

WOMAN'S WORK IN THE MIDDLE AGES.

"King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,
Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
Upon the hidden bases of the hills."

SIR BEDIVERE'S heart misgave him twice ere he could obey the dying commands of King Arthur, and fling away so precious a relic. The lonely maiden's industry has been equalled by many of her mortal sisters, sitting, not indeed "upon the hidden bases of the hills," but in all the varied human habitations built above them since the days of King Arthur.

The richness, beauty, and skill displayed in the needle-work of the Middle Ages demonstrate the perfection that art had attained; while church inventories, wills, and costumes represented in the miniatures of illuminated manuscripts and elsewhere, amaze us by the quantity as well as the quality of this department of woman's work. Though regal robes and heavy church vestments were sometimes wrought by monks, yet to woman's taste and skill the greater share of the result must be attributed, the professional hands being those of nuns and their pupils in convents. The life of woman in those days was extremely monotonous. For the mass of the people, there hardly existed any means of locomotion, the swampy state of the land in England and on the Continent allowing few roads to be made, except such as were traversed by pack-horses. Ladies of rank who wished to journey were borne on litters carried upon men's shoulders, and, until the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, few representations of carriages appear. Such a conveyance is depicted in an illustration of the Romance of the Rose, where Venus, attired in the fashionable costume of the fifteenth century, is seated in a *chare*, by courtesy a chariot, but in fact a clumsy covered wagon without springs. Six doves are perched upon the shafts, and

fastened by mediæval harness. The goddess of course possessed superhuman powers for guiding this extraordinary equipage, but to mere mortals it must have been a slow coach, and a horribly uncomfortable conveyance even when horses were substituted for doves. An ordinance of Philip le Bel, in 1294, forbids any wheel carriages to be used by the wives of citizens, as too great a luxury. As the date of the coach which Venus guides is two hundred years later, it is difficult to imagine what style of equipage belonged to those ladies over whom Philip le Bel tyrannized.

With so little means of going about, our sisters of the Middle Ages were perforce domestic; no wonder they excelled in needle-work. To women of any culture it was almost the only tangible form of creative art they could command, and the love of the beautiful implanted in their souls must find some expression. The great pattern-book of nature, filled with graceful forms, in ever-varied arrangement, and illuminated by delicate tints or gorgeous hues, suggested the beauty they endeavored to represent. Whether religious devotion, human affection, or a taste for dress prompted them, the needle was the instrument to effect their purpose. The monogram of the blessed Mary's name, intertwined with pure white lilies on the deep blue ground, was designed and embroidered with holy reverence, and laid on the altar of the Lady-chapel by the trembling hand of one whose sorrows had there found solace, or by another in token of gratitude for joys which were heightened by a conviction of celestial sympathy. The pennon of the knight—a silken streamer affixed to the top of the lance—bore his crest, or an emblematic al-

lusion to some event in his career, embroidered, it was supposed, by the hand of his lady-love. A yet more sacred gift was the scarf worn across the shoulder, an indispensable appendage to a knight fully equipped. The emotions of the human soul send an electric current through the ages, and women who during four years of war toiled to aid our soldiers in the great struggle of the nineteenth century felt their hearts beat in unison with hers who gave, with tears and prayers, pennon and scarf to the knightly and beloved hero seven hundred years ago.

Not only were the appointments of the warriors adorned by needle-work, but the ladies must have found ample scope for industry and taste in their own toilets. The Anglo-Saxon women as far back as the eighth century excelled in needle-work, although, judging from the representations which have come down to us, their dress was much less ornamented than that of the gentlemen. During the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries there were few changes in fashion. A purple gown or robe, with long yellow sleeves, and coverchief wrapt round the head and neck, frequently appears, the edges of the long gown and sleeves being slightly ornamented by the needle. How the ladies dressed their hair in those days is more difficult to decide, as the coverchief conceals it. Crisping-needles to curl and plat the hair, and golden hair-cauls, are mentioned in Saxon writings, and give us reason to suppose that the locks of the fair damsels were not neglected. In the eleventh century the embroidery upon the long gowns becomes more elaborate, and other changes of the mode appear.

From the report of an ancient Spanish ballad, the art of needle-work and taste in dress must have attained great perfection in that country while our Anglo-Saxon sisters were wearing their plain long gowns. The fair Sybilla is described as changing her dress seven times in one evening, on the arrival of that successful and victorious knight, Prince Baldwin. First,

she dazzles him in blue and silver, with a rich turban; then appears in purple satin, fringed and looped with gold, with white feathers in her hair; next, in green silk and emeralds; anon, in pale straw-color, with a tuft of flowers; next, in pink and silver, with varied plumes, white, carnation, and blue; then, in brown, with a splendid crescent. As the fortunate Prince beholds each transformation, he is bewildered (as well he may be) to choose which array becomes her best; but when

"Lastly in white she comes, and loosely
Down in ringlets floats her hair,
'O,' exclaimed the Prince, 'what beauty!
Ne'er was princess half so fair.'"

Simplicity and natural grace carried the day after all, as they generally do with men of true taste. "Woman is fine for her own satisfaction alone," says that nice observer of human nature, Jane Austen. "Man only knows man's insensibility to a new gown." We hope, however, that the dressmakers and tirewomen of the fair Sybilla, who had expended so much time and invention, were handsomely rewarded by the Prince, since they must have been most accomplished needle-women and handmaids to have got up their young lady in so many costumes and in such rapid succession.

A very odd fashion appears in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, of embroidering heraldic devices on the long gowns of the ladies of rank. In one of the illuminations of a famous psalter, executed for Sir Geoffery Loutterell, who died in 1345, that nobleman is represented armed at all points, receiving from the ladies of his family his tilting helmet, shield, and *pavon*. His coat of arms is repeated on every part of his own dress, and is embroidered on that of his wife, who wears also the crest of her own family.

Marie de Hainault, wife of the first Duke of Bourbon, 1354, appears in a corsage and train of ermine, with a very fierce-looking lion rampant embroidered twice on her long gown. Her jewels are magnificent. Anne,

Dauphine d'Auvergne, wife of Louis, second Duke of Bourbon, married in 1371, displays an heraldic dolphin of very sinister aspect upon one side of her corsage, and on the skirt of her long gown, — which, divided in the centre, seems to be composed of two different stuffs, that opposite to the dolphin being powdered with *fleurs de lis*. Her circlet of jewels is very elegant, and is worn just above her brow, while the hair is braided close to the face. An attendant lady wears neither train nor jewels, but her dress is likewise formed of different material, divided like that of the Dauphine. Six little parrots are emblazoned on the right side, one on her sleeve, two on her corsage, and three on her skirt. The fashion of embroidering armorial bearings on ladies' dresses must have given needle-women a vast deal of work. It died out in the fifteenth century.

It was the custom in feudal times for knightly families to send their daughters to the castles of their suzerain lords, to be trained to weave and embroider. The young ladies on their return home instructed the more intelligent of their female servants in these arts. Ladies of rank in all countries prided themselves upon the number of these attendants, and were in the habit of passing the morning surrounded by their workwomen, singing the *chansons à toile*, as ballads composed for these hours were called.

Estienne Jodelle, a French poet, 1573, addressed a fair lady whose cunning fingers plied the needle in words thus translated:—

"I saw thee weave a web with care,
Where at thy touch fresh roses grew,
And marvelled they were formed so fair,
And that thy heart such nature knew.
Alas! how idle my surprise,
Since naught so plain can be:
Thy cheek their richest hue supplies,
And in thy breath their perfume lies;
Their grace and beauty all are drawn from thee.

If needle-work had its poetry, it had also its reckonings. Old account-books bear many entries of heavy payments for working materials used by industrious queens and indefatigable ladies

of rank. Good authorities state that, before the sixth century, all silk materials were brought to Europe by the Seres, ancestors of the ancient Bokharians, whence it derived its name of Serica. In 551, silk-worms were introduced by two monks into Constantinople, but the Greeks monopolized the manufacture until 1130, when Roger, king of Sicily, returning from a crusade, collected some Greek manufacturers, and established them at Palermo, whence the trade was disseminated over Italy.

In the thirteenth century, Bruges was the great mart for silk. The stuffs then known were velvet, satin (called samite), and taffeta, — all of which were stitched with gold or silver thread. The expense of working materials was therefore very great, and royal ladies condescended to superintend sewing-schools.

Editha, consort of Edward the Confessor, was a highly accomplished lady, who sometimes intercepted the master of Westminster School and his scholars in their walks, questioning them in Latin. She was also skilled in all feminine works, embroidering the robes of her royal husband with her own hands.

Of all the fair ones, however, who have wrought for the service of a king, since the manufacture of Excalibur, let the name of Matilda of Flanders, wife of William the Conqueror, stand at the head of the record, in spite of historians' doubts. Matilda, born about the year 1031, was carefully educated. She had beauty, learning, industry; and the Bayeux tapestry connected with her name still exists, a monument of her achievements in the art of needle-work. It is, as everybody knows, a pictured chronicle of the conquest of England, — a wife's tribute to the glory of her husband.

As a specimen of ancient stitchery and feminine industry, this work is extremely curious. The tapestry is two hundred and twenty-two feet in length and twenty in width. It is worked in different-colored worsteds on white

cloth, now brown with age. The attempts to represent the human figure are very rude, and it is merely given in outline. Matilda evidently had very few colors at her disposal, as the horses are depicted of any hue, — blue, green, or yellow; the arabesque patterns introduced are rich and varied.

During the French Revolution, this tapestry was demanded by the insurgents to cover their guns; but a priest succeeded in concealing it until the storm had passed. Bonaparte knew its value. He caused it to be brought to Paris and displayed, after which he restored the precious relic to Bayeux.

We have many records of royal ladies who practised and patronized needle-work. Anne of Brittany, first wife of Louis XII. of France, caused three hundred girls, daughters of the nobility, to be instructed in that art under her personal supervision. Her daughter Claude pursued the same laudable plan. Jeanne d'Albret, queen of Navarre, and mother of Henry IV. of France, a woman of vigorous mind, was skilled also in the handicraft of the needle, and wrought a set of hangings called "The Prison Opened," meaning that she had broken the bonds of the Pope.

The practice of teaching needle-work continued long at the French court, and it was there that Mary of Scotland learned the art in which she so much excelled. When cast into prison, she beguiled the time, and soothed the repentant anxieties of her mind, with the companionship of her needle. The specimens of her work yet existing are principally bed-trimmings, hangings, and coverlets, composed of dark satin, upon which flowers, separately embroidered, are transferred.

The romances and lays of chivalry contain many descriptions of the ornamental needle-work of those early days. In one of the ancient ballads, a knight, after describing a fair damsel whom he had rescued and carried to his castle, adds that she "knewe how to sewe and marke all manner of silken worke," and no doubt he made her repair many of

his mantles and scarfs frayed and torn by time and tourney.

The beautiful Elaine covered the shield of Sir Launcelot with a case of silk, upon which devices were braided by her fair hands, and added, from her own design,

"A border fantasy of branch and flower,
And yellow-throated nestling in the nest."

When he went to the tourney she gave him a red sleeve "broidered with great pearls," which he bound upon his helmet. It is recorded that, in a tournament at the court of Burgundy in 1445, one of the knights received from his lady a sleeve of delicate dove-color, which he fastened on his left arm. These sleeves were made of a different material from the dress, and generally of a richer fabric elaborately ornamented; so they were considered valuable enough to form a separate legacy in wills of those centuries. Maddalena Doni, in her portrait, painted by Raphael, which hangs in the Pitti Palace at Florence, wears a pair of these rich, heavy sleeves, fastened slightly at the shoulder, and worn over a shorter sleeve belonging to her dress. Thus we see how it was that a lady could disengage her sleeve at the right moment, and give it to the fortunate knight.

The art of adorning linen was practised from the earliest times. Threads were drawn and fashioned with the needle, or the ends of the cloth unravelled and plaited into geometrical patterns. St. Cuthbert's curious grave-clothes, as described by an eyewitness to his disinterment in the twelfth century, were ornamented with cut-work, which was used principally for ecclesiastical purposes, and was looked upon in England till the dissolution of the monasteries as a church secret. The open-work embroidery, which went under the general name of cut-work, is the origin of lace.

The history of lace by Mrs. Bury Palliser, recently published in London, is worthy of the exquisite fabric of which it treats. The author has woven valuable facts, historical associations, and curious anecdotes into the

web of her narrative, with an industry and skill rivalling the work of her mediæval sisters. The illustrations of this beautiful volume are taken from rare specimens of ancient and modern lace, so perfectly executed as quite to deceive the eye, and almost the touch.

Italy and Flanders dispute the invention of point or needle-made lace. The Italians probably derived the art of needle-work from the Greeks who took refuge in Italy during the troubles of the Lower Empire. Its origin was undoubtedly Byzantine, as the places which were in constant intercourse with the Greek Empire were the cities where point-lace was earliest made. The traditions of the Low Countries also ascribe it to an Eastern origin, assigning the introduction of lace-making to the Crusaders on their return from the Holy Land. A modern writer, Francis North, asserts that the Italians learned embroidery from the Saracens, as Spaniards learned the same art from the Moors, and, in proof of his theory, states that the word *embroider* is derived from the Arabic, and does not belong to any European language. In the opinion of some authorities, the English word *lace* comes from the Latin word *licina*, signifying the hem or fringe of a garment; others suppose it derived from the word *laces*, which appears in Anglo-Norman statutes, meaning braids which were used to unite different parts of the dress. In England the earliest lace was called *passament*, from the fact that the threads were passed over each other in its formation; and it is not until the reign of Richard III. that the word *lace* appears in royal accounts. The French term *dentelle* is also of modern date, and was not used until fashion caused *passament* to be made with a toothed edge, when the designation *passament dentelé* appears.

But whatever the origin of the name, lace-making and embroidery have employed many fingers, and worn out many eyes, and even created revolutions. In England, until the time of Henry VIII., shirts, handkerchiefs, sheets, and pillow-cases were embroi-

dered in silks of different colors, until the fashion gave way to cut-work and lace. Italy produced lace fabrics early in the fifteenth century; and the Florentine poet, Firenzuola, who flourished about 1520, composed an elegy upon a collar of raised point lace made by the hand of his mistress. Portraits of Venetian ladies dated as early as 1500 reveal white lace trimmings; but at that period lace was, professedly, only made by nuns for the service of the Church, and the term *nuns' work* has been the designation of lace in many places to a very modern date. Venice was famed for point, Genoa for pillow laces. English Parliamentary records have statutes on the subject of Venice laces; at the coronation of Richard III., fringes of Venice and mantle laces of gold and white silk appear.

"To know the age and pedigrees
Of points of Flanders and Venise,"

depends much upon the ancient pattern-books yet in existence. Parchment patterns, drawn and pricked for pillow lace, bearing the date of 1577, were lately found covering old law-books, in Albisola, a town near Savona, which was a place celebrated for its laces, as we infer from the fact that it was long the custom of the daughters of the nobles to select these laces for their wedding shawls and veils. There is a pretty tradition at Venice, handed down among the inhabitants of the Lagoons, which says that a sailor brought home to his betrothed a branch of the delicate coralline known as "mermaids' lace." The girl, a worker in points, attracted by the grace of the coral, imitated it with her needle, and after much toil produced the exquisite fabric which, as Venice point, soon became the mode in all Europe. Lace-making in Italy formed the occupation of many women of the higher classes, who wished to add to their incomes. Each lady had a number of workers, to whom she supplied patterns, pricked by herself, paying her workwomen at the end of every week, each day being notched on a tally.

In the convent of Gesù Bambino, at

Rome, curious specimens of old Spanish conventual work — parchment patterns with lace in progress — have been found. They belonged to Spanish nuns, who long ago taught the art of lace-making to novices. Like all point lace, this appears to be executed in separate pieces, given out by the nuns, and then joined together by a skilful hand. We see the pattern traced, the work partly finished, and the very thread left, as when "Sister Felice Vittoria" laid down her work, centuries ago. Mrs. Palliser received from Rome photographs of these valuable relics, engravings from which she has inserted in her history of lace. Aloe-thread was then used for lace-making, as it is now in Florence for sewing straw-plait. Spanish point has been as celebrated as that of Flanders or Italy. Some traditions aver that Spain taught the art to Flanders. Spain had no cause to import laces: they were extensively made at home, and were less known than the manufacture of other countries, because very little was exported. The numberless images of the Madonna and patron saints dressed and undressed daily, together with the albs of the priests and decorations of the altars, caused an immense consumption for ecclesiastical uses. Thread lace was manufactured in Spain in 1492, and in the Cathedral of Granada is a lace alb presented to the church by Ferdinand and Isabella, — one of the few relics of ecclesiastical grandeur preserved in the country. Cardinal Wiseman, in a letter to Mrs. Palliser, states that he had himself officiated in this vestment, which was valued at ten thousand crowns. The fine church lace of Spain was little known in Europe until the revolution of 1830, when splendid specimens were suddenly thrown into the market, — not merely the heavy lace known as Spanish point, but pieces of the most exquisite description, which could only have been made, says Mrs. Palliser, by those whose time was not money.

Among the Saxon Hartz Mountains is the old town of Annaburg, and be-

neath a lime-tree in its ancient burial-ground stands a simple monument with this inscription: —

"Here lies Barbara Uttman, died on the 14th of January, 1576, whose invention of lace in the year 1561 made her the benefactress of the Hartz Mountains.

'An active mind, a skilful hand,
Bring blessings down on Fatherland.'

Barbara was born in 1514. Her parents, burghers of Nuremberg, removed to the Hartz Mountains for the purpose of working a mine in that neighborhood. It is said that Barbara learned the art of lace-making from a native of Brabant, a Protestant, whom the cruelties of the Duke of Alva had driven from her country. Barbara, observing the mountain girls making nets for the miners to wear over their hair, took great interest in the improvement of their work, and succeeded in teaching them a fine knitted *tricot*, and afterwards a lace ground. In 1561, having procured aid from Flanders, she set up a workshop in Annaburg for lace-making. This branch of industry spread beyond Bavaria, giving employment to thirty thousand persons, and producing a revenue of one million thalers.

Italy and Flanders dispute the invention of lace, but it was probably introduced into both countries about the same time. The Emperor Charles V. commanded lace-making to be taught in schools and convents. A specimen of the manufacture of his day may be seen in his cap, now preserved in the museum at Hôtel Cluny, Paris. It is of fine linen, with the Emperor's arms embroidered in relief, with designs in lace, of exquisite workmanship. The old Flemish laces are of great beauty and world-wide fame.

Many passages in the history of lace show how severely the manufacture of this beautiful fabric has strained the nerves of eye and brain. The fishermen's wives on the Scottish coast apostrophize the fish they sell, after their husbands' perilous voyages, and sing,

"Call them lives o' men."

Not more fatal to life are the blasts

from ocean winds than the tasks of laborious lace-makers; and this thought cannot but mingle with our admiration for the skill displayed in this branch of woman's endless toil and endeavor to supply her own wants and aid those who are dear to her, in the present as well as in the past centuries.

In the British Museum there is a curious manuscript of the fourteenth century, afterwards translated "into our maternall englisshe by me William Caxton, and empynted at Westminstre the last day of Januer, the first yere of the regne of King Richard the thyrd," called "the booke which the Knight of the Towere made for the enseynement and teching of his doughtres."

The Knight of the Tower was Geofroy Landry, surnamed De la Tour, of a noble family of Anjou. In the month of April, 1371, he was one day reflecting beneath the shade of some trees on various passages in his life, and upon the memory of his wife, whose early death had caused him sorrow, when his three daughters walked into the garden. The sight of these motherless girls naturally turned his thoughts to the condition of woman in society, and he resolved to write a treatise, enforced by examples of both good and evil, for their instruction. The state of society which the "evil" examples portray might well cause a father's heart to tremble.

The education of young ladies, as we have before stated, was in that age usually assigned to convents or to families of higher rank. It consisted of instruction in needle-work, confectionery, surgery, and the rudiments of church music. Men were strongly opposed to any high degree of mental culture for women; and although the Knight of the Tower thinks it good for women to be taught to read their Bibles, yet the pen is too dangerous an instrument to trust to their hands. The art of writing he disapproves,—"Better women can naught of it." Religious observances he strictly recommends; but we shudder at some of the stories which even this well-meaning father

relates as illustrations of the efficacy of religious austerities. Extravagance in dress prevailed at that time among men and women to such a degree that Parliament was appealed to on the subject in 1363. From the Knight's exhortations on the subject, this mania seems to have affected the women alarmingly, and the examples given of the passion for dress appear to surpass what is acknowledged in our day. Yet the vast increase of materials, as well as the extended interests and objects opened to woman now, renders the extravagance of dress in the Middle Ages far less reprehensible.

The record of woman's work in the Middle Ages includes far more than the account of what her needle accomplished. The position of the mistress of a family in those centuries was no sinecure. When we look up at castles perched on rocks, or walk through the echoing apartments of baronial halls, we know that woman must have worked there with brain and fingers. The household and its dependencies, in such mansions, consisted of more than a score of persons, and provisions must be laid in during the autumn for many months. As we glance at the enormous fireplaces and ovens in the kitchens of those castles and halls, and remember the weight of the armor men wore, we can readily imagine that no trifling supply of brawn and beef was needed for their meals; and the sight of a husband frowning out of one of those old helmets because the dinner was scanty, must have been a fearful trial to feminine nerves. The title of "Lady" means the "Giver of bread" in Saxon, and the lady of the castle dispensed food to many beyond her own household.

The task of preparing the raiment of the family devolved upon the women; for there were no travelling dealers except for the richest and most expensive articles. Wool, the produce of the flock, was carded and spun; flax was grown, and woven into coarse linen; and both materials were prepared and fashioned into garments at home. Glimpses

of domestic life come down to us through early legends and records, some of which modern genius has melodized. Authentic history and romantic story often show us that women of all ranks were little better, in fact, than household drudges to these splendid knights and courtly old barons. The fair Enid sang a charming song as she turned her wheel; but when Geraint arrived, she not only assisted her mother to receive him, but, by her father's order, led the knight's charger to the stall, and gave him corn. If she also relieved the noble animal of his heavy saddle and horse-furniture, gave him water as well as corn, and shook down the dry furze for his bed, she must have had the courage and skill of a feminine Rarey; and we fear her dress of faded silk came out of the stable in a very dilapidated condition. After the horse was cared for, Enid put her wits and hands to work to prepare the evening meal, and spread it before her father and his guest. The knight, indeed, condescended to think her "sweet and serviceable"!

The women of those days are often described only as they appeared at festivals and tournaments,—Ladies of Beauty, to whom knights lowered their lances, and of whom troubadours sang. They had their amusements and their triumphs, doubtless; but they also had their work, domestic, industrial, and sanitary. They knew how to bind up wounds and care for the sick, and we read many records of their knowledge in this department. Elaine, when she found Sir Launcelot terribly wounded in the cave, so skilfully aided him that, when the old hermit came who was learned in all the simples and science of the times, he told the knight that "her fine care had saved his life,"—a pleasing assurance that there were medical men in those days, as well as in our own, who expressed no unwillingness to allow a woman credit for success in their own profession.

Illuminated books sometimes show us pictures of women of the humbler ranks of life at their work. On the

border of a fine manuscript of the time of Edward IV. there is the figure of a woman employed with her distaff, her head and neck enveloped in a coverchief. The figure rises out of a flower. In a manuscript of 1316, a country-woman is engaged in churning, dressed in a comfortable gown and apron, the gown tidily pinned up, and her head and neck in a coverchief. The churn is of considerable height, and of very clumsy construction. A blind beggar approaches her, led by his dog, who holds apparently a cup in his mouth to receive donations. In another part of the same volume is a beautiful damsel with her hair spread over her shoulders, while her maid arranges her tresses with a comb of ivory set in gold. The young lady holds a small mirror, probably of polished steel, in her hand. Specimens of these curious combs and mirrors yet exist in collections. A century later we see a pretty laundress, holding in her hands a number of delicately woven napkins, which look as if they might have come out of the elaborately carved napkin press of the same period in the collection of Sir Samuel Myrick at Goodrich Court.

Although the Knight of the Tower disapproved of young ladies being taught to write, there were women whose employment writing seems to have been; but these were nuns safely shut up from the risk of *billets-doux*. In Dr. Maitland's Essays on the Dark Ages, he quotes from the biography of Diemudis, a devout nun of the eleventh century, a list of the volumes which she prepared with her own hand, written in beautiful and legible characters, to the praise of God, and of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, the patrons of the monastery, which was that of Wessobrunn in Bavaria. The list comprises thirty-one works, many of them in three or four volumes; and although Diemudis is not supposed to have been an authoress, she is certainly worthy of having her name handed down through eight centuries in witness of woman's indefatigable work in the scriptorium. One missal prepared by Diemudis was giv-

en to the Bishop of Treves, another to the Bishop of Augsburg, and one Bible in two volumes is mentioned, which was exchanged by the monastery for an estate.

We can picture to ourselves Diemudis in her conventual dress, seated in the scriptorium, with her materials for chirography. The sun, as it streams through the window, throws a golden light over the vellum page, suggesting the rich hue of the gilded nimbus, while in the convent garden she sees the white lily or the modest violet, which, typical of the Madonna, she transfers to her illuminated borders. Thus has God ever interwoven truth and love with their correspondences of beauty and development in the natural world, which were open to the eyes of Diemudis eight hundred years ago, perhaps as clearly as to our own in these latter days. That women of even an earlier century than that of Diemudis were permitted to read, if not to write, is proved by the description of a private library, given in the letters of C. S. Sidonius Apollinaris, and quoted in Edwards's "History of Libraries." This book-collection was the property of a gentleman of the fifth century, residing at his castle of Prusiana. It was divided into three departments, the first of which was expressly intended for the ladies of the family, and contained books of piety and devotion. The second department was for men, and is rather ungallantly stated to have been of a higher order; yet, as the third department was intended for the whole family, and contained such works as Augustine, Origen, Varro, Prudentius, and Horace, the literary tastes of the ladies should have been satisfied. We are also told that it was the custom at the castle of Prusiana to discuss at dinner the books read in the morning, — which would tend to a belief that conversation at the dinner-tables of the fifth century might be quite as edifying as at those of the nineteenth.

A few feminine names connected with the literature of the Middle Ages

have come down to us. The lays of Marie de France are among the manuscripts in the British Museum. Marie's personal history, as well as the period when she flourished, is uncertain. Her style is extremely obscure; but in her Preface she seems aware of this defect, yet defends it by the example of the ancients. She considers it the duty of all persons to employ their talents; and as her gifts were intellectual, she cast her thoughts in various directions ere she determined upon her peculiar mission. She had intended translating from the Latin a good history, but some one else unluckily anticipated her; and she finally settled herself down to poetry, and to the translation of numerous lays she had treasured in her memory, as these would be new to many of her readers. Like other literary ladies, she complains of envy and persecution, but she perseveres through all difficulties, and dedicates her book "to the King."

Marie was born in France. Some authorities suppose she wrote in England during the reign of Henry III., and that the patron she names was William Langue-espée, who died in 1226; others, that this *plus vaillant* patron was William, Count of Flanders, who accompanied St. Louis on his first crusade in 1248, and was killed at a tournament in 1251. A later surmise is that the book was dedicated to Stephen, French being his native language. Among the manuscripts of the Bibliothèque Royale at Paris, is Marie's translation of the fables which Henry Beauclerc translated from Latin into English, and which Marie renders into French. A proof that Marie's poems are extremely ancient is deduced from the names in one of these fables applied to the wolf and the fox. She uses other names than those of Ysengrin and Renard, which were introduced as early as the reign of Cœur de Lion, and it would seem that she could not have failed to notice these remarkable names, had they existed in her time. A complete collection of the works of Marie de France was published in

Paris in 1820, by M. de Roquefort, who speaks of her in the following terms: "She possessed that penetration which distinguishes at first sight the different passions of mankind, which seizes upon the different forms they assume, and, remarking the objects of their notice, discovers at the same time the means by which they are attained." If this be a true statement, the acuteness of feminine observation has gained but little in the progress of the centuries, and her literary sisters of the present era can hardly hope to eclipse the penetration of Marie de France.

The Countesses de Die, supposed to be mother and daughter, were both poetesses. The elder lady was beloved by Rabaud d'Orange, who died in 1173, and the younger is celebrated by William Adhémar, a distinguished troubadour. He was visited on his death-bed by both these ladies, who afterwards erected a monument to his memory. The younger countess retired to a convent, and died soon after Adhémar.

In the Harleian Collection is a fine manuscript containing the writings of Christine de Pisan, a distinguished woman of the fourteenth century. Her father, Thomas de Pisan, a celebrated *savant* of Bologna, had married a daughter of a member of the Grand Council of Venice. So renowned was Thomas de Pisan that the kings of Hungary and France determined to win him away from Bologna. Charles V. of France, surnamed the Wise, was successful, and Thomas de Pisan went to Paris in 1368; his transfer to the French court making a great sensation among learned and scientific circles of that day. Charles loaded him with wealth and honors, and chose him Astrologer Royal. According to the history, as told by Louisa Stuart Costello, in her "Specimens of the Early Poetry of France," Christine was but five years old when she accompanied her parents to Paris, where she received every advantage of education, and, inheriting her father's literary tastes, early became learned in languages and sci-

ence. Her personal charms, together with her father's high favor at court, attracted many admirers. She married Stephen Castel, a young gentleman of Picardy, to whom she was tenderly attached, and whose character she has drawn in most favorable colors. A few years passed happily, but, alas! changes came. The king died, the pension and offices bestowed upon Thomas de Pisan were suspended, and the Astrologer Royal soon followed his patron beyond the stars. Castel was also deprived of his preferments; and though he maintained his wife and family for a time, he was cut off by death at thirty-four years of age.

Christine had need of all her energies to meet such a succession of calamities, following close on so brilliant a career. Devoting herself anew to study, she determined to improve her talents for composition, and to make her literary attainments a means of support for her children. The illustrations in the manuscript volume of her works picture to us several scenes in Christine's life. In one, the artist has sliced off the side of a house to allow us to see Christine in her study, giving us also the exterior, roof, and dormer-windows, with points finished by gilt balls. The room is very small, with a crimson and white tapestry hanging. Christine wears what may be called the regulation color for literary ladies, — blue, with the extraordinary two-peaked head-dress of the period, put on in a decidedly strong-minded manner. At her feet sits a white dog, small, but wise-looking, with a collar of gold bells round his neck. Before Christine stands a plain table, covered with green cloth; her book, bound in crimson and gold, in which she is writing, lies before her.

Christine's style of holding the implements, — one in each hand, — and the case of materials for her work which lies beside her, are according to representations of the *miniatori calligrafi* at their labors; and, as the art of calligraphy was well known at Bologna,

so learned a man as Thomas de Pisan must have been acquainted with it, and would have caused his talented daughter to be instructed in so rare an accomplishment. It is not therefore unreasonable to believe that, in the beautiful volume now in the British Museum, the work of Christine's hand, as well as the result of her genius, is preserved. The next picture shows us Christine presenting her book to Charles VII. of France, who is dressed in a black robe edged with ermine; he wears a golden belt, order, and crown. The king is seated beneath a canopy, blue, powdered with *fleurs de lis*. Four courtiers stand beside him, dressed in robes of different colors, — one in pink, and wearing a large white hat of Quaker-like fashion. Christine has put on a white robe over her blue dress, perhaps as a sign of mourning, — she being then a widow. A white veil depends from the peaks of her head-dress. She kneels before the king, and presents her book.

Another and more elaborate picture represents the repetition of the same ceremony before Isabelle of Bavaria, queen of Charles VI. We are here admitted into the private royal apartments of the fourteenth century. The hangings of the apartment consist of strips, upon which are alternately emblazoned the armorial devices of France and Bavaria. A couch or bed, with a square canopy covered with red and blue, having the royal arms embroidered in the centre, stands on one side of the room. The queen is seated upon a lounge of modern shape, covered to correspond with the couch. She is dressed in a splendid robe of purple and gold, with long sleeves sweeping the ground, lined with ermine; upon her head arises a structure of stuffed rolls, heavy in material and covered with jewels, which shoots up into two high peaks above her forehead. Six ladies are in waiting, two in black and gold, with the same enormous head-gears. They sit on the edge of her Majesty's sofa, while four ladies of inferior rank and plainer garments are

contented with low benches. Christine reappears in her blue dress, and white-veiled, peaked cap. She kneels before the queen, on a square carpet with a geometrical-patterned border, and presents her book. A white Italian hound lies at the foot of the couch, while beside Isabelle sits a small white dog, resembling the one we saw in Christine's study. As we can hardly suppose Christine would bring her pet on so solemn an occasion, — far less allow him to jump up beside the queen, — and as this little animal wears no gold bells, we are led to suppose that little white dogs were in fashion in the fourteenth century.

We cannot say that the portrait of Isabelle gives us any idea of her splendid beauty; but "handsome is that handsome does," and as Isabelle's work was a very bad one in the Middle Ages, we will say no more about her.

Christine was but twenty-five years of age when she became a widow, and her personal charms captivated the heart of no less a personage than the Earl of Salisbury, who came ambassador from England to demand the hand of the very youthful princess, Isabelle, for his master.

They exchanged verses; and although Salisbury spoke by no means mysteriously, the sage Christine affected to view his declarations only in the light of complimentary speeches from a gallant knight. The Earl considered himself as rejected, bade adieu to love, and renounced marriage. To Christine he made a very singular proposal for a rejected lover, — that of taking with him to England her eldest son, promising to devote himself to his education and preferment. The offer was too valuable to be declined by a poor widow, whose pen was her only means of supporting her family. That such a proof of devotion argued a tenderer feeling than that of knightly gallantry must have been apparent to Christine; but for reasons best understood by herself, — and shall we not believe with a heart yet true to her husband's memory? — she merely acknowledged the

kindness shown to her son; and the Earl and his adopted boy left France together. When Richard II. was deposed, Henry Bolingbroke struck off the head of the Earl of Salisbury. Among the papers of the murdered man the lays of Christine were found by King Henry, who was so much struck with their purity and beauty, that he wrote to the fair authoress of her son's safety, under his protection, and invited her to his court.

This invitation was at once a compliment and an insult, for the hand that sent it was stained with the blood of her friend. Christine, however, had worldly wisdom enough to send a respectful, though firm refusal, to a crowned head, a successful soldier, and one, moreover, who held her son in his power. Feminine tact must have guided her pen, for Henry was not offended, and twice despatched a herald to renew the invitation to his court. She steadily declined to leave France, but managed the affair so admirably that she at last obtained the return of her son from England.

Like her father, Thomas de Pisán, Christine seems to have been sought as an ornament of their courts by several rulers. Henry Bolingbroke could not gain her for England, and the Duke of Milan in vain urged her to reside in that city. Seldom has a literary lady in any age received such tempting invitations; yet Christine refused to leave France, although her own fortunes were anything but certain. The Duke of Burgundy took her son under his protection, and urged Christine to write the history of her patron, Charles V. of France. This was a work grateful to her feelings, and she had commenced the memoir when the death of the Duke deprived her of his patronage, and threw her son again upon her care, involving her in many anxieties. But Christine bore herself through all her trials with firmness and prudence, and her latter days were more tranquil. She took a deep interest in the affairs of her adopted country, and welcomed in her writings

the appearance of the Maid of Orleans. We believe, however, that she was spared the pain of witnessing the last act in that drama of history, where an innocent victim was given up by French perfidy to English cruelty.

The deeds of Joan of Arc need no recital here. A daughter of France in the nineteenth century had a soul pure enough to reflect the image of the Maid of Orleans, and with a skilful hand she embodied the vision in marble. The statue of Joan of Arc, modelled by the Princess Marie, adorns — or rather sanctifies — the halls of Versailles.

Of woman's work as an artist in the early centuries we have a curious illustration in a manuscript belonging to the Bibliothèque Royale at Paris, which exhibits a female figure painting the statue of the Madonna. The artist holds in her left hand a palette, which is the earliest notice of the use of that implement with which antiquarians are acquainted. The fashion of painting figures cut in wood was once much practised, and we see here the representation of a female artist of very ancient date. Painting, music, and dancing come under the designation of accomplishments; yet to obtain distinction in any of these branches implies a vast amount of work. An illustration of Lygate's Pilgrim shows us a young lady playing upon a species of organ with one hand; in the other she holds to her lips a mellow horn, through which she pours her breath, if not her soul; lying beside her is a stringed instrument called a sawtry. Such varied musical acquirements certainly argue both industry and devotion to art. Charlemagne's daughters were distinguished for their skill in dancing; and we read of many instances in the Middle Ages of women excelling in these fine arts.

The period of time generally denominated the Middle Ages commences with the fifth century, and ends with the fifteenth. We have in several instances ventured to extend the limits as far as a part of the sixteenth century, and therefore include among female artists the name of Sofonisba An-

guisciola, who was born about 1540. She was a noble lady of Cremona, whose fame spread early throughout Italy. In 1559, Philip II. of Spain invited her to his court at Madrid, where on her arrival she was treated with great distinction. Her chief study was portraiture, and her pictures became objects of great value to kings and popes.

Her royal patrons of Spain married their artist to a noble Sicilian, giving her a dowry of twelve thousand ducats and a pension of one thousand ducats, beside rich presents in tapestries and jewels. She went with her husband to Palermo, where they resided several years. On the death of her husband the king and queen of Spain urged her to return to their court; but she excused herself on account of her wish to visit Cremona. Embarking on board a galley for this purpose, bound to Genoa, she was entertained with such gallantry by the captain, Orazio Lomellini, one of the merchant princes of that city, that the heart of the distinguished artist was won, and she gave him her hand on their arrival at Genoa.

History does not tell us whether she ever revisited Cremona, but she dwelt in Genoa during the remainder of her long life, pursuing her art with great success. On her second marriage, her faithful friends in the royal family of Spain added four hundred crowns to her pension. The Empress of Germany visited Sofonisba on the way to Spain, and accepted from her hand a little picture. Sofonisba became blind in her old age, but lost no other faculty. Vandyck was her guest when at Genoa, and said that he had learned more of his art from one blind old woman than from any other teacher. A medal was struck in her honor at Bologna. The Academy of Fine Arts at Edinburgh contains a noble picture by Vandyck, painted in his Italian manner. It represents individuals of the Lomellini family, and was probably in progress when he visited this illustrious woman, who had become a member of that house.

Stirling in his "Artists of Spain" states that few of Sofonisba's pictures are now known to exist, and that the beautiful portrait of herself, probably the one mentioned by Vasari in the wardrobe of the Cardinal di Monte at Rome, or that noticed by Soprani in the palace of Giovanni Lomellini at Genoa, is now in the possession of Earl Spencer at Althorp. The engraving from this picture, in Dibdin's *Ædes Althorpianae*, lies before us. We think the better of kings and queens who prized a woman with eyes so clear, and an expression of such honesty and truth. The original is said to be masterly in its drawing and execution. Sofonisba is represented in a simple black dress, and wears no jewels. She touches the keys of a harpsichord with her beautiful hands; a duenna-like figure of an old woman stands behind the instrument, apparently listening to the melody.

Whatever of skill or fame women have acquired through the ages in other departments, the nursery has ever been an undisputed sphere for woman's work. Nor have we reason to think that, in the centuries we have been considering, she was not faithful to this her especial province. The cradle of Henry V., yet in existence, is one of the best specimens of nursery furniture in the fourteenth century which have come down to us. Beautifully carved foliage fills the space between the uprights and stays and stand of the cradle, which is not upon rockers, but apparently swings like the modern crib. On each of these uprights is perched a dove, carefully carved, whose quiet influences had not much effect on the infant dreams of Prince Hal.

Henry was born at Monmouth, 1388, and sent to Courtfield, about seven miles distant, where the air was considered more salubrious. There he was nursed under the superintendence of Lady Montacute, and in that place this cradle was preserved for many years. It was sold by a steward of the Montacute property, and, after passing through

several hands, was in the possession of a gentleman near Bristol when engraved for Shaw's "Ancient Furniture," in 1836.

In the Douce Collection of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, there is figured in a manuscript of the fifteenth century a cradle, with the baby very nicely tucked up in it. The cradle resembles those of modern date, and is upon rockers. Another illustration of the same period shows us a cradle of similar form, the "cradle, baby, and all" carried on the head of the nursery-maid, — a caryatid style of baby-tending which we cannot suppose to have been universal. The inventories of household furniture belonging to Reginald de la Pole, after enumerating some bed-hangings of costly stuff, describe: "Item, a pane" (piece of cloth which we now call counterpane) "and head-shete for y^e cradell, of same sute, bothe furred with mynever,"—giving us a comfortable idea of the nursery establishment in the De la Pole family. The recent discovery in England of that which tradition avers to be the tomb of Canute's little daughter, speaks of another phase in nursery experience. The relics, both of the cradle and the grave, bear their own record of the joys, cares, and sorrows of the nursery in vanished years, and bring near to every mother's heart the baby that was rocked in the one, and the grief which came when that little form was given to the solemn keeping of the other.

A miniature in an early manuscript, called "The Birth of St. Edmund," gives us a picture of a bedroom and baby in the fifteenth century. St. Edmund himself was born five hundred years previous to that date; but as saints and sinners look very much alike when they are an hour old, we can imagine that, as far as the baby is concerned, it may be considered a portrait. A pretty young woman, in a long white gown, whose cap looks like magnified butterflies' wings turned upside down, sits on a low seat before the blazing wood-fire burning on great andirons in a wide fireplace, which, instead of a mantel-

piece, has three niches for ornamental vases. She holds the baby very nicely, and, having warmed his feet, has wrapt him in a long white garment, so that we see only his little head in a plain night-cap, surrounded indeed by the gilded nimbus of his saintship, which we hope was not of tangible substance, as it would have been an appendage very inconvenient to all parties concerned. The mother reposes in a bed with high posts and long curtains. She must have been a woman of strong nerves to have borne the sight of such stupendous head-gears as those in which her attendants are nodding over herself and baby, or to have supported the weight of that which she wears by way of night-cap. One nurse raises the lady, while another, who, from her showy dress, appears to be the head of the department, offers a tall, elegant, but very inconveniently-shaped goblet, which contains, we presume, mediæval gruel. The room has a very comfortable aspect, from which we judge that some babies in those times were carefully attended.

Many centuries ago, a young woman sat one day among the boys to whom she had come, as their father's bride, from a foreign land, to take the name and place of their mother. She showed to them a beautiful volume of Saxon poems, one of her wedding-gifts,—perhaps offered by the artists of the court of Charles le Chauve, of whose skill such magnificent specimens yet exist. As the attention of the boys was arrested by the brilliant external decorations, Judith, with that quick instinct for the extension of knowledge which showed her a true descendant of Charlemagne, promised that the book should be given to him who first learned to read it. Young Alfred won the prize, and became Alfred the Great.

We are brought near to the presence of a woman of the Middle Ages when we stand beside the monument of Eleanor of Castile, queen of Edward I., in Westminster Abbey. The figure is lifelike and beautiful, with flowing drapery folded simply around it. The

countenance, with its delicate features, wears a look of sweetness and dignity as fresh to-day as when sculptured seven hundred years ago. The hair, confined by a coronet, falls on each side of her face in ringlets; one hand lies by her side, and once held a sceptre; the other is brought gracefully upward; the slender fingers, with trusting touch, are laid upon a cross suspended from her neck.

Historians have done their best, or their worst, to throw doubt upon the story of Eleanor's sucking the poison with her lips from the arm of her husband when a dastardly assassin of those days struck at the life of Edward. But such a tradition, whether actually a fact or not, is a tribute to the affection and strength of Eleanor's character; and all historians agree that she instilled no poison into the life of king or country. As a wife, a mother, and a queen, Eleanor of Castile stands high on the record of the women of the Middle Ages.

Coming from Westminster Abbey, in the spring of 1856, we stood one day at a window in the Strand, and watched a multitude which no man could number, pulsing through that great artery of the mighty heart of London. It was the day of the great Peace celebration, and a holiday. Hour after hour the mighty host swept on, in undiminished numbers. The place where we stood was Charing Cross,

and our thoughts went back seven hundred years, when Edward, following the mortal remains of his beloved Eleanor, erected on this spot, then a country suburb of London, the last of that line of crosses which marked those places where the mournful procession paused on its way from Hereby to Westminster. It was the cross of the dear queen, *la chère reine*, which time and changes of language have since corrupted into Charing Cross. Through this pathway crowds have trodden for many centuries, and few remember that its name is linked with the queenly dead or with a kingly sorrow. Thus it is, as we hasten on through the busy thoroughfares of life from age to age, even as one of our own poets hath said,—

“We pass, and heed each other not.”

In these pages we have made some record of woman's work in past centuries, and also caught glimpses of duties, loves, hopes, fears, and sorrows not unlike our own. A wider sphere is now accorded, and a deeper responsibility devolves upon woman to fill it wisely and well. We should never forget that, as far as they were faithful to the duties appointed to them, they elevated their sex to a higher and nobler position, and therein performed the best work of the women of the Middle Ages.
