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INTRODUCTION TO COUNT DE MONTALEMBERT'S LIFE OF ST. ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY.

(Continued from our last.)

In Italy, it was only at the close of the period under review that Dante appeared, (born 1265) but his advent was nobly ushered in. Poetry, less precocious than in France or Germany, was but beginning to bear fruit, but she did so with prodigious abundance. In every quarter of that noble and fertile land, schools of poets arose, as schools of artists were soon after to do. In Sicily, the Italian muse had her cradle; there she appeared pure, animated, a lover of nature, delicate, nearly akin to the French genius,—which was twice to make Sicily its appanage,—but still and ever profoundly Catholic.† In Pisa and Sienna, it is more grave, more solemn, as we see by the fine monuments which those cities have preserved. In Florence and the neighboring cities it is tender, abundant, pious—worthy in all respects of its birth-place.‡ They were indeed a legion of poets, whose chiefs were the Emperor Frederick II, the Kings Enzo and Mainfroy, his sons, and his Chancellor, Peter de Vignes; then Guittone d'Arezzo, a poet so profound, and sometimes so eloquent, and so touching, warmly praised by Petrarch and imitated by him; finally, Guido Guinicelli, whom Dante unhesitatingly proclaimed as his master. But all these were preceded and surpassed by St. Francis of Assisium;§ his influence was to enliven art, his example to inflame poets. While reforming the world, God permitted him to use the first of that poetry which was to bring forth Dante and Petrarch. As it was his soul alone that inspired his verses, and that he followed no rule in their composition, he had them corrected by the Brother Pacific, who became his disciple, after having been poet-laureate to the Emperor Frederick II; and then both together went along the high-ways, singing to the people those new hymns, saying that they were God's minstrels, and required no other reward than the repentance of sinners. We still have those joyous canticles wherein the poor mendicant celebrated the wonders of God's love, in the vernacular tongue, and so passionately that he himself apprehended lest he might be accused of folly.

No, never did that love, which was, as we have seen, his whole life, send forth a cry so enthusiastic, so truly celestial, so wholly detached from the earth; hence it is that succeeding ages have not only failed to equal it, but even to understand it. His famous canticle to his brother the sun is better known; it was composed after an ecstasy wherein he had received the certitude of his salvation. Scarcely had it escaped from his heart when he goes out to sing it in the streets of Assisium, where the Bishop and the magistrate were in open warfare. But at the accents of that divine lyre, hatred was extinguished in all hearts, enemies shed tears as they embraced each other, and concord reappeared at the call of poetry and sanctity.

Finally, the highest and fairest branch of poetry, the liturgy, produced in that age some of its most popular master-pieces, and if St. Thomas of Aquinas gives it the *Lauda Sion*, and all the admirable office of the Blessed Sacrament, it is a disciple of St. Francis—Thomas de Celano—who leaves us the *Dies iræ*, that cry of sublime terror, and another, the Brother Jacopone, who disputes with Innocent III the glory of having composed, in the *Stabat Mater*, the most beautiful tribute to the purest and most touching of sorrows.

This brings us back to St. Francis, and it may be observed that this period, whose most prominent features we have endeavored to sketch, may be wholly summed up in the two great figures of St. Francis of Assisium, and St. Louis of France.

The one, a man of the people, and who did more for the people than any one had yet done, raising poverty to the supreme dignity, making it his choice and his protection, and giving it a new influence over the things of heaven and earth; invested with that supernatural life of Christianity which has so often conferred spiritual sovereignty on the lowest of its children; regarded by his contemporaries as the closest imitator of Christ; enraptured during his whole life with divine love; and by the all-powerful virtue of that love, a poet, an actor, a lawgiver, a conqueror.

* Any one who supposes that Italian poetry began with Dante, would do well to see the collection entitled *Poeti del primo secolo*, that is to say, of the thirteenth century, which contains some master-pieces of the poetic art.

† Such, at least, is the opinion of Dante, *De Vulg. Eloq.*, l. 12; and of Petrarch, *Trionfo d'Amore*, v. 35.

‡ We must especially mention the charming strains of *Rotaio d'Oltarno* (1240); they are found in Crescimbeni and the *Utile antiche*.

§ We must here refer to the fine work of M. Gœrres, entitled *St. Francis of Assisium Troubadour*, translated into the *European Review* of 1833. There are no Italian verses whose date can be fixed with certainty before those of St. Francis.—We have already spoken of the beautiful poems of St. Bonaventure.

The other a layman, a knight, a pilgrim, a crusader, a king crowned with the first Christian diadem, brave even to rashness, as willing to risk his life as to bend his head before God; a lover of danger, of humiliation, of penance; the indefatigable champion of justice, of the weak and the oppressed; the sublime personification of christian chivalry in all its purity, and of true royalty in all its august grandeur. Both greedy for martyrdom, and for sacrifice; both continually intent on the salvation of their neighbor; both marked with the Cross of Christ. Francis in the glorious wounds which he had in common with the Crucified; and Louis in that inmost heart where love lies.

These two men so similar in their nature and in their tendency, so well fitted to appreciate each other never met on earth. There is a pious and a touching tradition that St. Louis went on a pilgrimage to the tomb of his glorious contemporary, and that he there found a worthy successor of St. Francis in one of his chosen disciples, Brother Egidius. The account of their meeting is too characteristic of the age whereof we treat, for us to omit giving it a place. St. Louis being come, then, from Assisium to the Convent of Perousa, where Egidius dwelt, sent him word that a poor pilgrim wished to speak with him. But an interior vision instantly revealed to the friar that the pilgrim was no other than the holy king of France. He ran out to meet him, and as soon as they beheld each other, although it was for the first time, they both fell on their knees at the same moment, and tenderly embracing, they remained long thus without exchanging a single word. At length they separated, arose and went their way, the king to his kingdom—the monk to his cell. But the other brothers of the convent, having discovered that it was the king, began to reproach Egidius. "How," said they, "couldst thou have been so rude, as not to speak a single word to such a holy prince, he coming all the way from France on purpose to see thee?" "Ah! my beloved brethren," replied the holy man, "be not surprised that neither he nor I could speak; for, whilst we embraced each other, the light of divine wisdom revealed his heart to me and mine to him; and thus, looking into each other's heart, we knew each other far better than if we had spoken, and with much greater consolation than if we could have given vent to our feelings in words, so incapable is the human tongue of expressing the secret mysteries of God!" A touching and an admirable symbol of that secret intelligence, of that victorious harmony which then united lofty and holy souls, as a sublime and eternal compact.

It may also be said that those two great souls meet and are completely united in that of one woman—St. Elizabeth—whose name has already occurred so often in this work. That burning love of poverty which inflamed the seraph of Assisium, that luxury of suffering and humiliation, that supreme worship of obedience is suddenly enkindled in the heart of a young princess, who, from the centre of Germany, recognises him as her model and her father. That boundless sympathy for the Passion of a God made man, which sent St. Louis, barefoot, at twenty-four, to visit the holy Crown of thorns,—which impelled him to go twice under the standard of the Cross to seek death and captivity in Africa; that longing for a better life which made him struggle against his friends and family to abdicate the crown and hide his royalty under the monastic habit; that respect for poverty which made him kiss the hand of every one to whom he gave alms; his abundant tears, his sweet familiarity with Joinville, and even his conjugal tenderness: all that is found again in the life of St. Elizabeth, who was no less his sister by feeling and by sympathy, than by their common engagement under the rule of St. Francis.

It has been established, in our own days, that the thirteenth century was remarkable for the increasing influence of women in the social and political world; that they guided the helm of government in several large states,* and that fresh homage was daily offered to them both in public and private life. This was the inevitable consequence of that devotion to the Blessed Virgin, the progress of which we have already noticed.† "It must be accredited to all women" says a poet of that age, "that the mother of God was a woman."‡ How, in fact, could kings and nations constantly take her for mediatrix between her Son and them, place all their works under her sanction, choose her for the special object of their most ardent devotion, without giving a share of that veneration to the sex whose representative she was with God, as also its most perfect type? Since woman was so powerful in heaven, she must needs be so on earth. But, whilst other princesses learned to share with kings the right of supreme command, the daughter

* Blanche of Castile; Isabella de la Marche, who controlled the entire policy of king John Lack-land, her husband; Jane, Countess of Flanders, who claimed the right of assisting as a peer of France, at the consecration of St. Louis.
† *Frauenlob*, a poem of the thirteenth century.

of the King of Hungary,—the issue of a race of saints, and whose example was to produce so many others,—showed that there was still, for women, a royalty of soul far above all earthly pomp; and it was by exercising it, unwittingly and unknown, that she gained her place in history.

Her life, short though it be, presents, perhaps, the only assemblage of the most varied phases, the most attractive, and yet the most austere features which can mark the life of a Christian, a princess and a Saint. Still, during the twenty years which elapse from the day when she was brought to her betrothed in a silver cradle, till that when she expired on the hospital pallet, which she chose for her death-bed, there are two very distinct parts, if not in her character, at least in her exterior life. The first is all chivalric, all poetic, calculated as much to enchain the imagination as to inspire piety. From the interior of Hungary, that land half unknown, half eastern,—the frontier of Christendom, which presented to the mediæval ages a grand and mysterious aspect,* she arrives at the Court of Thuringia, the most brilliant and the most poetical in all Germany. During her childhood, her precocious virtue is overlooked, her piety despised; some were for sending her back disgracefully to her father; but her betrothed remains ever faithful to her, consoles her for the persecution of the wicked, and as soon as he is master of his States, hastens to marry her. The holy love of a sister mingles in her heart with the ardent love of a wife for him who was first the companion of her childhood and then her husband, and who vies with herself in piety and fervor; a charming freedom, a sweet and artless confidence presides over their union. During all the time of their wedded life, they certainly offer the most touching and edifying example of a Christian marriage; and we dare affirm that, amongst all the Saints, none has presented in the same degree as Elizabeth, the type of the Christian wife. But, amidst all the happiness of this life,—the joys of maternity—the homage and the splendor of a chivalrous court, her soul tends already towards the eternal source of love, by mortification, humility and the most fervent devotion; and the germs of that more perfect life, implanted within her, grow and expand in boundless charity, and indefatigable solicitude for the miseries of the poor. Meanwhile, the irresistible call of the Crusade, the supreme duty of freeing the Holy Sepulchre, draws away her young husband after seven years of the most tender union; he dares not reveal to her this still secret project, but she discovers it in a moment of tender familiarity. She knows not how to resign herself to this hard destiny; she follows and accompanies him far beyond the confines of their country; she cannot tear herself from his arms. In the anguish which rends her heart at this parting, and again when she hears of the untimely death of her beloved husband, we behold all the energy and tenderness of that young heart; precious and invincible energy, worthy of being consecrated to the conquest of heaven; profound and insatiable tenderness which God alone could reward and satisfy.

Thus, this separation once consummated, her whole life is changed, and God alone engrosses the affection of her soul. Misfortune comes on fast and heavy; she is brutally expelled from her royal dwelling; she wanders through the streets with her infant children, a prey to cold and hunger, she who had fed and comforted so many; no asylum can she find, she who had so often sheltered others. But, even when her wrongs are repaired, she is no longer inclined to a worldly life. Left a widow at the age of twenty, she rejects the hand of the most powerful princes; she is sick of the world; the ties of mortal love once broken, she feels herself moved with divine love; her heart, like the sacred censor, is closed to all earthly things, and is open only to heaven. She contracts with Christ a second and indissoluble union; she seeks Him and serves Him in the person of the wretched; after distributing all her treasures, all her possessions, when she has nothing more to give, she then gives herself; she becomes poor, the better to understand and to relieve the misery of the poor; she consecrates her life to render them even the most repulsive services. In vain does her father, the King of Hungary, send ambassadors to bring her back to him; they find her at her wheel, resolved on preferring the kingdom of heaven to the royal splendor of her father's court. In exchange for her austerities, her voluntary poverty, the yoke of obedience under which she daily bends, her Divine Spouse endows her with supernatural joy and supernatural power. In the midst of calumnies, privations, and the most cruel mortifications, she knows not a shade of sadness; a look, a prayer of hers suffices to heal the diseases of her fellow-creatures. In the bloom of youth, she is ripe for eternity; and she dies in the act of singing a

* The famous Berthe the Good, wife of Pepin, and mother of Charlemagne, the principal heroine of the cycle of the Carolingian epics, was also daughter of a king of Hungary.

hymn of joy which the angels above are heard to repeat in welcome to her victorious soul.

Thus, in the twenty-four years of her life, we see her in succession, a lonely and persecuted orphan,—a sweet and modest betrothed bride, a wife unequalled for tenderness and trust, a loving and devoted mother, a sovereign more powerful by her benefits than by her rank; then a widow cruelly oppressed, a penitent without sin, an austere nun, a Sister of Charity, a fervent and favored spouse of the God who glorifies her by miracles before He calls her to Himself; and, in all the vicissitudes of life, ever faithful to her original character, to that perfect simplicity which is the sweetest fruit of faith and the most fragrant perfume of charity, and which transformed her entire life into that heavenly childishness to which Jesus has promised the kingdom of heaven.

(To be continued.)

A PASTORAL LETTER,

BY THE RIGHT REV. BISHOP GILLIS, ON A BILL NOW BEFORE PARLIAMENT, FOR AUTHORIZING THE INSPECTION OF CONVENTS, CALLED "A BILL TO FACILITATE THE RECOVERY OF PERSONAL LIBERTY IN CERTAIN CASES."

JAMES, by the Mercy of God, and favor of the Holy Apostolic See, Bishop of Limyra, and Vicar Apostolic of the Eastern District in Scotland: To the Clergy and Laity under our Jurisdiction: Health and Benediction in the Lord.

Dear Beloved Brethren,—There reigned over England some three centuries ago, a man, great in wickedness, whose name was Henry. Regardless alike of truth or justice; void of all honor, and a stranger to shame; reckless in his ambition, and iron-handed in his despotism, insatiable in his rapacity, yet not the less prodigal in his waste; unsparring in his cruelty, as well as unbridled in his lust; "without affection" (Rom. i. 13), without gratitude, without pity, and without remorse; sending relentlessly to the scaffold the most upright of his councillors, and the holiest prelate of his realm, his enemies and his friends, the wives of his choice, and the mother of his offspring; and burning in turn at the stake, those of his subjects who believed, and those who disbelieved in transubstantiation: this adulterous Prince continued to live on his charmed life of crime, till, victim at length of his own excesses, and sinking beneath a mountain load of sacrilege and murder; while yet an open rebel against the Church of whose Faith he meanly sullied himself to be still called the Defender;—he closed a career of unparalleled profligacy, by emitting a solemn wish, more in the spirit of a coward than of a penitent, that Mass should be offered up for the repose of his soul! Henry died the supreme head of a Church that dares not implement, if it could, the last request of its Founder; and while his memory remains embalmed within the leaves of a Prayer Book, history has consigned his name to perpetual infamy. Such, Beloved Brethren, was the first schismatic Sovereign of Protestant England: and, that hypocrisy might not be found wanting in the long list of his iniquities, such also was the first reformer of England's monasteries and convents.

Henry went through the mockery of going to Parliament to ask for a Bill; and in doing so he laid down the principle on which future Bills might be framed and sought for by others, and in support of which his name and example might one day be invoked, when the Church of his building should have become so effete, as to begin to stagger in its walk; and when the same hand that rocked its cradle might again be called upon to support its decrepitude.—The unscrupulous one, to wit, of religious persecution. There were appointed "Commissioners," whose privilege it was to enter forcibly, if required, all religious houses, in the name of the King; whose duty it was to inquire into, and to report upon the morals, and, moreover, the revenues of their inmates; whose interest it was, that no such houses should elude their searching eye, for they were paid for their labor; and the result of whose zeal soon proved to be, the utter destruction throughout England, of hundreds upon hundreds of Religious Houses and Churches, many of them among the noblest buildings in the world; the confiscation of property for behoof of a tyrant and of his sycophants, to an amount that never can be computed to the full; but a mere portion of which, we know, yielded to the English Crown of sacrilegious plunder, a yearly revenue of more than one hundred and thirty-two thousand pounds; the

* From the attempts made against them (the Monasteries) in the reigns of King Henry IV. and King Henry V., it was evident that the revenues of these Houses had been long enquired, and thought too great, and perhaps that small part of the Alien Priors which had been given to the Laity might unde them long for more.—TANNER, NOTITIA MONASTICA, Preface, p. xxii.

† "I cannot believe," says Bishop Tanner, "that they (the Monasteries) were in general so bad as the visitors represented them, because they who are to be run down, are always to be set forth in the worst light; and Lord Herbert tells us, 'that