

PETTICOAT INFLUENCE.

THE GREAT POWER FOR GOOD THAT IT HAS EXERCISED ON MODERN STATES.

"The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat." It was thus that Adam endeavored to excuse himself in the eyes of the Almighty for having tasted the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and this Biblical story, which has its counterpart in the sacred writings of almost every existing creed and form of belief, is recalled to mind by the articles which are now being published in England ascribing all the mistakes and disasters that characterized the early stages of the South African war to petticoat influence. From time immemorial there has always been a certain degree of association between Mars and Venus. But one is tempted to ask whether there is not just a trifle too much of the old Adam in holding women responsible for every weakness that has been laid bare in the military system of Great Britain since the outbreak of the conflict with the Transvaal.

The general public in this country have no idea of the extent to which the fair sex in the United Kingdom are being assailed just at the present moment, and one important London paper, which is popularly believed to be owned by Cecil Rhodes, and to be inspired by its former editor, George Wyndham, now Under Secretary of State for War, goes so far as to state editorially that the denunciation by John Knox of the "monstrous regiment of women" was "by far the happiest utterance" of that vigorous divine. The paper goes on to add that in the same way as the women of his day were a barrier to the regeneration of his country, petticoat influence to-day is not only responsible for every defect of the British War Department and of the English Army, but likewise an obstruction to its improvement—an obstruction which demands immediate removal. Finally this article concludes by the solemn declaration that "there has never been a moment when feminine influence was more greatly dominant at the War Office in Pall Mall than at present."

Yet petticoat influence is nothing new, nor is the British army the only one where it is dominant, and there is something peculiarly disrespectful, not to say disloyal, in thus denouncing the role which woman is asserted to play in the military affairs of Great Britain, when it is borne in mind that Queen Victoria has for more than sixty years past figured at the head of the roster of the English army as its chief. Petticoat influence, in fact, predominates all the world over, and although it is constantly being denounced, sometimes by those who have been vanquished thereby, and on other occasions by weak vessels who endeavor to saddle it with the burden of their own mistakes, yet it always subsists, as it has subsisted from the beginning of the world, and is stronger than ever at the close of the nineteenth century.

TWO GREATEST EMPIRES UNDER WOMEN.

The two greatest empires, comprising between them some seven hundred million human beings, are subject to the powerful, and assuredly predominant, influence of two aged women, one of them Queen Victoria, who has exercised that influence for more than sixty years, while the other is the Dowager Empress of China, who for at least four decades has ruled the so-called Middle Kingdom with a rod of iron. No one will dream of questioning the extent of the influence exercised by these two old women, and while the progress of Great and Greater Britain under the beneficent rule of Queen Victoria has been altogether phenomenal, China is certainly no worse off to-day, but, on the contrary, is in a

far superior position to what she was forty years ago, when the Empire was rent asunder by the Taiping Rebellion, while not only Canton, the southern capital, but even Peking, the "Forbidden City," was occupied by foreign troops, and the Summer Palace of the rulers of the Celestial Empire was given over to plunder and to fire. If China still preserves to-day her independence and has not succumbed to the attacks of the various foreign Powers it is mainly due to the statecraft of the old Empress, who has defeated in turn the cleverest diplomats that the Western nations have sent to Peking, while if she has dealt harshly with the so-called Reform party, it is because she is shrewd enough to introduce Western innovations, not with a rush, but slowly and with care, after having convinced both herself and her people that they will prove to the advantage of China, and not to its detriment. Her recognition of the Roman Catholic Church as one of the State religions of the Empire; her acceptance of the presentation of a Bible from Protestant missionary societies; her action in intrusting the most important administration of the Empire to an Irishman, in the person of Sir Robert Hart, who for thirty years has been at the head of the Imperial customs, and her recent decision to remove the great wall of China as an obstruction to trade and as useless for defence all go to indicate that she is a woman far less reactionary and bigoted than is asserted.

In order to realize what the destruction of the great wall by dynamite means, it must be understood that its earliest sections were built 3,300 years before Christ, and that it was completed about two hundred years before His appearance on earth. It, therefore, took thirty centuries to build, and has been the pride of the Mongolians of countless generations.

It had become part of their religion, and had the suggestion of its destruction come from a foreigner the Chinese people would have risen as one man to call for his blood. But the de-

cision emanates from the Dowager Empress of China, and no one dares to dissent, an interesting and striking object lesson being thus furnished by her Chinese Majesty of China's transition in a few years from superstitious stagnation to practical progress, and to sure if slow development.

RUSSIA'S PETTICOAT INFLUENCE.

For the last three reigns petticoat influence has predominated in Russia, and the country has been vastly benefited, instead of injured thereby. It was in the salon of Princess Yourieffska, themorganatic wife of Alexander II, that the constitution with which that Czar proposed to endow his people was drawn up, being signed there on the morning of the day that he was blown to pieces by the Nihilists. In fact, it was his assassination alone which prevented Russia from being endowed to-day with the same form of popular government as other European countries. His liberation of the serfs seventeen years earlier was largely attributable to the influence of his first wife, the Hess-born Czarina Marie. To the influence which the present Empress-Mother exercised over her husband, Alexander III, Russia is indebted for the peace which it enjoyed throughout his reign, for the purity of its Court, and for the example given of domestic happiness and sterling honesty in public, as well as in private life.

No one doubts the influence of Queen Victoria's favorite granddaughter, the present Czarina, upon Emperor Nicholas, and the latter's efforts in behalf of peace, his avowed determination to remain at all costs on friendly terms with England, to a syndicate of whose people he has just intrusted the management and development of 8,000 square miles of his private domains, and his liberal and humane reforms are mainly due to the happy influence of his consort, who, though born a German Princess, was reared in England and still talks every language except English with a foreign

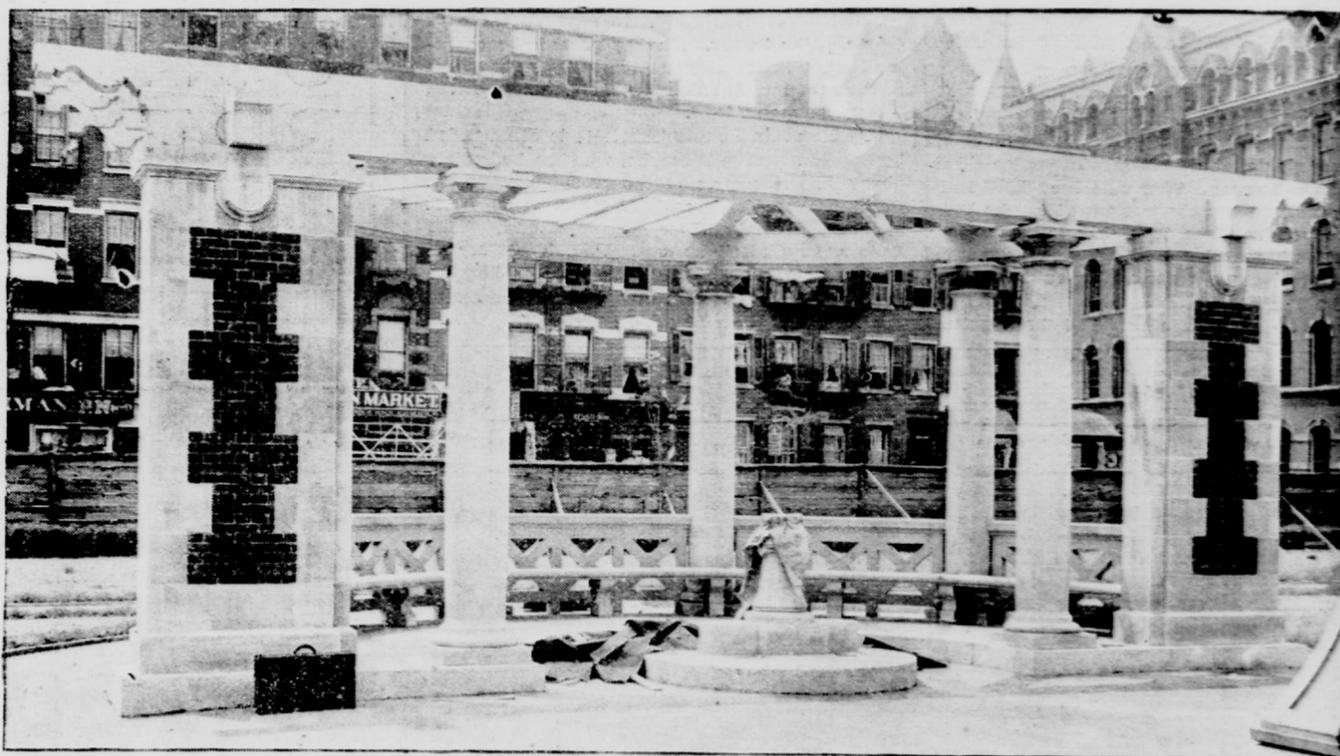
accent. She is a woman of great intelligence, strength of character and tact, imbued with progressive ideas and with a profound horror for everything that is unjust, ungenerous and mean. Her husband is devoted to her—too much so to suit the views of some of his pan-Slav advisers—and, though nominally an autocrat, he has far less absolute power than that with which he is credited. Yet he may be relied upon as long as he lives to yield to the gentle and enlightened influence of his consort. Petticoat influence has assuredly never done any harm to Russia. On the contrary, she owes much—far more than people imagine—to her Empresses, since even the dissolute Catherine the Great contributed materially to the evolution of the Empire from a semi-barbaric state into a civilized Power.

To the late Empress of Austria Hungary is largely indebted for its home rule and status as a virtually independent kingdom, bound to Austria only by dynastic ties. That which the Magyar patriots failed to obtain in 1849 by means of fighting of the most sanguinary character Elizabeth secured for Hungary a few years after her marriage through the exercise of her influence on the Emperor and his advisers, a fact to which Francis Joseph has borne frequent and eloquent witness. And it is likewise to her personal intervention that the Austro-Hungarian army is indebted for the abolition of those punishments of a corporal character, especially the terrible running of the gantlet, which were as frequent as they were degrading, until she persuaded her consort to forbid them. Neither Austria nor Hungary can therefore ever complain of having suffered from feminine influence. On the contrary, they have at all time benefited thereby, since even in the last century the Hapsburg Empire attained the climax of its grandeur under Maria Theresa.

POPULARITY OF QUEEN MARGHERITA.

Foreigners can scarcely realize the extent to which King Humbert is indebted to the popularity of his charming consort for his presence on the throne. It would be ridiculous to allege that the Italian people as a whole are loyal to the House of Savoy, which can rely only upon the allegiance of its former kingdom of Piedmont. Elsewhere Republican sentiments or else affection for the former dynasties prevail. But no matter what his sentiments toward the King and toward his heir, every Italian has a good word to say for Queen Margherita, this too, in spite of the fact that she is generally credited with having, through the assistance of her mother, the widowed Duchess of Genoa, sister of the present King of Saxony, brought King Humbert into the Triple Alliance with the object of assuring the succession of her only son to the throne. Perhaps the prettiest proof of the hold which Queen Margherita has on the hearts of the Italian people, both at home and abroad, is the fact that the emblem of the "Irredenta" and of the other societies which have for their aim the reunion of the Italian speaking provinces of Austria to the Italian kingdom is that particular flower which bears the name of Queen Margherita.

Of the influence which the present German Empress exercises over her husband I have frequently written in these letters. It has been of the happiest character, as concerns not only the Kaiser himself, but also the German people. It is to her that is due the extraordinary religious revival that has taken place throughout the length and breadth of the Empire during the last twelve years, and if to-day piety is fashionable and philanthropy regarded as the most certain road to imperial favor, it is thanks to Auguste Victoria. So happy, indeed, is the influence which she exercises over her somewhat impulsive and hotheaded husband that his constitutional advisers, his family and his subjects all entertain a certain amount of apprehension and even anxiety as to what he may do or not do when she is not by his side to temper his impetuosity, to soothe his irritation



THE NORTH EXEDRA OR RESTING PAVILION, HAMILTON FISH PARK.



INTERIOR OF HAMILTON FISH PARK GYMNASIUM.