esteem, inasmuch as the French word *diamant*, minus its first syllable, signified a "lover"; the beryl, of uncertain hue, made sure the love of man and wife; and Marbodus is authority for the statement that "the emerald is found only in a dry and uninhabitable country, so bitterly cold that nothing can live there but the griffins and the one-eyed arimasps that fight with them."

But the men and women of Provence could not forever stand with mouths agape in eager wonder and expectation; these were tales of interest, no doubt, and their truth was not seriously questioned, but this was not life, and they knew it. There was red blood in their veins, the heartbeat was quick and strong, and love had charmed them all. It must not be supposed, however, that this was a weakly and effeminate age, that all were carpet knights, and that strong and virile men no longer could be found, for such was not the case. All was movement and action, the interests of life were many, and warfare

was the masculine vocation, but in the very midst of all this turmoil and confusion there sprang up a courtly ideal of love and a reverence for women which is almost without parallel. The sanctity of the marriage tie had not been respected during the feudal days, the union for life between men and women had, generally, other causes than any mutual love which might exist between the two, and the right of divorce was shamefully misused. While in other parts of Europe women sought relief from this intolerable condition of affairs by giving their love to Christ and by becoming His bride in mystic marriage through the Church, in bright Provence, aided by the order of chivalry, they were able to do something for the ideals of love in a more definite way and to bring back to earth that all-absorbing passion which women had been bestowing upon the Lord of Heaven. Inasmuch as the real marriage of the time was but a *mariage de convenance*, which gave the wife to the husband without regard for her own inclinations, and without consideration for the finer things of sense and sentiment which should find a perfect harmony in such relationship, it came to be a well-recognized fact that love and marriage were two things quite distinct and different. A wife was expected to show a material fidelity to her lord, keep her honor unstained, and devote herself to his service; and this done, she was allowed to bestow upon a lover her soul and better spirit.

A quaint story with regard to the Chevalier de Bayard, though of somewhat later date, will serve to illustrate this condition of affairs. The brave knight had been brought up during his youth in the palace of the Duke of Savoy, and there, mingling with the other young people of the house, he had seen and soon loved a beautiful young girl who was in the service of the duchess. This love was returned, and they would soon have married in spite of their poverty if a cruel fate had not parted them. Bayard was sent as a page to the court of Charles VIII., and during his absence his ladylove, by the duke's order, was married to the Lord of Fluxas. This Bayard found out to his bitter sorrow when he returned some years later, but the lady, as a virtuous woman, wishing to show him that her honest affection for him was still alive, overwhelmed him with so many courteous acts that more would have been impossible. "Monseigneur de Bayard, my friend," she said, "this is the home of your youth, and it would be but sorry treatment if you should fail to show us here your knightly skill, reports of which have come from Italy and France." The poor gentleman could but reply: "What is your wish, madame?" Whereat she said: "It seems to me, Monseigneur de Bayard, that you would do well to give a splendid tourney in the city." "Madame," he said, "it shall be done. You are the lady in this world who first conquered my heart to her service, but now I well know that I can naught expect except your kiss of welcome and the touch of your soft hand. Death would I prefer to your dishonor, and that I do not seek; but give me, I pray you, your muff." The next morning heralds proclaimed that the lists would be opened in Carignan, and that the Chevalier de Bayard would joust with all who might appear, the prize to be his lady's muff, from which now hung a precious ruby worth a hundred ducats. The lists were run, and after the last blare of trumpet and clatter of charger's hoof, the two judges, one of them being the Lord of Fluxas, came to Bayard with the prize. He, blushing, refused this great honor, saying he had done nothing worthy of it, but that in all truth it belonged to Madame de Fluxas, who had lent him the muff and who had been his inspiration. The Lord of Fluxas, knowing the chivalry of this great knight, felt no pang of jealousy whatever, and went straightway to his lady, bearing the prize and the courtly words of the champion. Madame de Fluxas, with secret joy but outward calm, replied: "Monseigneur de Bayard has honored me with his fair speech and highbred courtesy, and this muff will I ever keep in honor of him." That night there was feasting and dancing in the halls, next day, departure. The knight went to take leave of his lady, with heavy heart, and many bitter tears they shed. This honest love endured until death parted them, and no year passed that presents were not exchanged between them.

So there was a social life at this time and place which was filled with refinement and courtesy, and it centred about the ladies of the courts. Each troubadour, and many of them were brave knights as well, sought to sing the praises of his lady, devote himself to her service, and do her bidding in all things great and small. There was a proverb in Provence, it is true, which declared that "A man's

shadow is worth a hundred women," and another saying, "Water spoils wine, carts spoil roads, and women spoil men"; but, in spite of all this, devotion to women was developed to a most unusual degree, and there was even an attempt made to fix the nature of such soft bondage by rule and regulation. Southern natures were so impetuous that some checks upon the practice of this chivalric love seemed to be imperative, as thinking people felt that love should not go unbridled. Justin H. Smith, who has written so entertainingly of the *Troubadours at Home*, says that it was their expedient to make love a "science and an art. Rules were devised, and passion was to be bound with a rigid etiquette like that of chivalry or social intercourse. It was to be mainly an affair of sentiment and honor, not wholly Platonic to be sure, but thoroughly desensualized. Four stages were marked off in the lover's progress: first, he adored for a season without venturing to confess it; secondly, he adored as a mere suppliant; thirdly, he adored as one who knew that the lady was not indifferent; and finally, he became the accepted lover, that is to say, the chosen servitor and vassal of his lady, her special knight."

To the coarse and somewhat stupid barons of the time infidelity was an act of absolute self-abandonment, and they felt in no way jealous of these fine knights who were more in sympathy with their wives than they could ever hope to be. So the lover became an accepted person who had rights which the wife did not conceal and which the husband did not deny. The husband literally owned the body of his wife, it is true, but the lover had her soul, for the feudal customs gave to the woman no moral power over her husband, while the code of love, on the other hand, made of woman the guide and associate of man. It was all a play world, of course; the troubadour knight and lover would discuss by means of the *tenso*, which was a dialogue in song, all sorts of questions with his lady, or with another of his kind, while the slow, thick-headed husbands dozed in their chairs, dreaming of sudden alarums and the din of battle. Here, however, was afforded opportunity for a quick display of wit, and here was shown much nimbleness of mind, and, all in all, woman profited by the intercourse and became, as has been said, more than the "link between generations," which was all she had been before. It was in the great hall, about the wide hearth, after the evening meal, that the harp was sounded and the *tenso* was begun which was of such interest to the singer and his fair chatelaine; and among the questions of serious import which they then discussed, the following will serve by way of illustration: "Which is better, to have wisdom, or success with the ladies?" "Which is better, to win a lady by skill or by boldness?" "Which are greater, the joys or the sorrows of love?" "Which brings the greater renown, Yes or No?" "Can true love exist between married persons?" Futile and ridiculous as all this may seem to us to-day, the very fact that women were here put upon the same footing as the men, even upon a superior footing, as great deference was shown them by their knightly lovers, all this was but an indication of the fact that woman's place in society was surely advancing. Thus, outside of marriage and even opposed to it, was realized that which constitutes its true essence, the fusion of soul and mutual improvement; and since that time love and marriage have more often been found together, and the notion has been growing with the ages that the one is the complement of the other. Marriage, as has been said, was but an imperfect institution at this time, and in many cases it appears that the code of love, as it may be called, was quite superior to the civil code. For example, the feudal law allowed a man to beat his wife moderately, as occasion required, but respect was one of the fundamental laws imposed by the code of love. Again, the civil law said that a woman whose husband had been absent for ten years, and whose whereabouts was unknown, had the right to marry again, but the code of love decreed that the absence of a lover, no matter how prolonged, was not sufficient cause for giving up the attachment. In short, in this world of gallantry the ideals of love were higher than they were in the world of lawful wedlock, and the reason was not far to seek.

It cannot be said, however, that these lofty ideals of Platonic affection which so strongly characterize this brilliant and courtly society were always carried out to the letter, and it must be admitted with regret that there are many cases on record where the restraints and formalities of etiquette were insufficient to check the fateful passion when once its fires were burning. Every forbidden intrigue was fraught with danger; indeed, the injured husband is sometimes alluded to

as *Monsieur Danger*, but here, as elsewhere, stolen sweets were sweetest, and the risk was taken. Vengeance, however, followed discovery, and swift was the retribution which overtook the troubadour when guilty of faithless conduct. The tragic story of Guillem de Cabestaing, who came from that district of Roussillon which is said to be famous for its red wine and its black sheep, will serve to show how love could not be bound by laws of honor and how quick punishment came to pay the score. Guillem, the son of a poor knight, came at the age of twelve to enter the service of my lord Raimon of Roussillon, who was also his father's lord, and there in the castle he began his education. An esquire he became, and he followed his master in peace and in warfare, perfected himself in the gentler arts of song and music, and paid no small attention to his own person, which was fair and comely. On an evil day, however, my lord Raimon transferred young Guillem to the service of his wife, the Lady Margarida, a young and sweet-faced girl who was famed for her beauty, and then began the love between them. Raimon was soon jealous and then suspicious, but false words from false lips allayed suspicion for a time. Then Guillem, in a song composed at his lady's command, revealed the love which united them, though all unconsciously, and then the end was near. One day, Guillem was summoned from the palace into the dark wood by his master, but when Raimon returned Guillem did not come with him; in his stead was a servant, who carried something concealed beneath his cloak. After the dinner, which had been attended with constant jest and laughter, Raimon informed his wife that she had just eaten the heart of the luckless troubadour! Summoning her words with a quick self-control, the Lady Margarida vowed that never after would she taste of meat, whereat Raimon grew red with rage and sought to take her life. But she fled quickly to a high tower and threw herself down to death. That is the tragedy, but this fidelity in death received its reward; for when the king heard the tale, and who did not, as it was soon spread abroad, Raimon was stripped of all his possessions and thrown into a dungeon, while lover and lady were buried together at the church door at Perpignan, and a yearly festival was ordained in their honor.

For many hundreds of years after the decay of all this brilliant life in southern France, the statement was repeated that courts of love had been organized in gay Provence, which were described as assemblies of beautiful women, sitting in judgment on guilty lovers and deciding amorous questions, but the relentless search of the modern scholar has proved beyond a doubt that no such courts ever existed. A certain code of love there was most certainly, of which the troubadours sang, and whose regulations were matters of general conduct as inspired by the spirit of courtesy and gallantry which was current at the time, and very often were questions relating to the tender passion discussed *in extenso* by the fairest ladies of the south, but more than that cannot be said with truth. The fiction is a pretty one, and among those who are said to have presided at these amorous tribunals are Queen Eleanor, the Countess of Narbonne, and the Countess of Champagne, and Richard Coeur de Lion has even been mentioned in this capacity. The courts were held at Pierrefeu, Digne, and Avignon according to tradition, women alone could act as judges, and appeals might be made from one court to another. This tradition but goes to show that after the decay of the Provençal civilization, its various ideas and ideals were drawn up into formal documents, that the spirit of the age might be preserved, and they in turn were taken by following generations in good faith as coexistent with the things which they describe.

It was but natural that in a state of society like the one mentioned, women should long to show themselves possessed of poetic gifts as well as men. It must not be supposed that the wife of a great baron occupied an easy position, however, and had many leisure hours, as her wifely duties took no little time and energy, and it was her place to hold in check the rude speech and manners of the warlike nobles who thronged the castle halls, as well as to put some limit to the bold words and glances of the troubadours, who were often hard to repress. Her previous education had been bestowed with care, however, the advantages of a formal and punctilious etiquette had been preached more than once, and she was even advised that the enemy of all her friends should find her civil-spoken; so, my lady managed her difficult affairs with tact and skill, and contrived in many cases to acquire such

fame for her moderation and her wisdom that many poets sang her praises. It was her pleasure also to harbor these troubadours who sang her praises, and learn from them the secrets of their art; and in this pleasant intercourse it often chanced that she was inspired by the god of song, and vied with them in poesy. The names of eighteen such women have come down to us, and fragments from most of them are extant, though the Countess of Dia seems the most important of them all, as five of her short poems are now known to exist. The Lady Castelloza must be named soon after, for her wit and her accomplishments. She once reminded a thoughtless lover that if he should allow her to pine away and die for love of him, he would be committing a monstrous crime "before God and men." Clara of Anduse must not be forgotten in this list, and she it was who conquered the cold indifference of the brilliant troubadour Uc de Saint-Cyr; still, however numerous her contributions to poetry may have been, but one song remains to us, and that is contained in a manuscript of the fourteenth century. It should be said that the reason for the small amount of poetry which these women have left behind them is easily explained. Talents they may have possessed and poetical ability in abundance, but there was no great incentive to work, inasmuch as poetry offered them no career such as it opened up to the men. A troubadour sang at the command of his noble patron, but with the women poetry was not an employment, but a necessity for self-expression. It is altogether probable that their efforts were for the most part the result of a sudden inspiration, their mirth or their grief was poured forth, and then they relapsed into silence. Other than in this way the voice of the woman was rarely heard in song, unless she took part in the *tenso*, or song of contention, and then her words were uttered as they came, without premeditation, and were lost as soon as sung.

The city of Toulouse was a centre for much of the literary life of the time, and it was during the reign of Count Raimon VI., who was a poet of no small merit, that the art of the troubadours reached its culmination. For half a generation, it is said, his court was crowded with these poets, and he dwelt with them and they with him in brotherly affection. With the terrible Albigensian Crusade, the voice of the singer was no longer heard in the land, and the poetic fire, which had burned with so fierce a blaze at times, smouldered for long years, until in the beginning of the fourteenth century the flames burst forth anew. At that time a company of poets, and they were of bourgeois origin and not of the nobility, determined to take vigorous measures to restore the art of the troubadour to its former high position, and to this end they founded the Collège du Gay Sçavoir, which was to support and maintain annually in Toulouse a poetic tournament called Les Jeux Floraux, wherein the prizes were to consist of flowers of gold and silver. With the definite establishment of these Floral Games the name of a woman has been intertwined in most curious fashion; and although many facts are recorded of her life and deeds, there are those who deny that she ever lived. This remarkable woman was called Clémence Isaure, and the story has grown up that some years after the founding of the Jeux Floraux she left a sum of money in trust which was to serve as a permanent endowment for this most illustrious institution of her native city. Then it was that the Collège du Gay Sçavoir became a thing of permanence, and brilliant were the fêtes which were celebrated under its auspices. First, a golden violet was bestowed upon the victor in these poetic contests, and the winner was decreed a Bachelor of Poetry; then, two other flowers were added, the eglantine and the marigold, and he who won two prizes was given the degree of Master; while he who won all three became forthwith a Doctor.

To prove that Clémence Isaure really did exist in Toulouse a tomb was shown which seemed to bear her name; and so strongly rooted is this belief, that her statue is held in reverence, and every year in May, even to this day, when the date for the Jeux Floraux arrives, the first thing on the programme for that solemn occasion is a formal eulogy in honor of this distinguished patroness. More than that, in the garden of the Luxembourg Palace in Paris, in that semicircle of twenty marble statues grouped about the parterre and representing some of the most illustrious women of France, Clémence Isaure has an honored place, and her counterfeit presentment by the sculptor Préault is considered one of the finest of the number.

In support of the claim that such a woman never existed, and in explanation of the tradition itself, the learned ones inform us that with the definite establishment of these Floral Games the good citizens of Toulouse thought it best to follow in the footsteps of their bold and plain-spoken troubadour ancestors in a somewhat timid manner, and the poems which were then written were not addressed to some fair lady in real life, but to the Holy Virgin, who was frequently addressed as Clemenza [pity], and from this word the story took its rise. After a certain lapse of time, Clemenza, personified so often in their impassioned strains, became a real person to their southern imaginations, and a tomb was conveniently found which seemed to settle the matter without question. It is even asserted that the city of Toulouse is enjoying to-day other bequests which were made to it by Clémence Isaure, and that there is no more reason for doubting her existence than for doubting the existence of any other historical character of long ago. In any event, the Floral Games are still held yearly, the seven poets have become forty in number, and they compose a dignified Academy, which has some ten thousand francs a year to bestow in prizes. And the number of the prizes has been increased, as now five different flowers of gold and five of silver are bestowed each for poetry of a certain kind, and in addition there is a gold jasmine which is awarded to the most excellent prose article, and a silver pink which is a sort of prize at large, and which may be given for a composition of any character.

This belief in the actual existence of Clémence Isaure is still held by many, and, in fact, the legend seems stronger than the facts adduced against it; but whatever the truth may be, the story symbolizes in a most beautiful and fitting way the part which woman has played in this Provençal country in the encouragement given to song and poetry. It was the women who gave the real encouragement to the troubadours and inspired them to their greatest efforts, and it seems but poetic justice, at least, that in Toulouse the only existing institution representative of those old troubadour days should claim a woman as its greatest patron.

CHAPTER V
INFLUENCE OF WOMEN IN EARLY LITERATURE

"Nine times now since my birth, the heaven of light had turned almost to the same point in its own gyration, when the glorious Lady of my mind-who was called Beatrice by many who knew not what to call her-first appeared before my eyes. She had already been in this life so long, that in its course the starry heaven had moved toward the region of the East one of the twelve parts of a degree; so that at about the beginning of her ninth year she appeared to me, and I near the end of my ninth year saw her. She appeared to me clothed in a most noble color, a modest and becoming crimson, and she was girt and adorned in such wise as befitted her very youthful age. At that instant, I can truly say that the spirit of life, which dwells in the most secret chamber of the heart, began to tremble with such violence that it appeared fearfully in the least pulses, and, trembling, said these words: *Ecce deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur mihi* [Behold a god stronger than I, who, coming, shall rule over me]. At that instant the spirit of the soul, which dwells in the high chamber to which all the spirits of the senses carry their perceptions, began to marvel greatly, and, speaking especially to the spirit of the sight, said these words: *Apparuit jam beatitudo vestra* [Now has appeared your bliss]. At that instant the natural spirit, which dwells in that part where our nourishment is supplied, began to weep, and, weeping, said these words: *Heu miser! quia frequenter impeditus ero deinceps* [Woe is me, wretched! Because often from this time forth shall I be hindered]."

Nowhere in all literature can be found a dearer statement of the spiritual evolution which was going on in the minds of men with respect to women, at the close of the Middle Ages, than that given in the foregoing passage from Dante's *Vita Nuova*-taken from Professor Norton's finished translation. The spirit of the amatory poetry of the gay troubadours of Provence had found its way into Italy, but it was its more spiritual side which was to make the greater impression upon the national literature at this early stage of its development. The mystic marriage with the Church which had consoled so many women in distress, and which had removed them from the sin and confusion of the hurly-burly world to a life of quiet joy and peace, had slowly been exerting a more general and secular influence which first bore fruit in the notions of Platonic friendship which had been discussed; then came deference and respect and a truer understanding of woman's true position. But something was wanting in this profession of love and respect which came from the singers of Provence; their words were ready and their speech was smooth, but all their knightly grace of manner could not conceal the fact that Venus was their goddess. They were sincere, doubtless, but all that they sang was so lyric, subjective, and persona! in its essence that they failed to strike the deepest chords of human feeling or display that high seriousness which is indicative of real dignity of character. Love had been the despot whose slightest caprice was law. – in obeying his commands one could do no wrong. Woman became the arbiter of man's destiny in so far as, the fervent lover, in his ardor, was glad to do her bidding. The troubadour Miravel has told us that when a man made a failure of his life, all were prone to say: "It is evident that he did not care for the ladies." There is a worldly tone in this remark which grates upon the ear-it does not ring clear and true, although the Provençal poets had improved the manners of their time and had introduced a highbred courtesy into their dealings with women which was in itself a great step in advance. It is related that when William the Conqueror first saw Emma, his betrothed, he seized her roughly in his arms and threw her to the ground as an indication of affection; but the troubadour was wont to kneel before his lady and pray for grace and power to win her approbation. Yet, under the courtly form of manner and speech, it is too often the sensual conception of womankind which lurks in the background, and there is little evidence to show that there was any general belief in the chastening power of the love of a good woman-a power which might be of positive value in character building.

The spiritual possibilities latent in this higher conception seem, however, to have been grasped by some of the Italian poets of the early Renaissance, and here we find a devotion to women which comes not from the heart alone, but from the soul as well. Dante's "natural spirit" was but the sensual nature, and well might it cry out when the "spirit of life" began to feel the secret commotion of the "spirit of the soul": "Woe is me, wretched! Because often from this time forth shall I be hindered in my work." And so it was. With this first somewhat broad conception of the dignity of womanhood there was a new incentive to manly endeavor; and there came into the world, in the power and might of the great Florentine poet, a majesty of character which fair Provence could never have produced. Immediately before Dante's time we see glimmerings of this new sentiment in the work of Guido Cavalcanti and of Cino da Pistoja. Cavalcanti, being exiled from Florence, went on a visit to the shrine of Saint James of Compostella; and upon the way, passing through Toulouse, he was captivated by a beautiful Spanish girl, whom he has made celebrated under the name of Mandetta:

"In un boschetto trovai pastorella,
Più che la stella bella al mio parere,
Capegli avea biondetti e ricciutelli."

It is true that in his work Cavalcanti shows many of the stilted mannerisms which were common to the troubadours; but such expressions as "to her, every virtue bows," and "the mind of man cannot soar so high, nor is it sufficiently purified by divine grace to understand and appreciate all her perfections," point the way toward a greater sincerity. His chief work was a long *Canzone sopra l'Amore*, which was so deep and philosophic that seven weighty commentaries in both Latin and Italian have as yet failed to sound all its depths. In the story of the early love of Cino da Pistoja for Ricciarda dei Selvaggi there is a genuine and homely charm which makes us feel that here indeed true love had found a place. Ricciarda-or Selvaggia, as Cino calls her-was the daughter of a noble family of Pistoja, her father having been *gonfaniere* and leader of the Bianchi faction, and it appears that she also was famed for her poetic gifts. For a time she and Cino kept their love a secret from the world, but their poems to each other at this time show it to have been upon a high plane. Finally, the parents of Ricciarda were banished from Pistoja by the Neri, and in their flight they took refuge in a small fortress perched near the summit of the Apennines, where they were joined by Cino, who had determined to share their fortunes. There the spring turned into summer, and the summer into autumn, and the days sped happily-days which were later called the happiest of the poet's whole life. The two young people roamed the hills together, or took their share in the household duties, and the whole picture seems to breathe forth an air of reality and truth which far removes it from that atmosphere of comic-opera love and passion which seemed to fill the Midi. When the winter came, the hardship of this mountain life commenced; the winds grew too keen, and the young girl soon began to show the effects of the want and misery to which she was exposed. Finally, the end came; and there Cino and the parents, grieving, laid her to her rest, in a sheltered valley. The pathos of this story needs no word of explanation, and Cino's grief is best shown by an act of his later years. Long afterward, when he was loaded with fame and honors, it happened that, being sent upon an embassy, he had occasion to cross the mountains near the spot where Selvaggia had been buried. Sending his suite around by another path, he went alone to her tomb and tarried for a time in prayer and sorrow. Later, in verse, he commemorates this visit, closing with the words:

"…pur chiamando, Selvaggia!
L'alpe passai, con voce di dolore."

[Then calling aloud in accents of despair, Selvaggia! I passed the mountain tops.] Cino's loved one is distinguished in the history of Italian literature as the *bel numer'una*-"fair number one" – in that list of the famous women of the century where the names of Beatrice and Laura are to be found.

With Dante, the spiritual nature of his love for Beatrice assumed an almost mystical and religious character, betraying the marked influence of mediæval philosophy and theology; and here it was-for the first time in modern literature-that woman as a symbol of goodness and light found herself raised upon a pedestal and glorified in the eyes of the world. Many a pink and rosy Venus had been evoked before, many a pale-faced nun had received the veneration of the multitude for her saintly life, but here we have neither Venus nor saint; for Beatrice is the type of the good woman in the world, human in her instincts and holy in her acts. The air of mysticism with which Dante has enveloped his love for the daughter of the Portinari family does not in any way detract from our interest in his point of view, for the principal fact for the modern world is that he had such thoughts about women. Legouvé has said that spiritual love was always mingled with a respect for women, and that sensual admiration was rarely without secret scorn and hatred; and it is his further opinion that spiritual love was naturally allied to sentiments of austere patriotism in illustrious men, while those who celebrated the joys of sensual passion were indifferent to the cause of country and sometimes traitor to it. Dante and Petrarch, the two chaste poets, as they are sometimes called, were the most ardent patriots in all Italy. Midst the tortures of the *Inferno* or the joys of the *Paradiso*, the image of the stricken fatherland is ever with Dante, and more than once does he cry out against her cruel oppressors. With Petrarch, as it has well been said, his love for the Latin language was but the form of his love for his people, as in his great hope for the future the glory of the past was to return. Boccaccio was the most illustrious of those in literature who represented the sensual conception of woman; and whatever his literary virtues may have been, no one has ever called attention to his patriotic fervor or to his dignity of character. Laura and Beatrice, though not of royal birth, have been made immortal by their poet lovers; Boccaccio loved the daughter of a king, but he has described her with such scant respect that what little renown she may have derived from her liaison with him is all to her discredit.

The story of Dante and Beatrice is now an old one, but ever fresh with the rare charm which it possesses even after the lapse of these many years. The *New Life*, Dante's earliest work, which is devoted to a description of his first meeting with Beatrice and his subsequent all-powerful love for her, has been regarded sceptically by some critics, who are inclined to see in it but an allegory, and there are others who go so far as to say that Beatrice never existed. What uncertainty can there be regarding her life, when Cino da Pistoja wrote his most celebrated poem, a *canzone* to Dante, consoling him for her loss? The following stanza from Rossetti's matchless version is proof enough for all who care to read:

"Why now do pangs of torment clutch thy heart,
Which with thy love should make thee overjoyed,
As him whose intellect has passed the skies?
Behold, the spirits of thy life depart
Daily to Heaven with her, they so are buoyed
With thy desire, and Love so bids them rise.
O God I and thou, a man whom God made wise,
To nurse a charge of care, and love the same!
I tell thee, in His name,
From sin of sighing grief to hold thy breath,
Nor let thy heart to death,
Nor harbour death's resemblance in thine eyes.
God hath her with Himself eternally,
Yet she inhabits every hour with thee."

Beatrice certainly lived; and no matter in what veil of mysticism the poet may choose to envelop her in his later writings, and in spite of the imagery of his phrases, even in the *New Life*, she never fails to appear to us as a real woman. We know that Dante first saw her on Mayday, in the year 1274, when neither had reached the age of ten, and the thrill he felt at this first vision has been described in his own words on the first page of this chapter. From that time forth it seems that, boy as he was, he was continually haunted by this apparition, which had at once assumed such domination over him. Often he went seeking her, and all that he saw of her was so noble and praiseworthy that he is moved to apply to her the words of Homer: "She seems not the daughter of mortal man, but of God." And he further says: "Though her image, which stayed constantly with me, gave assurance to Love to hold lordship over me, yet it was of such noble virtue that it never suffered Love to rule me without the faithful counsel of the reason in those matters in which it was useful to hear such counsel." So began his pure and high ideal of love, which is most remarkable in that it stands in striking contrast, not only to the usual amatory declarations of the time to be found in literature, but also to the very life and temper of the day and generation in which he was so soon to play a conspicuous part. It was a day of almost unbridled passions and lack of self-restraint, and none before had thought to couple reason with the thought of love. For nine years his boyish dreams were filled with this maiden, Beatrice, and not once in all that time did he have word with her. Finally, he says: "On the last of these days, it happened that this most admirable lady appeared before me, clad in shining white, between two ladies older than herself; and as she passed along, she turned her eyes toward that spot where I stood in all timidity, and then, through her great courtesy, which now has its reward in the eternal world, she saluted me with such virtue that I knew all the depth of bliss." But never did Dante come to know her well, though she was ever in his thoughts, and though he must have watched for her presence in the street. Once she went upon a journey, and he was sore distraught until she came back into his existence; once he was taken to a company of young people, where he was so affected by sudden and unexpected sight of her that he grew pale and trembled, and showed such signs of mortal illness that his friend grew much alarmed and led him quickly away. The cause of his confusion was not apparent to all the company; but the ladies mocked him, to his great dismay, and even Beatrice was tempted to a smile, not understanding all, yet feeling some annoyance that she should be the occasion for such strange demeanor on his part. Later, when her father dies, Dante grieves for her, waits at the corner to pick up fragments of conversation from those who have just come from consoling her, and, in truth, makes such a spectacle of himself, that these ladies passing say: "Why should he feel such grief, when he has not seen her?" He constantly feels the moral force of her influence, and recounts in the following lines-from the Norton translation-her noble influence on others:

"…for when she goes her way
Love casts a blight upon all caitiff hearts,
So that their every thought doth freeze and perish.
And who can bear to stay on her to look,
Will noble thing become or else will die.
And when one finds that he may worthy be
To look on her, he doth his virtue prove."

Before we are through with Dante's little book, we seem to feel that Beatrice must have lived, that she was flesh and blood as we are, and that she really graced the fair city on the Arno in her time, as the poet would have us believe. She is pictured in company with other ladies, upon the street, in social gatherings at the homes of her friends, in church at her devotions, in tears and laughter, and ever is she pictured with such love and tenderness that she will remain, as Professor Norton says, "the loveliest and the most womanly woman of the Middle Ages-at once absolutely real and truly ideal."

At her death, Dante is disconsolate for a time, and then devotes himself to study with renewed vigor; and he closes his story of her with the promise that he will write of her what has never yet been written of any woman. This anticipates, perhaps, the *Divine Comedy*, which was yet to be written, wherein Beatrice was his guide through Paradise and where he accords her a place higher than that of the angels. It may mar the somewhat idyllic simplicity of this story to add that Dante was married some years later to Gemma Donati, the daughter of a distinguished Florentine family, but such was the case. Little is known of her, however, as Dante never speaks of her; and while there is no reason to suppose that their union was not a happy one, it is safe to conclude that it gave him no such spiritual uplift as he had felt from his youthful passion.

The extent of Dante's greatness is to be measured not only by his wide learning-for he was the greatest scholar of his time-but also by his noble seriousness, which enabled him to penetrate through that which was light and frivolous to that which was of deep import to humanity. His was not the task of amusing the idle populace with what he wrote-he had a high duty, which was to make men think on the realities of life and of their own short-comings. People whispered, as he passed along: "See his dark face and melancholy look! Hell has he seen and Purgatory, and Paradise as well! The mysteries of life are his, but he has paid the cost." And many went back to their pleasures, but some were impressed with his expression. Whence came his seriousness, whence came his penetrating glance and sober mien? Why did he move almost alone in all that heedless throng, intent upon the eternal truth? Because from early youth he had nourished in his heart a pure love which had chastened him and given him an understanding of those deeper things of the spirit, which was denied to most men of his time. Doubtless Dante would have been Dante, with or without the influence of Beatrice, but through her he received that broad humanity which makes him the symbol of the highest thought of his time.

Whatever the story of Petrarch and his Laura may lack in dignity when compared with that of Dante and Beatrice, it certainly does not lack in grace or interest. While Dante early took an interest in the political affairs which distracted Florence, and was of a stern and somewhat forbidding character, mingling study with action, Petrarch, humanist and scholar as he was, represents also the more polite accomplishments of his time, as he was a most polished courtier and somewhat vain of his fair person. Dante's whole exterior was characteristic of his mind. If accounts be true, his eyes were large and black, his nose was aquiline, his complexion dark, and in all his movements he was slow and deliberate. Petrarch, on the contrary, was more quick and animated; he had bright blue eyes, a fair skin, and a merry laugh; and he himself it is who tells us how cautiously he used to turn the corner of a street lest the wind should disarrange the elaborate curls of his beautiful hair. Though record is made of this side of his character, it must not be assumed that his mind was a frivolous one, for he may be considered-as Professor Robinson says-as "the cosmopolitan representative of the first great forward movement" in Western civilization and deserves to rank-as Carducci claims-with Erasmus and Voltaire, each in his time the intellectual leader of Europe.

With regard to Laura, Petrarch has left the following lines, which were inscribed upon the fly-leaf of a favorite copy of Virgil, wherein it was his habit to keep a record of all those things which most concerned him: "Laura, who was so distinguished by her own virtues and so widely celebrated by my poetry, first appeared before my eyes in my early manhood, in the year of our Lord 1327, upon the sixth day of April, at the first hour, in the Church of Santa Clara at Avignon; in the same city, in the same month of April, on the same sixth day, at the same first hour, in the year 1348, that light was taken from our day, while I, by chance, happened to be at Verona, ignorant, alas! of my fate. The sad news came to me at Parma, in a letter from my friend Ludovico, on the morning of the nineteenth of May of the same year. Her chaste and beautiful form was laid in the Church of the Franciscans, the evening of the day she died. I am persuaded that her soul returned, as Seneca says of Scipio Africanus, to the heaven whence it came. I have experienced a certain satisfaction in writing this bitter record of a cruel event, especially in this place, where I may see it often, for so

may I be led to reflect that life can afford me no further joys; and the most serious of my temptations being removed, I may be counselled by the frequent perusal of these lines and by the thought of my departing years, that now the time has come to flee from Babylon. This, with God's help, will be easy when I frankly and manfully consider the needless troubles of the past with its empty hopes and unexpected issue."

The Babylon to which Petrarch refers was Avignon, then the home of the popes, which he declares was a place filled with everything fearful that had ever existed or been conceived by a disordered mind-a veritable hell on earth. But here he had stayed this quarter of a century, a captive to the charms of his fair Laura. According to the generally accepted story, she was of high birth, as her father-Audibert de Noves-was a noble of Avignon, who died in her infancy, leaving her a dowry of one thousand gold crowns, which would amount to almost ten thousand pounds sterling to-day, and which was a splendid marriage portion for that time. In 1325, two years before her meeting with Petrarch, she was married to Hugh de Sade, when she was but eighteen; and while her husband was a man of rank and of an age suited to her own, it does not appear that he was favored in mind or in body, or that there was any special affinity between them. In the marriage contract it was stipulated that her mother and brother were to pay the dower left by the father and also to bestow upon the bride two gowns for state ceremonies, one of them to be green, embroidered with violets, and the other of crimson, with a trimming of feathers. Petrarch frequently alludes to these gowns, and in the portraits of Laura which have been preserved she is attired in either one or the other of them. Her personal beauty has been described in greatest detail by the poet, and it is doubtful if the features of any other woman and her general characteristics of mind and body were ever subjected to such minute analysis as is exemplified in the present instance. Hands and feet, hair, eyes, ears, nose, and throat-all are depicted in most glowing and appreciative fashion; and, from the superlative degree of the adjectives, she must indeed have been fair to look upon and possessed of a great compelling charm. But from her lovely mouth-*la bella bocca angelica*, as he calls it-there never came a weak or yielding word in answer to his passionate entreaties. For this was no mystical love, no such spiritual affection as was felt by Dante, but the love of an active man of the world whose feelings had been deeply troubled. In spite of his pleadings, she remained unshaken; and although she felt honored by the affection of this man, and was entirely susceptible to the compliment of his poetry, and in spite of the current notions of duty and fidelity, which were far from exacting, she had a better self which triumphed. The profligate Madame du Deffand, who occupies so conspicuous a place in the annals of the French court in the days of its greatest corruption, has little sympathy with a situation of this kind, and is led to exclaim: *Le fade personnage que votre Pétrarque! que sa Laure était sotte et précieuse!* But Petrarch himself thought otherwise, for he has written thereupon: "A woman taught me the duty of a man! To persuade me to keep the path of virtue, her conduct was at once an example and a reproach."

Without following it in all its various incidents, it will suffice to say that this love of Petrarch for Laura, which lasted for so many years, exerted a powerful influence upon the poet and had much to do in shaping the character which was to win for him in later times the praise which Pierre de Nolhac has bestowed upon him in calling him the first modern man. Petrarch considered unworthy, it is true, the poems and sonnets which he consecrated to the charms of Laura, and he even regretted that his fame should rest upon them, when, in his own estimation, his ponderous works in Latin were of much more consequence. But, incidental to his passion for Laura, he was led to discuss within himself the two conceptions of love which were current at that time, – the mediæval and monkish conception, based upon a sensual idea which regarded women as the root of all evil and the source of all sin, and the modern or secular idea, which is spiritual and may become holy. In an imaginary conversation with Saint Augustine which Petrarch wrote to furnish a vehicle for the discussion of these matters, the poet exclaims that it is the soul-the inborn and celestial goodness-that he loves, and that he owes all to her who has preserved him from sin and urged him on to a full development of his powers. The ultimate result of all this thought and all this reflection upon the nature of the affections developed

the humanity of the man, excited broad interests within his breast, gave him a wide sympathy, and entitled him to rank as the first great humanist.

Dante, with his vague and almost mystical adoration of Beatrice, which was at times a passion almost subjective, is still in the shadow of the Middle Ages, their gloom is still upon him, and he can see but dimly into the centuries which are still to come; but his face is glorified by his vision of the spiritual possibilities of good and noble womanhood. Petrarch, in the brief interval which has passed, has come out into the light of a modern world; and there, in the midst of baffled desire, he is brought face to face with the great thought that though love be human it has power divine.

CHAPTER VI
WOMEN IN THE EARLY RENAISSANCE

Although the fourteenth century in Italy was one of almost continuous warfare between the different contending states of the peninsula, the fact remains that the whole country was enjoying a degree of prosperity which was unprecedented in the history of the Italian people. It was the beginning of the age of the despots, it is true, but in the midst of strife and contention there was at the same time a material progress which did much to enrich the country and enable its inhabitants to elevate their standard of living. The Italian cities were encouraging business transactions on a large scale; Italian merchants were among the most enterprising on the continent, making long trips to foreign countries for the purpose of buying and selling goods; and the Oriental trade, which had been diverted in great measure to Italian channels, was a constant source of profit. That all this could be so in the face of the warlike condition of society is due to the fact that much of the fighting was done by mercenary soldiers, or that the political quarrels of the time, which frequently concerned the fate of cities, too often had their rise in family feuds which, no matter how fiercely they were waged, did not interest the masses. There were always thousands upon thousands of worthy citizens who felt no direct personal interest in the outcome of the fighting, and who pursued the even tenor of their way without much regard for what was taking place, so far as allowing it to interfere with their daily occupations was concerned.

The general impression of the moral tone of this epoch in society is far from favorable. Divorce had become practically impossible for ordinary individuals; marriage was common enough, but appeared to possess no special sanctity; and as a result there were many illegitimate children, who seem, however, to have been recognized by their fathers and cared for with as great solicitude as were those who were born within the pale of the law. The ideas which were current regarding matters of decency and refinement will be found quite different from those prevalent in our own day. Coarseness in speech and manner was common, no high moral standards were maintained, even by the Church, and diplomacy and calculation took the place of sincerity and conscience. Still, while these may have been the characteristics of a considerable number of the population, the fact must not be forgotten that even in that day of moral laxity there were many good and simple people who lived their homely lives in peace and quiet and contentment, unmoved by the rush of the world. We get a glimpse of what this simple life may have been from a charming little book by Pandolfino called *La Famiglia*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.