

M. B. SYNGE

***GREAT ENGLISHWOMEN:
AN HISTORICAL
READING BOOK FOR
SCHOOLS***

M. B. Synge

Great Englishwomen: An Historical Reading Book for Schools

EAN 8596547368465

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



TABLE OF CONTENTS

[QUEEN BERTHA \(died 606\)](#).

[MAUDE THE GOOD \(1080-1118\)](#).

[ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE \(1122-1204\)](#).

[PHILIPPA OF HAINAULT \(1313-1369\)](#).

[MARGARET OF ANJOU \(1429-1480\)](#).

[THE LADY MARGARET \(1441-1509\)](#).

[MARGARET ROPER \(1501?-1544\)](#).

[LADY JANE GREY \(1537-1554\)](#).

[PRINCESS ELIZABETH \(1596-1662\)](#).

[LADY RACHEL RUSSELL \(1636-1723\)](#).

[ANGELICA KAUFMANN \(1741-1807\)](#).

[HANNAH MORE \(1745-1833\)](#).

[ELIZABETH FRY \(1780-1845\)](#).

[MARY SOMERVILLE \(1780-1872\)](#).

[ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING \(1809-1861\)](#).

[FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE \(born 1820\)](#).

QUEEN BERTHA (died 606).

[Table of Contents](#)

Bertha, our first Christian queen, lived a very quiet, uneventful life; history does not record her sayings, nor does it tell us that she performed any great public acts; she made no special mark on the world at large. But by her good example to others, by her gentle influence on those around her, she stands out as the one bright light shining from out the thick darkness of those heathen days.

She was the only child of the king of Paris, but there is more to say about her grandmother Radigund than about either her father or mother; for Bertha had been taught to love the name of Radigund from a little child.

Radigund was the wife of a king of part of France. This king had taken her prisoner with her little brother in a war, but, finding her very beautiful and of royal blood, he adopted her. As she was a heathen, he had her baptized, and then had her taught till she was old enough to become his wife. Then poor Radigund was very unhappy; the king her husband was stern, rough, and cruel, though he loved her very much, and she escaped unknown to a distant convent. With her own hands she cut off her long and beautiful hair, and leaving her royal dress and jewels, she threw on the cloak of a nun. At last the king discovered her, repented of his harshness toward her, and gave her a large estate, on which she built a convent, and devoted her time to study. It was she who made the convent rules herself, she who gave advice to those who needed it, encouraged the

timid, urged on the slothful, and spoke tenderly to those in trouble.

Radigund brought up her son, Bertha's father, to love the classics and old writings, and he became a wise and good king. So when he had a child of his own, he determined that she should be brought up in a convent, away from the world, as he had been. We do not know where Bertha was taught (it may have been under her grandmother Radigund), and we hear nothing more of her till history tells us that Ethelbert, the king of Kent, married the gentle Bertha, daughter of the king of Paris.

Now Ethelbert was a young Saxon king, who had taken part in governing from the age of sixteen; his friends and servants all looked up to him and were ready to share his dangers and his triumphs. The kings and princes of England at this early time were always trying to increase their domains, and Ethelbert was no exception. The kings were all very jealous of one another, so Ethelbert thought it would be better to look for help outside England. So he visited the king of Paris, to ask his advice on the subject. There he met Bertha, and was greatly attracted by the good and beautiful princess. The king of Paris for his part liked the brave boy-king of Kent, and was pleased with the idea of a marriage between him and his daughter Bertha. But in 567 he died suddenly, and Bertha went to live with her uncle, who now became king of Paris.

Now her uncle would not hear of her proposed marriage with the king of Kent, because Bertha was a Christian and Ethelbert a heathen. But Ethelbert loved Bertha very much, and he said if he might marry her, he would allow her to

keep her Christian religion, and also to bring over a Christian bishop with her. So the uncle consented, and the Princess Bertha was sent over in great state and honour to the unknown land, to become the queen of Kent.

Her new home was a castle in the town of Canterbury, a palace where the kings of Kent always lived. For it was a splendid hall where the king and queen entertained their friends, and where dancing to the pipe and harp often went on. The queen had a bower in the garden, where she could play the lute and ply the shuttle, and she loved to wander in the gardens with the ladies of the court and watch the flowers growing.

Happy years followed Bertha's marriage; a little son and daughter came to wake up the old castle with their merry voices. They had curious Saxon names, but the little girl was always called "Tata," which means lively, because she was such a bright little child.

On a hill beyond Canterbury stood the little church of St. Martin, which had been restored for the queen's use, and there she went daily, while Ethelbert prayed to his idols in a pagan temple near. Bertha longed for him to become a Christian and to convert the heathen men of Kent, but although he was a good king, anxious to improve the laws and the people, he liked to remain as he was and as his fathers had been before him. At last Bertha's wish was to be fulfilled.

Now some poor little Saxon children had been stolen away from their homes and taken all the way to Rome as slaves. There they were put out in the market-place to be bought by the people. They were very fair, with blue eyes,

light hair, white skins and rosy cheeks, and very different to the Roman children, who were dark.

While the children were there a priest passed by.

“From what country do these slaves come,” he asked.

“They are Angles,” answered the slave-dealer.

“Not Angles, but Angels,” replied the priest, with pity in his voice, “with faces so angel-like.”

Then he asked more about them and their country, and when he heard it was a heathen country, a longing came over him to go and teach the people to be Christians. When the Romans chose him for their bishop, or, as they called him, their Pope or Father, he remembered the little heathen slaves from the heathen land, and he chose a man called Augustine and forty monks to go over to England and teach the people better things.

As Augustine passed through France, he heard that Queen Bertha was already a Christian, and the news made him very hopeful. So he and the monks landed on the Isle of Thanet off Kent, and sent a message to Ethelbert to say they were there and would like to see the king. And a few days after Ethelbert and Bertha went to the Isle of Thanet to meet Augustine and his men. They wore monks' dress: loose black gowns, with wide sleeves and hood, and their heads were closely shaven on the top. The king and queen sat on the ground and watched the long array of monks coming nearer, while the words of their litany became more and more distinct. At the king's command they sat down, while Augustine stood and talked to the king about leaving his idols and letting his subjects become Christians.

“Your words are fair,” answered the king, “but they are new and of doubtful meaning.” Then he went on to say, that though he could not give up his old customs suddenly, yet he would allow Augustine to preach to his people; he would give them a house to dwell in and food to eat, and he hoped their mission might succeed. So the little band marched into the heathen city of Canterbury singing as they went. The people were greatly attracted by their teaching, their simple way of living, their plain food, and gentle manners. Augustine and the monks used to go to Queen Bertha’s little church of St. Martin, and pray, sing, preach, and baptize the people, who soon came promising to give up praying to their idols and to become Christians.

At last, one day the King Ethelbert came to the little church on the hill to be baptized, and you may imagine Bertha’s joy as the king of Kent was led to St. Martin’s Church, never more to enter his little pagan temple. Then many followed his example, and before the end of the year ten thousand Saxons were baptized. The king saw what good work these men were doing, and that St. Martin’s Church was not large enough for all, so he told the people to build and repair churches all over his land.

Now Augustine could not preach to all these many people, and he wanted to make new priests to help him. But this he could not do till he was made a bishop himself. So he went to an archbishop in the south of France, and was made a bishop with the Pope’s leave. Very soon after he was made Archbishop of Canterbury, and ever since his time there has been an Archbishop of Canterbury, who is not only head of all the clergy, but the highest subject in the queen’s realm.

Augustine was allowed to ordain twelve bishops to work under him, and to send to York a very trusty bishop, who might ordain twelve more.

Now the old Britons or Welsh were, many of them, already Christians, and Augustine and Ethelbert thought it would be a good plan to make friends with the Welsh bishops. So they all met under a great oak on the border land, but unhappily the Welsh bishops could not agree with them; for, although they were Christians, they did not do everything as Augustine had been used to do at Rome. So they could not help in preaching to the heathen, and Augustine went home again. He began to repair an old church in Canterbury, which is the present Canterbury Cathedral.

He died in 605, and the last time we hear of Queen Bertha is at the opening of a great monastery dedicated to St. Augustine. The king and queen and their son took part in the solemn meeting.

About the rest of Queen Bertha's life history is silent. Her death is supposed to have taken place the same year, but we have no record of the event. She died as quietly as she had lived, leaving us little more to know her by than her influence on the times in which she lived. She was buried in a church named after St. Peter and St. Paul, in a corner called St. Martin's porch, beside St. Augustine, and twelve years later King Ethelbert was laid beside her.

MAUDE THE GOOD (1080-1118).

[Table of Contents](#)

“Maude, the good queen;” “Dame Maude, a kind woman and true;” “The good queen Maude;” “Queen Maude, that’s right well loved England through.” When these are the terms used by the people of her time there is little need to say more about her character.

Born in 1080, she was christened Edith, but as her name was changed to Maude or Matilda, on her marriage, out of compliment to the mother of Henry I., we will call her Maude throughout. Her mother was Margaret, the gentle Queen of Scotland, her father the well-known Malcolm, of whom Shakspeare has written, a mighty king, but a man who could neither read nor write.

When Maude was quite a little girl, she was sent with her sister Mary to live with her aunt Christina, the Abbess of Romsey. Now, although she had no intention of making Maude a nun, her aunt compelled her to wear the nun’s veil; this made the little girl not only very unhappy, but angry, and, whenever her aunt’s back was turned, Maude tore the veil from her head and trampled upon it. One day her father came to the abbey to see his daughters, and he saw Maude wearing the nun’s veil. He was very angry, and, tearing it off her head, he declared that his fair-haired Maude should never be a nun, but that she was to marry Count Alan. It is probable that Malcolm took his two children back to Scotland with him, for the next mention of Maude is beside her mother’s death-bed.

Malcolm had invaded England for the fifth time, when he was slain, together with his eldest son Edward. This was heavy news for Prince Edgar to break to his mother.

“How fares it with the king and my Edward?” asked the dying queen, as her son Edgar entered the room. The young prince was silent, but his sad face spoke more than words.

“I know all—I know all,” sobbed his mother; “but speak the worst.”

“Then your husband and son are both slain!” replied Edgar.

The widowed queen lifted up her hands and eyes to heaven and prayed, and, as the last words were uttered, she died.

Then Maude and Mary were sent back to their aunt Christina to complete their education.

While they were there, the news suddenly burst upon England that William Rufus, the Red King, had been shot by an arrow while hunting in the New Forest, and that his brother Henry intended to be King of England, as Robert the elder brother was away fighting in the Holy Land. Henry said, if the people would only make him king, he would do everything they wished; and, when they at last consented, he pleased them all by marrying Maude, the daughter of good Queen Margaret, and descended from Alfred the Great, whose memory all England loved.

At first Christina the abbess refused to allow her niece to marry the king, and, knowing what a bad man Henry was, Maude refused too. But at last, commanded by her brother Edgar, urged by the people, entreated by the king, she consented. So they were married on November 11th, in 1100, and Archbishop Anselm preached a very celebrated sermon to the crowds who had come to see the royal

wedding. Then Maude was crowned Queen of England, to the joy of the people.

She was very kind to the poor and to all around her; every day in Lent she went barefoot, clothed in haircloth, to wash the feet of the poorest people, after the custom of her mother. She had hospitals built, new roads made, and bridges over the rivers.

One day she was riding on horseback through a ford on the river Lea, with her train of attendants. The river was flooded, and the current sweeping along so fast, that they were in danger of perishing, and out of gratitude for her life, Queen Maude caused the first arched bridge ever known in England to be built.

In 1102, a little son was born, and named William, after his grandfather William the Conqueror.

Now Robert, the Duke of Normandy, Henry's elder brother, had returned from his wars in the Holy Land, and finding it useless to try and assert his rights in England, he settled in Normandy. But he was very idle; he had spent all his money; it is even said that he had to lie in bed sometimes, for want of clothes to put on, and the Norman people were so unhappy, that they sent for Henry to come and help them. So leaving his wife Maude to govern England, Henry took an army to Normandy, and a battle was fought in which Duke Robert and his little son were taken prisoners.

It was just forty years after the battle of Hastings; then the Normans came over and conquered the English; now the English went over, and Normandy was conquered. Of course Henry had to spend a good deal of time over there, to