Women of the Romance countries

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MARIA DE PADILLA

After the painting by Paul Gernez.
WOMAN

In all ages and in all countries

WOMEN OF THE ROMANCE COUNTRIES

by

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PREFACE

No one can deny the influence of woman, which has been a potent factor in society, directly or indirectly, ever since the days of Mother Eve. Whether living in Oriental seclusion, or enjoying the freer life of the Western world, she has always played an important part in the onward march of events, and exercised a subtle power in all things, great and small. To appreciate this power properly, and give it a worthy narrative, is ever a difficult and well-nigh impossible task, at least for mortal man. Under the most favorable circumstances, the subject is elusive and difficult of approach, lacking in sequence, and often shrouded in mystery.

What, then, must have been the task of the author of the present volume, in essaying to write of the women of Italy and Spain! In neither of these countries are the people all of the same race, nor do they afford the development of a constant type for observation or study. Italy, with its mediæval chaos, its free cities, and its fast-and-loose allegiance to the temporal power of the Eternal City, has ever been the despair of the orderly historian; and Spain, overrun by Goth, by Roman, and by Moslem host, presents strange contrasts and rare complexities.

Such being the case, this account of the women of the Romance countries does not attempt to trace in detail their gradual evolution, but rather to present, in the proper
setting, the most conspicuous examples of their good or evil influence, their bravery or their cowardice, their loyalty or their infidelity, their learning or their illiteracy, their intelligence or their ignorance, throughout the succeeding years.

Chroniclers and historians, poets and romancers, have all given valuable aid in the undertaking, and to them grateful acknowledgment is hereby made.

JOHN R. EFFINGER.

University of Michigan.
Part First
Italian Women