



Angelique of Port-Royal: 1591-1661 (Classic Reprint)

A. K. H.

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Excerpt from Angelique of Port-Royal: 1591-1661

The name of Angelique Arnauld, once so famous, suggests the thought of a great Reformer, even as the most general idea of the period in which she lived suggests the need of reform. But there is a manifest danger, in concentrating attention on one impressive life-work, of forgetting that each honest endeavour, however limited its aims may seem, is part of a great whole, wherein the failures often hold a place as important as the successes. Such endeavours, abortive and triumphant, were manifold in that half-century which witnessed the birth and early growth of the future Abbess of Port-Royal. According to the somewhat arbitrary division of history, the close of the Renaissance falls within forty years of her birth, and the self-assertion of Louis XIV. had been accepted by civilized nations ere she died, therefore she lived in an atmosphere of change, most of it in the direction of improvement, and that which she herself accomplished can take its fitting place only as one expression of a tendency widely diffused, not as an isolated phenomenon.

With the Renaissance, Europe awoke to possibilities of knowledge and of enjoyment hitherto shrouded, but the free use of the higher senses induced a longing for the freedom of the reason. It savours, perhaps, of the miraculous that the license of the later Renaissance did not turn more generally to the seductive doctrine of the Epicurean School, and it is true to say that when its paganism was directed into Christian channels, it was a proof of the regenerating power that dwells for ever in the Church.

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