

THE WHITE SHIELD

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The White Shield by Caroline Atwater Mason

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CAROLINE ATWATER MASON

**THE
WHITE SHIELD**



"Hearing his name
the youth turned."
Page 2.



THE
White Shield

Caroline Atwater Mason

Author of
"A LILY OF FRANCE," ETC.

*I read of the ermine to-day,
Of the ermine who will not step
By the feet of a step in the mire;
The creature who will not stain
Her garment of wild white furs.*
—E. S. PHELPS.

PHILADELPHIA
The Griffith & Rowland Press
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This Legend
of Thekla, the Holy Maid of Phrygia,
is Dedicated to
Ruth



Foreword

Among the apostle legends which circulated throughout the Christian churches of the second century was that entitled the "*Acta Pauli et Theklæ.*" This document, itself not later than about A. D. 130, was an amplified and embellished version of a much earlier tale. The original form of the story is proved by internal evidence to have been produced little later than the middle of the first century A. D. Numerous MSS. of the *Acta* are known to exist, including versions in Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Slavonic. Prof. Rendel Harris mentions seeing at Mount Sinai eight or nine different MSS.

During the century following A. D. 70, Asia Minor became "the spiritual center of Christianity." The gospel spread here with marvelous rapidity from the time of Paul, so that we have it on the testimony of Pliny, that in his province of Bithynia before A. D. 112, the pagan ritual was

actually broken up in consequence and the temples were almost deserted.

The opposition was intense. Christianity was abhorred by many as a system, to use the words of Pliny, "destructive of that reasonable and obedient course of life which becomes the philosophic mind and the loyal citizen." Saints and martyrs multiplied under persecution. But Thekla of Iconium is counted the female proto-martyr of the Asian church, and the most illustrious sufferer despite her deliverance. She is worshiped to this day in the Greek communion as the pattern of purest and highest sainthood.

The biographies of the early saints of Asia Minor are however in general deficient in historical value, being profoundly modified or grossly exaggerated in later centuries. These processes have been at work with the story of Thekla of Iconium, and the commonly received versions bear the stamp of crude inferiority and exaggeration common to folk-lore. On going back, however, to the underlying structural features of the original *Acta* we find an accuracy of local detail, a fidelity to established facts existent in the middle of the first century, but

soon after transformed and forgotten, which leave room for but one conclusion. This is the conclusion reached after thorough study and painstaking research by Prof. W. M. Ramsay, who says: ¹

"It is not possible to account for this accuracy in details by the supposition that the story of Thekla is a skillful archæological forgery. . . The tale must be founded on fact and committed to writing by some person not far removed from the events able to compose a history or at least a poetical idealization of history. No other hypothesis seems consistent with the fidelity to a transitory and soon forgotten epoch of history. We must hold that the tale is in part historical, that Thekla was a real person, and that she was brought into relations with the greatest figures of the Galatic province about A. D. 50, viz, Paul, Queen Tryphena, and the Roman governor." The verification of the facts concerning the character and action of the queen, it may be added, is peculiarly striking and complete.

One very marked instance is found in the fact of Tryphena's influence over the governor and high

¹ See "The Church in the Roman Empire before A. D. 170."