

SISTER CATHERINE NOW

Is What They Will Call Kate Drexel, the Philadelphia Heiress.

IMPRESSIVE RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES.

The Large Fortune Which She Inherited From Her Father, the Late Francis A. Drexel, Will Not, However, Revert to the Roman Catholic Church—Possible Field of Her Future Labors as a Sister.

On the 7th of the present month Miss Kate Drexel, the daughter of the late Francis A. Drexel of Philadelphia, formally assumed the white veil of the Order of the Sisters of Mercy, at St. Paul's Cathedral, Pittsburg, Pa., and will hereafter be known to the world as Sister Catherine.

Her father was a member of the great banking-house of Drexel & Co., with headquarters in this country, London and Paris, and at the time of his death, some five years ago, left a fortune variously estimated at from \$20,000,000 to \$30,000,000, of which he bequeathed to each of his three daughters the sum of \$5,000,000, together with a life interest in the residue of his fortune, after the payment of immense bequests for charitable purposes. The Drexels are accounted among the exclusively aristocratic families of the Quaker City, the coterie of which includes such names as Binney, Dallas, Dallas-Bache, Biddle, Cadwallader and the Prices, among whose ranks Kate Drexel, or rather Sister Catherine, was an attractive and important figure.

Her grandfather, the founder of the present great banking-house, was a descendant of an old-time Provincial family, and sought the shores of America to embrace the opportunities then presented of accumulating wealth. Her mother was the daughter of the late Michael Bouvier, one of the oldest Philadelphia merchant princes, and from whom she, in conjunction with her sisters, inherited a large additional fortune.

MR. DREXEL'S WILL.

By the will of Francis A. Drexel, the father of the new sister, his daughters did not inherit their share in the estate in fee simple, but rather in the nature of a life interest, as the will expressly provided that in the event of either of the three daughters marrying and having an heir, that heir should inherit the entire fortune on the death of the others who had not married. But in the event of them all dying without having issue the entire principal must go to the church. One of the three some short time ago married Mr. Morrell, a brilliant young lawyer of the Philadelphia Bar, and if an heir should result from that marriage an entire change would take place in the ultimate distribution of the vast estate.

Miss Drexel's entering into religious life does not mean, as it has been erroneously stated, a necessary relinquishment of her private fortune to the church. Although the rules of the order do not allow a member of the community to be possessed of any personal wealth, the postulant is perfectly free to make whatever disposition of her fortune she may see fit.

AFTER MATURE REFLECTION.

In June last Miss Drexel as the result of mature deliberation concluded to embrace a religious life, and entered the Mother House at Pittsburg, in order to pass the six months' probation or "spiritual retreat" required before assuming the novice's veil, and having successfully passed through this period, she was accepted as a candidate for admission to the full sisterhood.

IMPRESSIVE CEREMONIES.

The ceremonies of the church which took place last Thursday, in the Suffragan Cathedral of Saint Paul's, now conducted with the highest pomp and magnificence of the Roman Catholic Church, at which the Right Reverend Richard Phelan, D. D., Bishop of the diocese, officiated, assisted by Bishop O'Connor of Omaha, and their priestly assistants. The services began at 10 o'clock, the grand altar presenting a mass of beautifully blended lace, flowers and burning tapers. Everything betokened the solemn marriage ceremony of one seeking to become the bride of Christ. As the episcopal procession, headed by the officiating Prelate with mitre, cape and crozier, entered the nave the choir burst forth in a pæan of exultation.

When the Bishops had taken their seats within the sanctuary another procession formed in the sacristy. It was that of the Religious Assembly, habited in their church cloaks and bearing lighted candles. Before taking her place in the line the postulant approached the Mother Superior and, kneeling at her chair, besought her blessing and the name she was to bear in religion. Then the Superioress, giving her her right hand, the procession filed into the church, whilst the choir sang the stirring hymn, "O, Gloriosa!"

What a strange yet impressive sight the little procession presented. A row of calm-faced, black-robed nuns, each bearing a lighted candle, and in their midst a tall, frail young girl, arrayed in a bridal costume of pure white. Around her shoulders fell the lace folds of the veil from the coronet fastening of orange blossoms. It was like the shadows of a dark night closing around the bright and glorious day.

On reaching the sanctuary the postulant knelt at the foot of the altar and received from the Bishop a lighted taper, and reciting the prayer, "Accipe Filia Charissima, Lumen Corporale," took her place in the somber-hued ranks again. A sermon by the officiating Bishop followed, and the formal interrogation of the candidate. The procession of nuns again took up the march to the sacristy during the singing of the cxiii, xv, and lxxxiii Psalms by the choir. In a few minutes the little band was lost to view and the door closed upon them. In a few moments the erstwhile bride would lay aside all secular things and without regret or sigh enter the shadow of a living death.

While awaiting the return of the procession the Bishop blessed the habit and veil of the novice. Miss Drexel was then led again into the church by the Mother Superior, and kneeling at the foot of the altar received the "cincture," the first emblem of her new life.

The veil was then fastened upon her head and she was enveloped in the church's cloak. The postulant humbly approached the altar, and prostrating herself at the foot of the stairs, remained so while the entire assembly burst out in praise with the hymn, "Veni Creatur Spiritus," and the Bishop sprinkled the prostrate figure with holy water.

After the choir had sung the cxxxii Psalm, the Benediction of the Most Holy Sacrament was given, and Miss Kate Drexel, forsaking youth, life, wealth and family, became a probationary member of the Order of Mercy.

HER FIELD OF LABOR.

What the particular work of Sister Catherine will be in the future is simply a mat-

ter of conjecture. It is certain, however, that the entering into this new field of labor is but the beginning of the accomplishment of the one dream of her life, the education and salvation of colored and Indian children.

Some years ago, in conjunction with the Sisters of the Academy of Notre Dame, she established a free daily school for the colored children in Philadelphia, on Seventh street above Pine, and, with zeal and devotion to her cause, personally taught the classes. Rain or shine, cold or hot, she would come in from her palatial home every morning and work unceasingly among the little waifs of her adoption.

It has for some time past been an open secret that the Sister was most anxious to found a community who would devote themselves exclusively to the moral and religious training of the Indian girls of the far West and Northwest, and of the colored girls who are so neglected in our large cities. If these views be ever brought to a realization she would soon be able to gather about her a community of young ladies whose influence would soon be beneficially felt.

THE NOVICESHIP NOT BINDING.

The solemn acceptance of Miss Drexel into the Order of Mercy does not conclusively preclude her ever entering into the world again. According to the law enacted by Pope Pius IX in 1857 only what is known as simple vows are to be taken after the noviceship in all religious orders, and that for the term of three years. During this time, however, if the professed grows weary of the life and desires to enter the world again, the power is reposed by the church in the Pope, who for legitimate reasons can dispense the vows, and the vows which have only received episcopal sanction can be dispensed with by episcopal authority.

It is hardly supposable, however, that Sister Catherine will again come into the world, as she has entered enthusiastically into the spirit of the spiritual life, and does, without a doubt, find a lasting joy in the surroundings that yield her such unlimited fields for the prosecution of the great work of her life.