

Madame Guyon.

AT Montargis, a town some fifty miles from Paris, in the year 1648, was born one who was destined to influence the leaders of religious thought, not only in France, but in other countries on the continent of Europe. In early life this child, whose name was Jeanne Marie Bouvières de la Mothe, was afflicted and feeble in health, but she grew up fairly strong, and, as she afterwards said, "life proved victorious over death." When quite a girl she married M. Guyon, a man of considerable wealth, and though her husband's relations behaved unkindly to her in many ways, he himself was no sharer in their behaviour; indeed her married life, apart from the unfortunate experiences to which reference has been made, appears to have been happy. On the death of M. Guyon we are told, her life was for a time quite desolate.

In order to understand the circumstances in which Madame Guyon was placed we must know something of the times in which she lived. The court of Louis XIV was not only profligate, but was allowed by the leaders of religion to exercise its evil influence without any attempt to oppose it. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that Madame Guyon, with her exalted views of life and its duties, should come under the ban of some of the dignitaries of the Roman Catholic Church. In the forest of Vincennes, near Paris, she was incarcerated in a castle used both as a military fortress and a State prison. But the walls which enclosed her had no terrors to a heart that recognized the presence of God as distinctly in sorrow as in joy.

It is curious to observe that Madame Guyon's captivity was a source of disagreement between two great leaders of thought of the day—Bossuet and Fénelon. With the intention of defending Madame Guyon, Fénelon wrote a work entitled *The Maxims of the Saints*; on the other hand, Bossuet never relinquished his attack on the imprisoned lady. But the authorities found it advisable for the sake of her health to transfer their prisoner to the Bastille, and, subsequently, allowed her conditional freedom. But the end was not distant, and on June 9, 1717, her death took place at the age of sixty-nine.

From this brief review of Madame Guyon's life we notice that

she possessed what may be termed "a strong propension towards God," and an emotional susceptibility to religious influences. Her book, *A Method of Prayer*, was to some "a light to lighten," to others "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence." Her teaching of the inward light could not be understood by the theologian, but she could sing—

A little bird am I
Shut from the fields of air,
And in my cage I sit and sing
To Him who placed me there;
Well pleased a prisoner to be
Because, my God, it pleaseth Thee.

In her *Method of Prayer* the question of perfectness is discussed, and is a résumé of the doctrine of the reception of the Holy Spirit, the new life being the consummation of the old, and the beginning of the new like the seed which is formed in the blossom of the plant. "Jesus Christ," says Madame Guyon, "often giveth us some insight into His states after a very particular manner. Then it behoveth us to receive them, and to suffer our minds to be applied to anything that pleaseth Him, taking equally all the dispositions that He shall see fit to place us in, not choosing one of ourselves, but only this to continue always with Him, to desire Him affectionately and to empty ourselves before Him, receiving with an evenness of mind all that He doth give us, whethèr light or darkness, fruitfulness or barrenness, strength or weakness, sweetness or bitterness, temptation, distraction, pains, troubles or doubtings; nothing of all these should stop us."

It is well for us to remember that the principles of mysticism are the same to-day as they were in the sixteenth century. Dr. Rendell Harris has referred to Madame Guyon as "the teacher from whom I have received more help and guidance in the things of God than from any other person." In her *Method of Prayer* the question of perfectness is discussed, and is a résumé of the doctrine of the reception of the Holy Spirit.

The direct personal realization of God in the soul, which is so characteristic of Madame Guyon, is summed up in the following words: "The soul that is faithful in exercising itself, as hath been said, in love and affection to its God, is all amazed when it feels how by little and little He gets the entire possession of it. His

presence now becometh so easy to the soul that it can no more be without it : it has acquired a habit of this as well as prayer. The soul feels the calm and serenity prevailing upon it by degrees : the silence maketh up its whole prayer, and God giveth it an infused love, which is the beginning of an unspeakable happiness."

J. C. WRIGHT.

