

## "LEADERS OF THE MIDDLE AGES."

### PROFESSOR HENDERSON'S LECTURES.

The second of Professor Henderson's University Extension lectures on "The Leaders of the Middle Ages" was delivered in Queen's Hall last night. The subject of the lecture was Francis of Assisi. The audience was again so large as practically to fill the building.

Professor Henderson said that the character of Francis of Assisi had interested him very much, and he had spent a good deal of time in the study of it. On two occasions he had visited Italy in order to substantiate what had seemed to him to be rather wonderful in the history of this man's life. Francis of Assisi was born six years before King Richard I. of England ascended the Throne, and an important part of his work was performed during the early part of the thirteenth century. That was a long time ago, but even at the present day they would find if they travelled through Italy that the influence of St. Francis was still tremendous. There was hardly a character to whom modern historians had devoted more attention, and the reason undoubtedly was that he had a message for our own times. We were all now struggling to attain something like a competence, and the object of the lecture was to rationalise the career of a man who had for an ideal and the purpose of his life's ambition poverty, and who made one of the most strenuous endeavours in history to keep adrift from everything that might be included in the term personal wealth. He was the son of well-to-do parents in the north of Italy. He was always the most conspicuous figure in the revels in which he indulged, and he took a position among the nobles, his father providing him with money for the purpose. Two voices called him from early years, and as time passed the tones of the second became louder and louder. He thought his vocation was that of a soldier, and when he was absent on military service he had to use the language of the chronicles—a vision. A voice said to him, "You have made a mistake. You have other work. Return to Assisi." After he went back he continued troubled in his mind. Following upon a merry meeting with his boon companions, he was found looking out on the starlit night, and was asked in a jesting tone, "Francis, are you thinking of a wife?" To this he made answer, "I am thinking of a wife more noble, more rich, more beautiful than anything you can conceive." Who was the wife? They would perhaps smile when he told them the Lady Poverty. Francis was a man with an imagination, and poverty had become personified. He was making up his mind to wed poverty. That marked the first stage in the development of his life. Visiting Rome, he went into the Church of St. Peter, and cast all his money on the altar. Outside he changed clothes with a beggar, and went about the city asking alms. He had a second vision in the Church of St. Damian. The crucifix seemed to bow towards him and a voice said, "My house is in ruins. Come and restore it." To this command he gave a practical interpretation, and set about the task of restoring the building. Meeting his father in the market-place, he divested himself of all his clothing and said, "Henceforth I have only one father, God. I renounce all that I had, and give it back." From that time Francis undertook the work of restoring the Church with his own hands, and the people who had jeered at him at first ended by assisting him. His earnestness attracted followers. The different Orders had their vows—chastity, obedience, and poverty. Poverty was the distinguishing characteristic of the Rule of Francis of Assisi. When Francis interviewed the Pope there were standing face to face

two ideals which had been present in the Christian Church since the second century. Francis represented one and the Pope the other, and both belonged to the same Church. There were those who called themselves Christians who were inclined to believe that if they were to maintain keenness of sympathy with their spiritual ideals the better plan was to keep apart from material power and wealth, and rely on the resource that was within them. There was another ideal which said that their ambitions might be spiritually lofty, but that they were living in a working world, where they must take men and women as they were, and that if they desired to make their ideals effective they must have power. Francis came to the Pope not for privilege, but for sanction to follow certain ideals. The first of these was to be at peace with his neighbours, which was a difficult matter in the middle ages. The second was "labour." The traveller to Italy was pursued by beggars, and there were those who said that this spirit had been fostered by Francis of Assisi. This, however, was untrue. Work was one of the most important principles of the Order, and if its followers were unable to obtain money for their work, in order to buy a few crumbs, they were to beg as a last resort, and a spiritual exercise. The third principle in the Rule of the Order was poverty. Clothing, habitation, and food were reduced to the barest necessities. Had Francis become a member of a recognised Order like the Dominicans, he could have had many privileges, but these, he declared, would beget pride, and he would have none of them. Neither would he have anything in the way of personal glory. The critics of Francis said that he denounced learning, and so he did, but it was learning of a certain kind. There was a sort of learning that made people superior, exclusive, supercilious. That was not learning at all. What Francis was afraid of was the spiritual and intellectual pride which made men pass by on the other side. Superciliousness of mind was one of the great barriers to the true progress of education, and Francis feared his followers would become men who would know about things instead of being able to do them. Education was an equipment that performed, and was not a mere matter of indulgence. There was the personal side of life, which consisted of looking after "number one." There was a higher side, and in the exercise of the faculties belonging to that higher side they might enrich their own personality by enriching the personality of others and giving out something. By giving they received—that was the paradox. Francis was a spiritual genius who knew from early years that man's true destiny was nothing short of God. Sabatier gave reasons why the followers of Francis could realise their ambition. Francis made the order absolutely democratic. Louis IX. of France was a member, and so were the lepers and beggars of Italy. It became the most powerful orders in Europe, and had two million people in it before Francis died. "Poverty," it was said, "not only permitted the brothers to mingle with the poor and speak to them with authority, but, removing them from all material anxiety, left them free to enjoy without hindrance those hidden treasures which Nature reserves for the pure idealist." The point Sabatier made here was that Francis made a grand attempt, in riding himself of all that personally concerned his life, to make himself responsive to those things which men might have in common and have for nothing. The followers of the order suffered because of the pooriness of their food and habitations, but there was a note of optimism in all they said, and the life of Francis himself was full of rich interests. His poem, "Canticle of the Sun," had been termed one of the best pieces of poetry written in the middle ages. Francis had all the serene consciousness which came from the service of one's fellow-men. It was perfectly true that the Franciscan order became corrupt in twenty-five years. Their ideal was pitched too high. That was, at the same time, no reason why they should not do the greatest honour to the man who made such a magnificent

struggle himself to attain his ideal, and, whatever might have been the case with his followers, Francis never lost touch with it. He had explained the man as far as he could from the human point of view, and he would remind them that every censure passed on Francis of Assisi was a censure passed upon Christianity. Francis made a determined attempt to reduce to practice the teaching of the Sermon on the mount. "The Most High revealed to me that I ought to live according to the Rule of the Gospel." He did live according to this rule, and it was a great thing that one man in history could say that.

A highly interesting series of lantern views were exhibited. These included portraits, pictures, and views collected by Professor Henderson himself while in Italy. While accompanying the succeeding illustrations with explanatory observations, the lecturer referred incidentally to the "stigmata," or the marks of the five wounds of Christ, which Francis was reputed to bear on his body. He said that the historian had documentary evidence of the first importance to attest the truth of the "stigmata." From the physiological and psychological side, so persuaded was he of the influence of the mind over the body that he thought he could prove, step by step, that it was possible for these wounds to have appeared and for blood to have come from them.

The next lecture will be on King Louis IX. of France, and will be delivered in the Town Hall next Wednesday night.

May 30<sup>th</sup> 07

## "LEADERS OF THE MIDDLE AGES."

### PROFESSOR HENDERSON'S LECTURES.

The third of Professor Henderson's series of lectures on "Leaders of the Middle Ages" was delivered in the Town Hall last night. The subject was "Louis IX., King of France," and the large audience was an evidence of the continued popularity of the lectures.

Professor Henderson said that when the reign of our present King came to be written the historian would find it needful to devote a considerable amount of time to his wondrous diplomatic ability. England now found herself in one of the most secure positions she had ever held in her history. By means of understandings we were on friendly terms with a great number of European Powers, and with Powers beyond Europe. One of the most important was the understanding with France, which had been productive of so much good in recent years. It was fitting that they should devote their attention for a brief space that evening to the consideration of one of the three greatest monarchs of France and the monarch whose memory was still the most revered by the French people. He meant King Louis IX. He would ask them to remember during the lecture that he was dealing with a character who belonged to the thirteenth and not the twentieth century, and unless they had some of the historical feeling and exercised a sympathetic imagination they would get a wrong impression of this man's attitude towards certain people with whom he had but lit-