

Catherine Marsh and Her Friends.

FUTURE historians will point out that the century separating the two greatest European wars was sharply differentiated from the preceding and following periods. For the Anglican Church, it was as eventful as the century of the Reformation, an age of great churchmen and of notable churchwomen also. Among these, four Catherines, all born within seven years, stand out as peculiarly typical of their age—Catherine Glynne (1812-1900), wife of W. E. Gladstone; Catherine King (1817-93), wife of the Rev. William Pennefather; Catherine Spooner (1819-78), wife of Archbishop Tait; and Catherine Marsh (1818-1912), whose life bridges the whole period, for she was born within three years of Waterloo, and the present war began less than twenty months after her death. All had intellectual power, strong affections, endearing social qualities and noble unselfish aims, and all belonged to "the landed gentry" in the days of its still undisputed ascendancy. Mrs. Gladstone was a baronet's daughter and a peer's granddaughter; Mrs. Pennefather's grandfathers were an Irish earl and an Archbishop of Dublin; Mrs. Tait's father was an archdeacon and her mother's nephew a baron; Catherine Marsh's grandfathers were a distinguished soldier and an Oxfordshire squire. Her father, her only brother, and all her brothers-in-laws were beneficed clergy.

The other three devoted long wedded lives to co-operating with men who did notable work. The statesman and primate are more renowned than the founder of "Mildmay," but it originated and inspired much beyond its actual achievement, re-starting, for instance, in our Church, the ancient order of Deaconesses, though the time was not yet for the formal ordination which Mildmay as well as other deaconesses now receive. Catherine Marsh was one of the very first to show what valuable service a religious woman who is not a "religieuse" and a woman in society who is not a wife can render to the Church and nation. It was to her and her friend and contemporary, Florence Nightingale, that Kingsley referred in the Preface to *Yeast* as "those human angels of whom it is written—'The barren hath more children than she who has a husband.'" But as with other spinsters whom the world coldly disparages there had been romance, ending in tragedy, in her life,

and it was because she had learned in the school of sorrow that her overflowing sympathy and genius for friendship enabled her to become such a power for blessing to others.

Her happily named and well-written *Life*¹ is among the most interesting books of this season. There is the charm of contrast to our own days, as we read that her fellow-lodger protested against staying in a house where three telegrams were delivered in one day ; and a charm of likeness too, as it pictures the deep emotions and active efforts stirred by the outbreak of a European war sixty years ago, [after long peace ; the revival of spiritual religion which followed on the mournful and terrible days of the Crimean Campaign and the Indian Mutiny, and the Society of Friends' timely aid to French peasants ruined and homeless through German invasion in 1870.

At first this Victorian gentlewoman seems to belong wholly to the past. She came of "the untitled aristocracy" with its Tory and exclusive traditions and its engrained reserve as to expressing feelings, especially religious feelings. Her well-to-do menfolk, land-owners, diplomatists, soldiers and parsons, regarded leisure and ease as the right of their gently nurtured wives and daughters. The appearance of a lady's real name in the Royal Academy Catalogue or on a title page would to them have been only less indecent than the appearance of the lady herself on a public platform. Miss Marsh's books were all either anonymous, or attributed merely to the author of such and such a previous volume. And how limited and uneventful was her life ! Except for one Swiss holiday in her youth, a few trips to the Riviera in later life, and two flying visits to an oculist at Wiesbaden, when aged and blind, she was never outside the United Kingdom ; and though she once declared that she would live in London if she were homeless, her visits to the metropolis were very rare and short. It is a proof of her generous and amiable disposition that though she never had a house of her own, she always had a thoroughly happy home. Her first thirty-two years were divided equally between her father's vicarages at Colchester, Birmingham and Leamington. Then she and he lived with his son-in-law at Beckenham Rectory for ten years till he, aged eighty-five, undertook a new parish at Beddington where

¹ *The Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh.* By L. E. O'Rorke. With portraits and other illustrations. (Longmans, 10s. 6d. net.)

he died four years later. Having given just half her life to him with unfaltering devotion, she wandered for a year or two, and then at fifty, took up her abode once for all, with the Rev. Henry O'Rorke and his wife, who was her niece and adopted daughter, for eleven years at Sheriff Hales Vicarage in Shropshire, and for thirty-three years at Feltwell Rectory in Norfolk. Yet she was so much in advance of her time that she dared to defy many of its conventions, though always gently and graciously ; and so eager to do good to all within her reach that the Archbishop of Canterbury can describe her as " the veteran pioneer of women's evangelistic forces in the England of to-day." She was her own taskmaster and knew what toil meant. She speaks of being " at her desk nine hours a day," of " writing till 3 a.m. and being up at six," and she would return prostrate with headache from addressing great audiences in heated halls. Her intense, unwavering faith, her insight into spiritual destitution, her capacity for calling out what was best in all with whom she came [into contact compelled her to bear witness. And the real humility which never arrogated any spiritual superiority, the gift of beauty and distinction, of an exquisitely musical voice, of a tact that never asked personal questions uninvited, and of that perfect sympathy which is never achieved by persons preoccupied with themselves, gave her an attractiveness and a popularity which she turned to highest ends. Thinking of her, Lord Shaftesbury wrote in 1872 that " women have an instinct in religious things that no man can attain to," adding his conviction that God is about to do great things for the world by the instrumentality of pious women. Her intimates included many of high social standing, and the incidental evidences in her correspondence of their simple goodness and unfeigned piety, would be wholesome reading for scribblers of third-rate fiction and scandal-mongering " Society " journals. Very few have so large a circle of friends, or can have written and received so many letters of a personal, not business kind.

Her influence on young men, from the days that Addiscombe cadets for the Indian Army were welcome Sunday afternoon guests at Beckenham Rectory, is closely associated with her *Memorials of Captain Hedley Vicars*, killed before Sebastopol, of which 70,000 copies were sold in one year. A small personal reminiscence may be permissible here. More than thirty years afterwards,

I was one of two girls waiting in an open boat to be fetched off a remote Highland coast. The elderly boatman gave a religious turn to our talk, and adduced Hedley Vicars as an example of a young and heroic life given to God, adding that he had bought the book again and again, but had always passed it on. For him, the result of that half-hour on the tossing waves was receiving from Miss Marsh herself an autographed copy, an illustration surely not only of the lasting popularity of her book, but of her spontaneous friendliness to all sorts of obscure people. Perhaps it was her intercourse with Charles Kingsley that removed her so far from the vaguely well-intentioned Lady Bountiful of olden days. For when a great immigration of navvies were transforming Beckenham from a rural village into a crowded suburb, she laboured unceasingly for their welfare, as a pioneer not only of the Navy Mission, but of many similar efforts for special classes whom modern industrial developments segregate from their fellows. It was she who inspired Mrs. Ranyard to organize Bible-women, and Miss Agnes Weston and Miss Sandes to work among sailors and soldiers; and Mrs. Sumner, founder of the Mothers' Union, acknowledges a similar debt to her.

In her second famous book, *English Hearts and English Hands*, she pleaded with her own class that what the labouring man needs is not kindness but sympathy; "Allow him the equality of being able to repay friendship with friendship." Does not that adumbrate Public School Missions, University Settlements and Friends of the Poor to-day? Once on the Brighton parade, she noticed a bricklayer at the top of a dangerously high ladder, lifted up her heart in a prayer for his safety, and when he came down, talked with him. Eleven years afterwards, the incident was related to a clergyman of her acquaintance, by a chance fellow-passenger in the train, who knew this bricklayer as a man leading a consistent Christian life, and had heard him relate that the lady had hardly gone out of sight before he thought, "Can a stranger care to pray for me, and I never pray for myself! It is high time I began."

One closing word about Catherine Marsh as a loyal and devoted churchwoman, with an ever-growing appreciation of our services and festivals. She belonged inevitably to the old Evangelical School, as the goddaughter of Charles Simeon, and habitually sat under its ministry and breathed its atmosphere. Her only outlook beyond it came through her friendship with Dean Stanley and

Kingsley. For although the Oxford Movement was stirring the whole Church during the most impressionable years of her life, there is no hint that either its leaders or its books ever crossed her path. The only reference to the controversies around it is a letter expressing the fervent hope that the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council's judgment in the Bennett case would not lead to a secession of Evangelical clergy: "For them to desert their Church would be little less than treason."

We get a keynote to this large-hearted and deeply spiritual Christian's life in a letter written to Mr. Gladstone when he was nearly eighty-five and she was seventy-six: "What a full Heaven we shall find, to fulfil these words, the most delightful of promises: 'He shall see of the travail of His soul *and shall be satisfied.*'"

MARY L. G. CARUS-WILSON.

