

# OUR MONTHLY.

A

## RELIGIOUS AND LITERARY MAGAZINE.

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### THE THEBAN LEGION.

BY PROF. WM. M. BLACKBURN.

#### CHAPTER II.

##### THE ANXIETIES OF MAURICE.

“ONE hour with Victor might settle my doubts,” said Maurice, the Centurion, as he gazed from a high mountain on the western border of Persia. He had learned the Gospel from Victor, and looked to him as a guide in matters of Christian duty. And now he was far away from his best earthly adviser. Around him were the tents of the Roman legions, covering the mountain. Almost in his view were the desolations made on a rapid march across the native land of Abraham. His backward gaze brought up the vision of cities pillaged, towns on fire, churches in ruins, Christians slaughtered, and bands of people driven from their homes to weep and starve in wintry wilds. He knew that other Christians eastward were in dread of outrage from their advancing enemy, and churches, whose history ran back quite to Apostolic days, were exposed to the spoiler’s avarice and fury. No wonder that Maurice felt his soul revolt.

“It is hard enough,” said he, “to fight the pagan foes of my country, but to slay my brethren in the faith, as we did at Edessa, is more than I can

bear. Never again, without resistance, will I see a Christian woman cut to pieces, while clinging to her daughter whom Galerius would make his slave.”

Was it right for him to serve in the army? Could he in honor leave it? Should he desert and risk the terrors of capture, or thenceforth be a vagabond in a strange land? Must he march against the Christians of Persia? These were the questions that troubled his mind. He lifted his eyes to heaven, asking God to give him wisdom, and deliver His people from the woes of war. “Let my right hand wither,” said he, “if it draw the sword upon one of Christ’s flock.” Jehovah would prove the shield of his Church in Persia, and turn back the pitiless invader.

An old warrior was seated upon the frosted grass eating his supper. His rations were stale bacon and hard peas. He cared for nothing better. A coarse purple robe marked him from other soldiers. Certain Persian ambassadors were brought before him, and were told, “This is the Emperor.” They bowed pompously to Carus, the successor of Probus.

They were astonished to find him so rough, and so devoid of courtly style and luxury. They began their speeches. Their “great king” had sent them

## THE NOTABLE WOMEN OF CHRISTIANITY. No. 1.

BY PROF. L. J. HALSEY, D. D.

## HELENA, THE MOTHER OF CONSTANTINE.

AT a time when the public mind is so intensely turned upon woman—her capability, dignity, influence and true position in the social scale—it will not be deemed out of place to call attention to some of the distinguished names that have adorned her annals in the past. It is always safe to be guided by the lessons of history. What the woman of the present ought to be, and what the coming woman will be, are problems which may, perhaps, be best elucidated by knowing what the historical woman has been.

Who are the notable women of Christianity? At first sight it may not seem easy to determine. There is a bright firmament overarching all the night of past history; and it is filled with many stars of the first magnitude. For eighteen centuries woman has acted her part in the onward movement of the world. Nor has it been an inconsiderable one. But her highest distinction has been won, her brightest record made, in connection with the Church of Christ. It is in virtue of her Christian character that woman lives and shines in all modern history. It is Christianity that has put her on the throne, and invested her with queenly powers. The glory she has attained outside of the church, or of the church's influence, is as nothing compared with that spiritual glory which encircles her brow as a Christian. The inauguration of Christianity is, indeed, the greatest event in the annals of woman—dividing, as nothing else does, her career into two grand epochs—on one side, a drama of increasing gloom and despair, on the other, a new world of beauty and divinity, full of promise and immortal hope. It was not with-

out a deep significance that woman was present amid all the scenes that marked the incarnation of the Son of God, and, at last, lingered so lovingly around the cross and the sepulcher. It was but the foreshadowing of her true mission and destiny thenceforward to the end of the world. It was the beginning of those ministries of love and mercy, and the recognition of that equality, elevation and dignity, that should evermore make woman an essential element in the problem of civilization.

Christianity, therefore, ever since Christianity began, may justly claim as its own, all, or nearly all, the women who have played a conspicuous part in the annals of modern history, whether distinguished for brilliant genius, for personal beauty, for exalted station, or for the sterling virtues of character. It is with eminent propriety that Mrs. Hale, in her beautiful work, entitled, "Woman's Record," has drawn the line of division at the birth of Christ. Of the notable women before the advent, she has given about two hundred examples—many of them necessarily brief and imperfect biographies, fading away in the dim and shadowy light of antiquity, while others stand out on the clearer light of Bible history. Of those who have lived since the advent, and for the most part are properly the women of Christianity, the number in this record rises to almost two thousand. It is a noble monument, and the author deserves well of her fair countrywomen. Though in so great a multitude, the sketches of individual character are far from being complete, yet we know of no other single volume which gives so interesting and satisfactory an account of what woman has been and has done.

In preparing a short series of arti-

cles for this Magazine, it will be our aim, to single from among the most prominent characters, those women who may be regarded as somewhat representative—representative, either of the age in which they lived, or of some great idea to which their lives were devoted, or of some grand work of beneficence and heroism performed by them, or perhaps of some noble type of piety which they illustrated. And with this view, it seems proper that Helena, the mother of the great Emperor Constantine, should head the list. She lived at that important transition period, during which the Roman world was gradually, but surely, changing from heathenism to Christianity; and she had the happiness of seeing the fierce and bloody persecutions, which, for ages, had sought to exterminate the church, all give way under the reign of her own son, to the public and universal recognition of Christianity as the religion of the Empire. This great change, from the relation in which she stood to the Emperor, and from the relation in which she had hitherto stood to Christianity, as an early convert and a life-long defender, had the effect of making her the most distinguished and influential lady of the Roman world. There were other distinguished women of whose piety we know more, as Monica, the mother of Augustine, and Paula, the friend of Jerome, of a later day, and the noble martyrs, Perpetua, Felicitas, Agnes, and Anastasia of earlier times, who sealed their testimony for Jesus with their blood; but no one, when we consider her exalted position, her ardent devotion to the church, and her vast influence over her own, and the following ages, is so fully entitled, as Helena, to stand as the representative woman of these early centuries.

In consideration of her great services to the church, not less than her piety, she holds a place among the canonized saints of the Romish calendar, and, with the exception of New Testament characters, she is probably the earliest woman admitted to that honor, who had not died a martyr's death. And, as a consequence of this idola-

trous exaltation in the Romish Church, as in other instances, she has not, perhaps, received from Protestants, that veneration to which her eminent virtues and services would entitle her. But we must not hold her responsible for abuses which extravagant admirers afterward practiced and justified in her name.

Like some other world-renowned female characters, Helena owed her elevation to her beauty. It was not, however, as the result shows, beauty alone that raised her to greatness. The charm of a fine person furnished the occasion, served as the very ladder of ascent, by which she passed from the humble obscurity of a country village to the splendor of the capital and the imperial court. But there were other qualities, more substantial than personal beauty, which laid the basis of her character and of her singular good fortune. Very little is known of her early life. She was of obscure origin, was born about the year 248, A. D., in the little village of Drepanum, in Bithynia, a province of Asia Minor, bordering the Black Sea, where she appears for the first time in history, as the daughter of an innkeeper. Here Constantius Chlorus, then a general in the armies of the Empire, met with her, in passing from the capital to the eastern provinces, and, attracted by her rare beauty, married her.

Of this union Constantine was born; and for eighteen years the fair Helena enjoyed the companionship of her warlike husband, and her promising son, who seemed to inherit the stern soldierly virtues of his father. But at the end of this period came a change, which sadly reversed her rising fortunes. Constantius was associated with the Emperor Diocletian and exalted to the rank of a Cæsar of the Empire, being required, as the condition, to divorce his wife, Helena, and to marry Theodora, the daughter of the other emperor, Maximian. And thus, says Gibbon, the splendor of an imperial alliance reduced both Helena and her son to a state of disgrace and humiliation. Instead of following the fortunes of Constantius in the west, the

youthful Constantine determined to remain in the service of Diocletian, signalized his valor in the wars of Persia and Egypt, and gradually rose to the honorable station of a tribune of the first order. "The figure of Constantine," says the historian, "was tall and majestic; he was dextrous in all his exercises, intrepid in war, affable in peace; in his whole conduct the active spirit of youth was tempered by habitual prudence; and while his mind was engrossed by ambition, he appeared cold and insensible to the allurements of pleasure."

But where was Helena during this period of humiliation, and what was she doing? History does not inform us. She was doubtless in retirement, abiding her time, and watching the fortunes of her rising son, between whom and herself there existed through life the most implicit confidence and the most affectionate attachment. If we might venture a conjecture, where the authorities leave us in the dark, it would be, that it was during this period of retirement and misfortune, that Helena became a convert to the Christian faith, and found, in the Gospel of Christ, that rest for the soul, and consolation in trouble, which she had failed to find in the world. Eusebius, the Father of Church History, in his *Life of Constantine*, tells us, indeed, that Constantine was first converted, and became the instrument of converting his mother. But Theodoret, perhaps of equal authority, reverses this statement, attributing the conversion of the Emperor to the direct influence of his mother, who had long been a christian. Comparing these contradictory statements together, the learned Church Historian, Dr. Mosheim, in his *Historical Commentaries*, makes the following decision: "I have pronounced Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great, a christian; for I do not hesitate to admit, as true, what Theodoret states, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, that she instilled into her son the elements of piety. From this opinion I am not induced to recede, by a passage in Eusebius, in his *Life of Constantine*, from which learned men

would prove that *he* converted *her* from the worship of the gods to the Christian religion. For that passage may be very suitably understood of his inspiring her with a desire to manifest, by actions and various works, her piety toward God." The conclusion therefore is, that Helena was a christian mother, and exerted her influence as such upon Constantine, possibly from his infancy, but in all probability long before he became a christian. If so, how vast the influence of that single mother, and unjustly discarded wife, upon the destinies of all Christendom!

But whatever may have been the sorrows and the conflicts of Helena, during the weary years, in which she waited in retirement, while her son was winning his upward way to the mastery of the world, it is evident that Divine Providence was preparing both her and him for the coming destiny. At length the hour arrived, which was to change the fortunes of the discarded wife, and change still more the condition of the long persecuted and suffering church. In the year 324, Constantine, having already espoused the Christian faith, in consequence, as was alleged, of a remarkable vision he had seen in the skies, and having vanquished all other aspirants to the imperial purple, became sole master of the reunited Roman world, and firmly established in the throne of Empire, at Constantinople; or New Rome, as it was then called. The accession of her son to the empire at once drew Helena from her obscurity. She was honored with the title of Augusta, and received at court with all the dignities due the mother of an emperor. Her religious character, now fully tried and matured in the school of reflection and of life's experience, along with her good sense, sagacity, and political wisdom, made her a fitting counselor to her exalted son; nor did she hesitate to admonish him when she disapproved his conduct. Their common conversion to the faith of Christ, their similar experience of the conflicts of life, only riveted more closely the ties which bound them together: and through all the changes and vicissitudes of the empire, even

down to old age, Helena enjoyed the love and confidence of her son.

She was already far advanced in life when Constantine ascended the throne. And now occurred, what, in its results, may be considered by far the most important event of her life—her pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and her alleged discovery there of the cross on which Christ had suffered. Already Christian pilgrims, here and there, had begun to turn their faces toward the Holy Land. It can not be doubted, that the motives which led Helena to make this pilgrimage, were pure and noble, springing from a holy love to Christ. The feeling was doubtless of the same nature with that which now prompts so many Christian travelers, of our own day, to visit these sacred places, and even to bring away with them some memorials of the spot. To those who lived within three centuries of the time when the wonderful events occurred, the feeling must have been more intense than it is now, and far more likely to be gratified by the sight of existing monuments. The feeling, which led the venerable Father Jerome and others, a little later, not only to make the visit, but to take up their residence there, took possession of the bosom of Helena, and was fully favored by Constantine. In the year 326, the year after the meeting of the famous Council of Nice, she made the visit, and remained some time.

But the consequences of that visit were momentous. It could not be otherwise than that the example of the most distinguished Christian lady of the empire should find imitators: and resulting, as it was believed, in the wonderful discovery of the true cross, and the bringing away of a part of that sacred relic, it powerfully stimulated other travelers to turn their feet toward the Holy City. Thus early and innocently was inaugurated that system of pilgrimages and search for holy places, which, in after ages, became a perfect passion, leading to the most absurd superstitions, filling the churches of Christendom with every species of sacred relic, gradually building up one of the most lucrative trades of the

Church of Rome, and culminating at last in the wars of the Crusaders. First beginnings are always of interest; especially when their endings reach so far and wide, as they do in this case. This queenly mother of Constantine and the Church little dreamed of the excesses to which thousands would go, even down to our own day, under the plea of her pious example.

The historians are not fully agreed as to her agency in this visit to Jerusalem and its results. Some, as Eusebius, attribute all that was done to Constantine; while others, as Theodoret and Socrates, make Helena the prime mover. But it is manifest on comparing the accounts, that the mother and son, in the whole matter, acted in entire concert. He not only approved of her visit, but gave her unlimited permission to draw on his treasures for whatever funds might be needed; which she was not slow to use in the erection of several splendid churches in Palestine, and in large benefactions to the poor.

Let us now turn to the account of the visit, as given by Socrates, who lived in the century after Constantine, and wrote the history of the Church, from the point at which Eusebius left it, down to his own times, A. D. 445. His narrative is substantially as follows: Helena, being divinely directed by dreams, went to Jerusalem; but finding that which was once Jerusalem lying desolate, according to the prophet Isaiah, as a "lodge in a garden of cucumbers," she sought carefully the sepulcher of Christ, from which he arose after his burial; and after much difficulty, by God's help, she discovered it. What the cause of the difficulty was, may be explained in few words. After the death of Christ, those who embraced the faith greatly venerated this tomb; but those who hated Christianity covered the spot with a mound of earth, erected on it a temple to Venus, and set up her image there; endeavoring to abolish the recollection of the place. This succeeded for a long time; but at length it became known to the Emperor's mother, who caused the

statue to be thrown down, the earth to be removed, and the ground to be entirely cleared, when three crosses were found in the sepulcher. One of these was that blessed cross on which Christ had hung; the other two were those on which the two thieves, crucified with him, had died. With these was also found the tablet of Pilate, on which he had inscribed, in various characters, that the Christ, who was crucified, was King of the Jews. Since, however, it was doubtful which was the cross they were in search of, the Emperor's mother was not a little distressed. But from this trouble she was soon relieved by Macarius, Bishop of Jerusalem, whose faith solved the doubt; for he sought a sign from God, and obtained it.

The sign was this: A certain woman of the neighborhood (others speak of her as a noble lady of Jerusalem), who had long been diseased, was now just at the point of death. The bishop, therefore, ordered that each of the crosses should be applied to the dying woman, believing that she would be healed on being touched by the precious cross. Nor was he disappointed in his expectation. For the two crosses having been applied, which were not the Lord's, the woman still continued in a dying state. But when the third, which was the true cross, touched her, she was immediately healed and restored to her former strength; and in this manner was the genuine cross discovered. The Emperor's mother then erected over the place of the sepulcher a magnificent church, and named it *New Jerusalem*, having built it opposite to that old and deserted city. There she left a portion of the cross, inclosed in a silver case, as a memorial to those who might wish to see it: the other part she sent to the Emperor, who, being persuaded that the city would be perfectly secure where that relic should be preserved, privately inclosed it in his own statue, which, adds the historian, "stands on a large column of porphyry in the forum, called *Constantine's*, at *Constantinople*."

The author then goes on to relate,

that although he had given the foregoing account from report, yet almost all the inhabitants of *Constantinople*, at that day, affirmed its truth. Moreover, *Constantine* caused the nails with which Christ's hands were fastened to the cross (for his mother having found these also in the sepulcher, had sent them) to be converted into bridle-bits and a helmet, which he used in his military expeditions. The Emperors supplied all materials for the construction of the churches, and wrote to *Macarius*, the bishop, to expedite these edifices. When the Emperor's mother had completed the *New Jerusalem*, she reared another church, not at all inferior, over the cave at *Bethlehem*, where *Christ* was born. Nor did she stop, but built a third on the mount of his *Ascension*. So devoutly was she affected in these matters, that she would pray in the company of women, and inviting the virgins enrolled in the register of the churches to a repast, she would bring the dishes to the table, serving them herself. She was also very munificent to the churches and to the poor; and having completed a life of piety, she died when about eighty years old. Her remains were conveyed to *New Rome*, and deposited in the imperial sepulchers. In honor of her character, *Constantine* raised her native village to the rank of a city, and called it *Helinopolis*.

Such is the most reliable account which antiquity gives us of the work of *Helena* at *Jerusalem*. And this is evidently too full of superstition and fable to be received with much credit, now, though it passed for many centuries as veritable history. This story of the finding of the cross received many additions and embellishments in subsequent ages. It was at length reduced to a sort of drama, under the title of the "Mystery Play," or "Invention of the Cross;" and as *D'Aubigne* states in his work on the "Reformation in the Time of Calvin," was performed on great public occasions, as a part of the imposing ceremonial of the Church of *Rome*. In process of time, not merely the three churches which had certainly

been built by Helena in Palestine, but thirty others claimed the honor of being built by her munificence.

The portrait of Helena, in Mrs. Hale's book, is one of unusual interest. It is taken from a picture found on a Greek manuscript of the ninth century. The dress is antique and simple; the face, which is expressive and attractive, has a slight Grecian cast, and is almost modern enough to belong to a lady of England or America at the present day. With its large lustrous eye, its ample brow, its finely-rounded cheek, and inclination of the head forward and downward, it is a face in which we read, at once, thoughtfulness, gentleness, benevolence, earnestness, and a touch of pensive sadness. The hair, which is long and full, is festooned and decked with ornaments—a portion of it braided and hanging over the neck and shoulder, but the larger part bound up and concealed by a broad band richly studded with pearls and other jewels, which encircles the fair brow like a coronet. Above this encircling band the head is

covered by a small black cloth cap, which terminates at the top in a low cross. Altogether it is a picture to be studied; and if it correctly embodies the conception which the artists of the ancient church formed of the character of Helena, it is itself an interesting relic.

After all it is but little we know of Helena, but all we do know is good. And we have thought that some account of the most exalted lady of Christian antiquity would be read with interest by our fair countrywomen of the present day. She is one of those characters about whom we know just enough to make us wish to know more. We wonder that she has not furnished a theme to the writers of the historical romance. With such a character, and in such a field, the pen of a Bulwer, or a Sir Walter Scott, if backed by the learning of Gibbon, and baptized with the evangelical spirit of Hannah More, might produce one of the most interesting and instructive books in all literature.

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“REJOICE EVERMORE.”\*

BY THE LATE MRS. LYDIA H. SIGOURNEY.

**R**EJOICE, true follower of the Lord,  
If not in earthly gain,  
Requited love, exulting power,  
Or fashion's gorgeous train,—

Yet in the work of prayer and praise,  
In faith that never dies,  
In patient undelusive hope  
That builds above the skies.

And when the solemn Angel comes,  
That blessed, loving guide,  
Who opes the spirit-gate, that leads  
To the Redeemer's side,—

Lay thy cold hand, without a fear,  
On his dark wing, and soar  
Where saints and seraphs round the Throne  
Rejoice forevermore.

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\*These beautiful verses were written after hearing a New Year's discourse upon these words of St. Paul, by a very distinguished minister of our church, and were sent to him by the authoress. Her manuscript, neatly and delicately written, has come into our possession, with the sermon, and we believe these lines have never appeared in print.