

WOMEN'S SERVICE
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THE
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Daughter of the ancient Eve,
We know the gifts ye gave and give ;
Who knows the gifts which you shall give,
Daughter of the Newer Eve ?

—Francis Thompson.

The Position of Women in the Mediaeval Craft Gilds.

BY DORA KEANE, M.A.

An interesting chapter in the history of women remains yet unwritten—namely, the history of the independent woman worker of the Middle Ages. A picture of mediaeval society generally depicts woman either as the busy housewife, or as member of a religious community, but it is a mistake to imagine a woman's activities in the middle ages were confined to her home. The range of occupations for women, both married and unmarried, outside the sphere of domestic ties was almost unlimited. Women engaged extensively in trade, in their own right, and the merchant designated as "femme seule" or "sole marchant" is a familiar figure in legal documents of the period. It was no uncommon thing for women to buy and sell in large quantities, and we even find them carrying on trade with foreigners. The practice of women working quite apart from their husband's trade or calling is not unknown in the middle ages, and it is well known that the mediaeval wife enjoyed an independent legal status hardly to be met with in our own day, as is testified by the fact that in some countries she had power to dispose of her property without her husband's permission.

A consideration of these general aspects of the economic position of women in mediaeval society leads naturally to the question, "What place had women in those typically mediaeval institutions—the craft gilds or misteries"? These gilds figure so largely in all the transactions and processes of industry of the time, that one would fain know how women fared

in them. Unfortunately the question of the general admission of women as active members of the gilds in their own right, is still a debatable one. The evidence is scanty and often negative in character, and it is necessary to read both on and between the lines of many a decree and regulation, to discover what share women had in the gild-society.

Mention of women in statutes and ordinances of the gilds does not necessarily imply full and independent membership. The craft gilds had a strong religious and social side and where the ordinances use the term "brethren and sustren" it is probably more often than not, a reference to wives, daughters and widows of members, sharing in the social life of the gild, attending its dinners and receiving its accustomed benefits. Women are frequently mentioned in the records of the London City Companies, but generally in connection with privileges and feastings, to which they were invited or permitted by their male relatives—this has obviously little to do with their practising the crafts as regular members in the army of industry.

Yet given this proviso in dealing with gild records, there is ample evidence that women, apart from wives and widows, had a recognised place in the organisation and membership of the gilds. The phrase, "to every man and woman having apprentices" is evident proof of their accepted position, and it occurs frequently in gild ordinances and regulations. The Charter of the Drapers' Company makes explicit

allusion to "brothers and sisters of the fellowship—taking apprentices." The ordinances of the Gild of Dyers at Bristol contain similar mention of women members, and the same is true of the Cloth workers, the Weavers, the Brewers, and the Fishmongers. Abroad the women members of a craft seem to have had a more definitely recognised status than in England. Thus we find female furriers and tailors in Frankfurt, embroideresses of coats of arms in Cologne, the female sadlers in Strasbourg—all organised into craft gilds. In Brussels the position of the craftswomen was similarly a recognised one, where decrees were made against their working outside a corporate body and demanding them to "s'affilier à métier." For France we have much fuller information in the famous "Livre des Métiers," drawn up for that King Louis IX known to history as St. Louis. At his instigation an order was given that the heads of all the important Parisian crafts were to draw up a careful and accurate digest of their traditions, ancient rights and privileges and internal organisation. Exactly one hundred crafts were so scheduled, of which five seem to have been wholly in the hands of women, and in a large number where it is reasonable to suppose that men preponderated, women were also employed on the same footing as men.

Evidently then, in any study of the position of women in the gilds, attention must be paid to two kinds, those in which men and women could both be members, commonly designated "mixed crafts," and those whose membership was exclusively feminine. To deal first with the "mixed" crafts. General regulations for apprenticeship, fees or admission, terms of indenture, etc., applied equally to male and female. The phrase "tant aux femmes qu'aux hommes" is a frequently recurring one. When in 1413 ordinances were drawn up for the carrying on of the new work of the Guildhall, the increase in payments to be made at the beginning and end of apprenticeship were payable by male and female alike. This inclusion of women in gild regulations was no vague generalisation, but evidently corresponded to actual practice. Wills of both men and women frequently make mention of female apprentices. There were 39 in the Brewers' Company in London in 1418 while in the Mercers' Company there appear to have been about three women apprentices to ten men. The origin of the word spinster is well known. It was frequently inserted after a woman's name to

distinguish her occupation from the craft of another in the wool trade. While the preparing of yarn was an almost exclusively feminine occupation, the craft of weaving was generally considered to be a man's occupation, and the male element dominated all the gilds set up by followers of this craft. But this does not imply that women were not to be found working at the looms or having charge of a weaving business. Chaucer's "Wyf of Bath" will always provide an emphatic denial to such a suggestion.

With regard to internal organisation, government and general management of affairs within the gilds, the state taken by women members seems to have varied in different gilds. In the ordinances of the Carpenters' Gild it is explicitly decreed that the "the sustren with the brethren" are to meet four times a year to ordain things needful and profitable for the Gild. In the shearmers' ordinances the "brethren and sustren" are directed to go to dinner together on the morrow of the Assumption every year, and there to make their election of Warden; and within 14 days they were to be called together again and to make election of twelve persons "to assiste, keepe and counsell" the wardens. Thus "votes for women" was, at any rate within these gilds, an accepted fact. The absence of such decrees from the ordinances of other gilds does not necessarily imply that women members had not such rights, but these are the only ones in which positive evidence of these practices exists.

The gilds showed as much solicitude for the spiritual welfare of "sisters" as of "brothers." They provided Masses for their souls, and tapers for their burial and bore the cost of their funeral if they died in poverty. The Drapers' Company's ordinances include this touching decree, "women, when they die, are to have the use of the best pall." Some gilds also gave help to men and women members alike when they fell into poverty through circumstances beyond their control. Thus in 1414 the Merchants Taylors built almshouses for the poor brethren and sisters. There was a special chamber for women in the Drapers' Hall where the Sisters sometimes had separate dinners, but they were also sometimes present at the feasts in the Common Hall. Women, as has been seen above, were often present at the gild feasts, sometimes in their own right, sometimes as their husband's companions. Widows

(Continued on p. 72.)

Notes and Comments.

We will deal next month with the final report of the Departmental Committee on Maternal Mortality and Morbidity. The Committee has been sitting four years, under the chairmanship of Sir George Newman. They report once more that half the deaths of mothers in childbirth are preventable. We have had the usual headlines in the Press, a one day sensation, but what next? We sincerely hope that the Government will give support to the committee's recommendations.

Two recent decisions of the Ministry of Labour have given pleasure to our Alliance, and other feminist societies; one is the appointment of a woman manager of the mixed Labour Exchange at Shoreditch; the other is the retention in the interests of the public service of a first-class Woman Officer after her marriage.

We trust that these two decisions will not be isolated cases, and that in the near future the marriage bar for women will be entirely abolished in the Civil Service—in the interests of the public.

We are at a loss to understand why Captain Cazalet should have introduced the British-born Alien Women (Civil Rights) Bill. As reported in Hansard, Captain Cazalet said: "The reason I introduce it is that a number of women's organisations are very anxious to see the Bill printed as having passed its first reading before they have their meetings and conferences in the autumn, at which the subject will be discussed." St. Joan's Alliance has written to Captain Cazalet protesting, and stating that far from wishing for the introduction of such a Bill the Alliance is entirely opposed to such procedure, feeling sure it will only delay the granting of full justice to women in regard to nationality rights.

Captain Cazalet's original Bill, the Nationality of Married Women Bill, had the whole-hearted support of St. Joan's Alliance and many other organisations, which have been working for the reforms it embodies for the last twenty years. We are therefore deeply disappointed that he should have temporised by introducing this new Bill. Will Captain Cazalet give the names of the societies supporting his Bill?

We will deal with this question of Nationality next month.

The Committee of St. Joan's Alliance had the pleasure of welcoming members of the Board of Officers of the International Alliance for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, which was meeting in London, at an informal lunch on July 22nd. Among the guests were Mrs. Corbett Ashby (President), Mlle. Gourd (Switzerland), Miss Manus (Holland), Senator Plaminikova (Czecho-Slovakia), Froken Walin (Sweden), and from England, Miss Sterling (Hon. Treasurer), Miss Neilans, and the Secretary Mrs. Bompas.

All our members will join with us in cordial thanks to Miss Nancy Stewart Parnell, for her great work for St. Joan's S.P.A., especially during the eight years she has been Hon. Secretary of our Liverpool Branch. Miss Parnell is leaving Liverpool, though she will remain a member of the Branch, to take up her new work as Warden of St. Gabriel's Hall, Manchester; the Hall of residence for Catholic students attending the University. We offer our best wishes to Miss Parnell.

We always remember that the late Mrs. Parnell was one of the original members of the Liverpool Branch, and Vice-Chairman and Hon. Secretary of our paper for many years. Miss Parnell was brought up in a suffrage atmosphere, and carries on the tradition with brilliance.

We offer our best thanks to Mrs. A. Stewart Mason, who has kindly accepted the office of Hon. Secretary of our Liverpool and District Branch. Her address is: "Brinsworth," Grosvenor Road, Birkenhead.

Mrs. Dugdale, a member of the Executive of the League of Nations Union, has been appointed one of the delegates of the Assembly of the League.

The Women's Advisory Committee met Mrs. Dugdale to discuss with her the subjects on which women are especially interested, such as equal nationality rights. Mrs. Dugdale has promised to study this and other feminist subjects before leaving for Geneva.

We are glad to report that, as last year, Dr. Ethel Osborne will be a delegate to the Assembly from Australia.

ST. JOAN'S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ALLIANCE,

AND

Editorial Office of "Catholic Citizen":

55 BERNERS STREET, LONDON, W.1. Tel. Museum 4181

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Society.

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The Lothian Report and Women's Franchise in India.

It does not come within the province of the CATHOLIC CITIZEN to analyse and criticise the Lothian Report as a whole. That the Committee had a difficult task few would deny, but the question of the franchise for the different communities in India is highly controversial, and no doubt our members will hold diverse views on the decisions adopted by the British Government. Indeed, the Prime Minister has found it necessary to issue a statement explaining the Government's action.

But there is one part of the Report with which St. Joan's S.P.A., as a society, is unanimous. The Alliance has systematically given its support openly and wholeheartedly to the organised women of India, who asked for no favours, but who, on the contrary, only demanded justice and equality between men and women in the new constitution of India. Has the Committee hearkened to women who expressed so clearly what they desired, what they considered would bring true freedom?

"Stri Dharma" (Madras), official Organ of the Women's Indian Association, says: "The recommendations of the Lothian Committee relating to women's franchise, and their representation on the provincial and federal legislatures are just contrary both in spirit and letter to the considered decisions of the organised and active women organisations in the country, and the well-known women leaders."

The women realise that members of the Committee were anxious to increase the voting strength of women, and to secure their adequate representation in the new proposed constitution for India. But they find that the disadvantages of the methods suggested outweigh the advan-

tages. "It must be remembered," says "Stri Dharma," "that the representative women of India have laid more stress upon the right principle of justice and equality between the sexes, to be followed in the new proposed constitution for India, even from its very beginning than upon any temporary privileges or humiliating advantages either for themselves or for any other class or community in this land. The committee, while paying a tribute to women for those high and noble ideals on which they have set their hearts, have not risen above the narrow notions of separate or communal electorates or special representations, which are devices destructive in their very nature of a united and nationalistic India."

The Report admits quite frankly that without exception, the representatives of women's organisations and individual women witnesses demanded that the principle of equality between men and women should be the basis of the new constitution.

We are told that the British Government settled the question on communal lines since the Indians failed to agree among themselves. We must point out that in the Indian Women's movement there was no communal problem, women presented a shining example, all sections working together. The Report bears witness to this: "We deem it our duty to give prominence to the important fact that there was a strong and an almost unanimous expression of opinion by women witnesses, whether they appeared as the representatives of women's associations or in their individual capacity that they did not want women representatives in the legislatures to be elected by any communal electorates.

Their objection to be dragged into communal controversies in any manner was emphatic, convincing, and, if we may add, most welcome."

And yet, though the women's opinion is qualified by the Report as *convincing* and most *welcome*, the Prime Minister tells us that there is no other way, but women must be dragged into communal controversy and be elected by communal methods, although he realises that there are undoubtedly serious objections to this course.

Mr. Macdonald tells us that it has been widely recognised in recent years that the women's movement in India holds one of the keys of progress. Why then obstruct them? Women did not ask for compliments, they asked for justice and equality, they have received neither.

"It is a matter of keen regret," says "Stri Dharma," and we agree, "that the Committee has failed to take note of the representative women's feelings on this very vital matter relating to the women's status in the social and political life of this country."

Women of all nations, we may say, have at some period suffered from similar stupidities, their opinion, though convincing and so welcome, must be set aside, because some men think they know better.

L. DE ALBERTI.

International Notes.

In a recent number of the "Catholic Gazette" Marie M. Hughes rescues from oblivion a Catholic woman scientist, born in the last years of the 16th century, Martiné Bertereau, engaged in the study of chemistry, geometry, hydraulics and mechanics from her youth, and married, at the age of twenty or thereabouts, the Baron de Beausoleil, also engaged in scientific research, mainly concerned with mineralogy. Together they pursued their researches, examining mines in Sweden, Germany, and Italy, and even in the New World. On their return to France they met with financial disaster, and were accused of being in league with the Devil, from whom they obtained their knowledge. They sought redress, and Martiné, now mother of six children, continued to urge her husband not to abandon their task, and herself addressed a memoir to the king on the mineral treasures of the country, but finally an ungrateful country cast them into prison; the Baron was removed to the Bastille; Martiné and one daughter to the State prison of Vincennes. They both died in prison. The article

appeared in the July number of the "Catholic Gazette," and we advise our readers to procure it. Perhaps the writer of the article may find some more permanent form for her discovery.

* * * * *

"La Cívica Feminina" (Barcelona), an organisation of which we have already spoken, whose aim is the defence of the social and political rights of Catholic women, is making great strides. They work hard and study the problems they have to face with courage. Their weekly meetings, held since February, are not, as they say, recreation, nor yet poetical dissertations to pass the time agreeably, they are eminently practical studies in Christian Sociology, in which those attending learn to grapple and to understand problems affecting all in which it is indispensable to have right ideas.

* * * * *

"La Bonne Parole" (Montreal), reports an Address given by Father M. C. Forest, O.P., during the Congress in 1931 of the Fédération Nationale Saint Jean Baptiste. It is an encouraging and progressive address, such as could scarcely be bettered. Father Forest believes in Feminism, and in making his profession of faith, declared that he did not think it just, he did not think it wise to close to women any source of learning, nor yet one single professional career. It lies with woman herself to judge in which careers she can meet men advantageously, and gain her living, and very often that of others. The lecturer concluded by saying that he believed with a faith, which the past left intact, in the creation of an intellectual feminism, and hoped that it would take root in their country. Woman not being a minor, it lay with her to go ahead, and he was among those who desired that the destiny of women should be left in their own hands.

A. A. B.

OBITUARY.

Since our last issue John Scurr has passed away, and Catholics have mourned one who worked so valiantly for the safety of our Schools.

Feminists have another reason for grief for John Scurr was a staunch believer in the equality of the sexes. In an article, August 19th, "The Vote" records some of his labours in the woman's cause, when the fight was at its height.

An honourable man has left us, but his example lives.—R.I.P.

The Position of Women in the Mediaeval Craft Gilds.

Continued from page 68.

of deceased members could attend, but they were called upon to pay double! On the whole the regulations of the gilds with regard to widows were very generous. A woman could, on the death of her husband, continue in his trade, and if he had been a master, she could carry on in this capacity. There was a special decree preserving this right to her even in the event of the widow's re-marriage to a man not of her own craft. Other decrees give a woman the right to have control of all tools used by her husband, after his death.

To turn now to the gilds of craftswomen, i.e., those engaged in purely feminine pursuits. The "Livre des Métiers" records five such exclusively feminine crafts in Paris, and there were similar women's crafts in England. They included dressmakers, silk workers, workers in gold and silver thread, and finally there was the "métier des lingères," fine linen being naturally the concern of women workers. The most important of these were the silk workers, and in Paris, these were organised into a gild on exactly the same lines as men's gilds, with strict regulations re apprenticeship, promotion, hours of work, rate of payment, etc. In England, too, the "silkwymen" were strongly organised, and we find them in the 14th century presenting a petition to the Lord Mayor against a Lombard who was "cornering" all raw and coloured silks. They seem to have been particularly jealous of foreign rivalry, for there is a later petition of the same character, this time addressed to the King. Its wording is interesting. It begins by recalling, in quaint mediaeval phrase, the great antiquity of the craft which "has existed in the citty, of time that no mind runneth to the contrary" and goes on "whereas it is shewed . . . by the grievous complaint of the silkwymen and spinners of the mistery and occupation of silkworking within the citty of London, how that divers Lombards and other strangers doe bring into the said realm" etc., etc. In 1482 they put their case to parliament in still more imposing language inscribing their petition "from the Kynges woefull menne and women of the hole crafte of silkewerke of the Cite of London and all other Citeis, Townes, Boroghes and Vilages of this Realm of England"! Incidentally this wording reveals that the silk trade was by the 15th century no longer a monopoly of women, and that the craft of the "silkewerke" had now become a "mixed" one.

It is established then, that women had a recognised place as members of the gilds, and that a large degree of equality prevailed as between men and women, regarding conditions of admission to the gilds. When we come, however, to examine in greater detail the subsequent fortunes of women members, once admitted, certain important inequalities are revealed. First, in the matter of advancement, the evidence goes to prove that the chances of this for women were slight. It was noted above that widows whose husbands had been masters were allowed to continue in this capacity, but apart from this the tendency was against women being masters. Thus of the three famous stages in the hierarchy of the gilds—apprentice, journeyman, master, only the first two were in general open to women, while in some gilds even apprenticeship for women was exclusive to wives and daughters of masters. In towns where entry into a gild conferred political rights, there were explicit decrees that women could not be masters. The whole question of the right of craftswomen to be burgesses and to gain "the freedom of the borough," is very interesting, but one which is, however, beyond the sphere of the present article. Again, even in those "mixed" gilds where the proportion of women was considerable, we never hear of them as wardens.

In the matter of remuneration, the tendency seems to have been on the whole to pay women less than men. The wage lists of Keepers of the King's Wardrobe, the records of city companies, and the account books of private merchants alike go to prove that women were paid at a rate definitely lower than men.

Thus equality of opportunity between the two sexes was not a principle of gild organisation. On the other hand we find evidence of protective legislation reminiscent of modern factory laws. Thus the craft of oriental carpet makers would not allow women to work for the trade, for the reason that "it was a grevous trade" and there was danger of the women injuring themselves during pregnancy. The cloth workers had a rule that women were not allowed to handle the wool until it had been sheared. This protective legislation doubtless operated, then as now, to the detriment as well as to the advantage of women—in the sense that such legislation tends to create an impression of inferiority which can easily be abused. An example of this is seen in Pontoise, where the bakers attempted to withdraw the right of widows to carry on their husband's trade, on the pretext that they were not strong enough to knead with their hands. The claim was,

however, fortunately dismissed by an ordinance of the Parlement.

The question of resentment against women workers, on the grounds of alleged unemployment caused to men, was not unknown in the middle ages. At Bristol, weavers were forbidden "to putt or hire wyfe, doughter or maide . . . to the occupation of weaving, because by it many and divers of the King's liege people likkely men to do the King servis in his warris and in the defence of this his land . . . gothe vagaraunt and unoccupied." But the gilds which explicitly forbade the employment of women, on the grounds that it threw men out of work were exceptional, and even where such decrees are found, exception is always made for wives and daughters of gildsmen.

To conclude—women had their part in mediaeval gild life, but except in those composed exclusively of women, it was not a prominent or leading part. It is, however, clearly evident from the regulations made regarding their rights and responsibilities as members of the gilds, that they had a recognised position in the industrial world of the middle ages.

AN INTERNATIONAL FEMINIST CENTRE IN GENEVA.

As in previous years, the International Woman Suffrage Alliance will establish a Temporary Office in Geneva at the time of the ordinary General Assembly of the League of Nations. Those who are visiting Geneva either in the course of a journey, or in order to take part in the intense international activity which goes on at this time, are always glad to know of some place where feminists from all countries may meet, obtain addresses or other information, get cards for the Assembly, etc.

This year the Office will be situated at the International Club, 4 rue de Monthoux, and the fact that it is taking up its quarters in such an active centre of internationalism, close to the Secretariat of the League and to the Disarmament Conference, gives further promise of success. It will be open every afternoon from 3 to 7 p.m., but even when it is not open it will be possible to obtain from the Club urgent information. As usual, the Office will be open the whole week before the opening of the Assembly, that is from September 19th. The President, Mrs. Corbett Ashby, and the Secretary, Mlle. Gourd, will be in Geneva, and it is hoped that other members of the Board will attend.

TREASURER'S NOTE.

The Garden Party, organised by Mrs. Laughton Mathews on July 19th, was a great success, and much enjoyed by all present. The proceeds amounted to £4 14s. 6d., as the half share coming to St. Joan's, the other half going to Mrs. Laughton Mathew's Sea Ranger Company.

We had some beautiful singing from Miss Beldon; the Sea Rangers sang Shanties as to the manner born, and little Elvira Laughton Mathews danced charmingly, supported by two small nymphs.

We shall be having a Jumble Sale in October, and would like to remind readers to send any old clothes, etc., to Mrs. Hand, at 10 St. James' Terrace, N.W.8.

P. M. BRANDT.

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At the close of July distinguished women from many lands met in London for the Board Meeting of the International Alliance for Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, and the Open Door International. Miss Chrystal Macmillan entertained the officers of the I.O.D.C. at her flat in Pump Court Temple; and on the evening of the same day Dr. Jane Walker gave at an At Home at her home in Harley Street for the same officers of the I.O.D.C., and many other feminists. The evening was very enjoyable. Other receptions were held, at all of which St. Joan's S.P.A. was represented.

ST. JOAN'S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ALLIANCE.

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