



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. III.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JUNE 17, 1853.

NO. 45.

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

(Continued from No. 43.)

Scarcely were these orders in existence, when their power and their propagation became one of the most important historical facts of the period. The Church suddenly finds herself mistress of two numerous armies, moveable and always available, ready at any moment to invade the world. In 1277, half a century after the death of St. Dominic, his order had already four hundred and seventeen convents in Europe. St. Francis, in his own life-time, assembled five thousand of his monks at Assisium; and thirty-five years after, in numbering the forces of the Seraphic Order at Narbonne, it is found that, in thirty-three provinces, it already reckons eight hundred monasteries, and at least twenty thousand religious. A century later, its members were computed at one hundred and fifty thousand. The conversion of pagan nations is renewed; Franciscans sent by Innocent IV and St. Louis, penetrate to Morocco, to Tunis, and even amongst the Mongols; but their chief care is to overcome the passions of paganism in the heart of Christian nations. They spread abroad over Italy, torn asunder by internal dissensions, seeking every where to reconcile opposite parties, to uproot errors, acting as supreme arbiters, according to the law of charity. They were seen in 1233, traversing the whole Italian Peninsula, with crosses, incense, and olive-branches, singing and preaching peace, reproaching cities, princes, and even the chiefs of the Church, with their faults and their enmities. The nations submit, at least for a time, to that sublime mediation; the nobles and the people of Pisa and Visconti, at that of a Franciscan; and on the plain of Verona two hundred thousand souls are seen crowding around the blessed John of Vicenza, a preaching friar, sent by the Pope to quiet the disturbance in Tuscany, in Romagna and in the Trevisan March. On this solemn occasion, he takes for his text the words: "My peace I leave you; my peace I give unto you;" and before he ends, an outbreak of tears and sobs shows that every heart is touched, and the chiefs of the rival houses of Este and Romano, embracing each other, give the signal for a general reconciliation. It is true that these happy results did not last long; but the evil was, at least, vigorously opposed, the sap of Christianity was revived in the souls of men, a gigantic struggle was every where and always carried on in the name of equity against the dead letter of the law, in the name of charity against the perverse inclinations of man, in the name of grace and faith against the dryness and the paucity of scientific reasoning. Nothing escaped this new influence; it moved the scattered inhabitants of the rural districts; it shared the sway of the universities; it even affected the king on his throne. Joinville tells us how, at the first place where he landed on his return from the Crusade, St. Louis was welcomed by a Franciscan, who told him that "never was kingdom lost, save for want of justice, and that he must be careful to administer justice promptly and willingly to his people." And that every one was mindful of the king. It is well known how he sought to steal away from his dearly-beloved wife, his friends and counsellors, to renounce the crown which he so gloriously wore, and go himself to beg his bread like St. Francis. But he was obliged to content himself with becoming a penitent of the third order; for in their all-conquering army they had a suitable place for every one. Together with these battalions of monks, numerous monasteries were opened for virgins who aspired to the honor of immolating themselves for Christ, and the vast affluents known under the name of *third orders* offered a place for princes, warriors, married people, fathers of families, in a word, to all the faithful of both sexes who wished to associate themselves, at least indirectly, in the great work of regenerating Christendom.

Tradition relates that the two glorious patriarchs of that regeneration had at one time an idea of uniting their efforts and their orders, apparently so much alike; but the celestial inspiration on which they acted revealed to them that there was room for two different powers, for two kinds of war against the invasion of evil. They seem to have divided their sublime mission, and also the moral world, in order to bring back charity and knowledge to the bosom of the Church, and to reconcile those two great rivals which cannot exist one without the other. This reconciliation was effected by them as it had never been before. Whilst the love that consumed and absorbed the soul of St. Francis has ever gained for him in the Church the name of the Seraph of Assisium, it would not be rash, perhaps, with Dante, to attribute to St. Dominick, the power and the light of the Cherubim. Their children shewed themselves

faithful to this distinct tendency, which ended in the same eternal unity, and with some few notable exceptions, it may be said that, dating from that period of the Church's history, the part which has especially fallen to the Seraphic Order was the distilling and diffusion of the treasures of love, the mysterious joys of sacrifice; whilst that of the Preachers was, as their name implies, to propagate, defend, and establish the truth. Neither one nor the other failed in its mission; and both in their adolescence, and in the course of the half-century of which we speak, gave to the Church perhaps more Saints and Doctors than she had ever possessed in so short an interval, from the first ages of her existence. Following closely in the footsteps of St. Dominick—that holy champion of the faith—that coadjutor of the Eternal Laborer, comes all at once the Brother Jourdain, worthy of being his first successor, and general of his order; then St. Peter of Verona, honored with the title of the martyr as if by excellence, and who, assassinated by the heretics, wrote on the ground with the blood from his wounds the first words of the Creed whose truth he maintained at the expense of his life; then St. Hyacinth and Ceslas his brother, those young Polish nobles, who, meeting St. Dominick in Rome, were induced to renounce all worldly greatness, in order to carry that new light to their own country, whence it was to spread with lightning rapidity through Lithuania, Muscovy and Prussia; then, St. Raymond de Penafort, chosen by Gregory IX to assist in framing the legislation of the Church, the author of the *Decrees* and successor of St. Dominick; finally, that Theobald Visconti, who was to preside over the affairs of the Church, under the name of Gregory X, before he became eternally entitled to its prayers, as Beatified in Heaven. Abreast of these men whose sanctity the Church has consecrated, a host of others were distinguished for their talents and learning. Albert the Great, that colossus of learning, the propagator of Aristotle and the master of St. Thomas; Vincent de Beauvais, author of the great encyclopedia of the middle ages; Cardinal Hugues de Saint-Cher, who made the first concordance of the Scriptures; Cardinal Henri de Suzon, author of *La Somme Dorée*; and above all in sanctity as in knowledge, the great St. Thomas d'Aquinas, the *Angelic Doctor*, the gigantic thinker, in whom there seems to be summed up all the science of the ages of faith, and whose magnificent synthesis has never since been equalled; who, with all his rapt abstraction is still an admirable poet, and merits to be chosen as the intimate friend and counsellor of St. Louis in the most intricate affairs of his kingdom. "Thou hast written well of me," said Christ to him one day; "what reward dost thou ask?" "Yourselves," replied the Saint. That word comprises his whole life and times.

The army of St. Francis marched to battle under chiefs no less glorious than those of the Dominicans; during his own life time, twelve of his first disciples went to gather the palms of martyrdom amongst the heathen. B. Bernard, B. Egidius, and B. Guy of Cortona, all of that company of Saints who were companions and disciples of the holy founder—survived him, and preserved the inviolable deposit of that spirit of love and humility wherewith he had been transported. Scarcely had the seraph taken his place before the throne of God, when his place in the veneration of the world is occupied by him, whom all proclaim as his first-born: St. Anthony of Padua, celebrated, like his spiritual father, for that control over nature which won for him the name of *Thaumaturgus*; he who was named by Gregory IX the *Arch of the Two Covenants*, who had the gift of tongues, like the Apostles; who, after having edified France and Sicily, spends his last years in preaching peace and union to the Lombard cities, obtains from the Paduans the privilege of the cession of funds for unhappy debtors, ventures alone to upbraid the ferocious Ezzelin with his tyranny, makes the ruthless oppressor tremble, as he himself confesses, and dies at thirty-six, in the same year with St. Elizabeth. Somewhat later, Roger Bacon reinstates and sanctifies the study of nature, classifies all the sciences and foresees, if he does not even effect, the greatest discoveries of modern times. Duns Scotus disputes with St. Thomas, the empire of the schools; and that great genius finds a rival and a friend in St. Bonaventure, the *Seraphic Doctor*, who being asked by his illustrious rival, the *Angelic Doctor*, from what books he derived his amazing knowledge, pointed in silence to his crucifix, and who was found washing the dishes in his convent when the Cardinal's hat was brought him.

But it is chiefly through women that the order of St. Francis sheds unequalled splendor on that age.

* Born in 1214. To him is attributed the discovery of gunpowder, the telescope, &c. It is known that he presented to Clement IV that plan of reforming the calendar, which was afterwards adopted by Gregory XIII.

That sex, emancipated by Christianity, and rising in the esteem of Christian nations, according as the devotion to the Blessed Virgin increased, could not fail to take an active part in the new developments of the power to which it owed its freedom. Thus, St. Dominick had introduced a fruitful reform into the rule of the spouses of Christ, and opened a new career to their virtues. But it was not until long after that in Margaret of Hungary, Agnes of Montepulciano, and Catherine of Sienna, this branch of the Dominican tree was to bring forth those prodigies of sanctity which have since been so numerous. Francis, more fortunate in this regard, finds at the outset a sister, an ally worthy of him. Whilst he, a merchant's son, commenced his work with some other humble citizens of Assisium, in that same city, Clara Sciffi, the daughter of a powerful Count, felt herself inspired with a similar zeal. She was only eighteen years of age when, on a Palm-Sunday, whilst the palms borne by others are withered and faded, hers suddenly blooms anew. It is for her a precept and a warning from on high. That very night she flies from her father's house, penetrates to the *Porziuncula*, kneels at the feet of St. Francis, receives from his hands the cord and the coarse woollen habit, and devotes herself like him to evangelical poverty. In vain do her parents persecute her; she is joined by her sister and many other virgins, who vie with her in their austerities and privations. In vain do the Sovereign Pontiffs entreat her to moderate her zeal, to accept some fixed rule, since her strict seclusion forbade her to go, like the Friars Minors, to solicit charity from the faithful, and reduced her to depend on chance assistance. She obstinately resisted, and Innocent IV finally grants her the *privilege of perpetual poverty*, the only one, he said, that none had ever before asked of him. "But He," he added, "who feeds the birds of the air, who clothes the earth with flowers and verdure, can well feed and clothe you till the day when He shall give Himself for your eternal aliment—when He will embrace you with His victorious arm in the fulness of His glory and beatitude." Three Popes and a multitude of other saintly and noble personages came to seek light and consolation from that humble virgin. In a few years she sees a whole army of pious women, with queens and princesses at their head, rising and encamping in Europe, under the rule of Francis of Assisium, living under her direction and called from her *poor Clares*. But in the midst of this spiritual empire, her modesty is so great that she is never seen to raise her eyes but once, viz., when she asked the Pope's blessing. The Saracens come to besiege her monastery; sick and bed-ridden she arises, takes the ostensory in her hand, walks forth to meet them, and they immediately take to flight. After fourteen years of a holy union with St. Francis, she loses him; then, having long endured the most grievous infirmity, she dies after having dictated a most sublime testament: and the Sovereign Pontiff, who had witnessed her death, proposes her at once to the veneration of the faithful, proclaiming her the resplendent light of the temple of God, the princess of poverty, and the duchess of humility.

As St. Francis found a friend and sister in St. Clara, so did St. Anthony of Padua in the blessed Helena Ensinelli; but, by a marvellous effect of divine grace, it is especially amongst the daughters of kings that the mendicant order finds its most eminent saints; whether they enter upon the strict observance of the *Poor Clares*, or, restrained in the bonds of marriage, can only adopt the rule of the third order. The first in date and in renown is that Elizabeth of Hungary, whose life we have written. It was not in vain, as we shall see, that Pope Gregory IX obliged St. Francis to send her his poor cloak; like Eliseus of old receiving that of Elias, she was to find therein the fortitude to become his heiress. Inflamed by her example, her cousin-german, Agnes of Bohemia, refuses the hand of the Emperor of the Romans, and that of the king of England, and writes to St. Clara, that she, too, has taken vows of absolute poverty. St. Clara replies in an admirable letter which has been preserved, and at the same time sends to her royal neophyte a cord to encircle her waist, an earthen bowl and a crucifix. Like her, Isabella of France, sister of St. Louis, refuses to become the wife of the Emperor Conrad IV., to become a *Poor Clara*, and die a Saint like her brother, Marguerite, the widow of that holy king, the two daughters of St. Ferdinand of Castile, and Helena, sister to the king of Portugal, follow that example. But as if Providence would bless the tender bond which united our Elizabeth to St. Francis and St. Clara, whom she had taken for models, it is chiefly her family which offers to the Seraphic Order as it were a nursery of Saints. After her cousin Agnes, it is her sister-in-law, the blessed Salome, queen of Galicia; then her niece, St. Cunegunda, Duchess of Poland; and whilst another of her nieces, the

blessed Margaret of Hungary, prefers the order of St. Dominick, in which she dies at the age of twenty-eight, the grand-daughter of her sister named after her Elizabeth, having become Queen of Portugal, embraces, like her, the third order of St. Francis, and like her merits the eternal veneration of the faithful.

In view of these Franciscans of royal birth, we must not lose sight of those whom the grace of God drew forth from the lowest ranks of the people. Such was St. Margaret of Cortona, who, from a prostitute, became the model of penitents; and especially, St. Rose of Viterbo, the illustrious and poetic heroine of the faith, who, though scarcely ten years old, when the fugitive Pope had not in Italy a spot where he might remain, went down to the public square of her native city, to preach the rights of the Holy See against the imperial power which she succeeded in slaking, merited to be exiled at fifteen, by order of Frederic II, and returned in triumph with the Church, to die at seventeen, the admiration of all Italy, where her name is still popular.

These two great orders which peopled Heaven by stirring up the earth, met, notwithstanding the diversity of their characters and modes of action, in one common object—the love and veneration of Mary.—It was impossible that the influence of this sublime belief in the Virgin-Mother, which had been steadily and rapidly increasing, since the proclamation of her divine maternity at the Council of Ephesus, should not be comprised in the immense spiritual movement of the thirteenth century; hence, it may be said that if, in the preceding century, St. Bernard had given the same impulse to the devotion of the people for the Blessed Virgin, that he had impressed on every noble instinct of Christianity, it was the two great mendicant orders who raised that devotion to a position at once firm and exalted. St. Dominick, by the establishment of the Rosary, and the Franciscans by preaching the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, reared, as it were, two majestic columns, the one of practice, the other of doctrine, from the summit of which the gracious Queen of Angels presided over Catholic piety and Catholic science. St. Bonaventure, the great and learned theologian, becomes a poet to sing her praise, and twice paraphrases the entire Psalter in her honor. All the works and all the institutions of that period, and especially all the inspirations of art as they have been preserved to us in her great cathedrals and in the lays of her poets; manifest an immense development in the heart of Christian people, of tenderness and veneration for Mary.

In the very bosom of the Church, and even outside the two families of St. Dominick and St. Francis, the devotion to the Blessed Virgin brought forth effects as precious for the salvation of souls, as venerable for their duration. Three new orders were consecrated to her in their very origin, and placed under shelter of her sacred name. That of Mount Carmel, emanating from the Holy Land, as the best production of that soil so fruitful in prodigies, gave, by the introduction of the Scapular, a sort of new standard to the followers of Mary. Seven merchants of Florence founded at the same time that order whose very name denotes the pride they experienced, in that age of chivalric devotion, in bending beneath the sweet yoke of the Queen of heaven; the order of the *Scrites* or *Scrys* of Mary, which immediately gave to the Church St. Philip Benizzi, author of the touching devotion of the Seven Dolours of the Virgin. At length that cherished name was attached to an institution worthy of her maternal heart—the Order of Our Lady of Mercy, intended for the ransom of Christian captives from the infidels. She had herself appeared, it was said, on the same night, to King James of Aragon, St. Raymond de Penafort, and St. Peter Nolasque, beseeching them to interest themselves for her sake in the fate of their captive brethren. All three obeyed; and Peter became the chief of the new order, which made a rapid progress and soon after produced that St. Raymond Nonnat, who sold himself to redeem a slave, and who was gagged by the infidels, so invincible did they find his words.

This same object of mercy, with a desire for the

* Besides his *Spectrum B.V.M.*, which is, perhaps, the most popular work of the middle ages, this Saint has written the *Psalterium Majoris B.V.M.*, which is composed of one hundred and fifty psalms, analogous to those of David, and applied to the Blessed Virgin; then the *Psalterium Minoris*, which consists of one hundred and fifty-four-line stanzas; finally, the *Laus B.V.M.*, and a paraphrase on the *Salva*, also in verse.

† It was in 1220 that the Margrave Henry of Moravia, and his wife Agnes, founded the first chapel at Mariazell, in Styria, even in our days a famous and popular pilgrimage in Germany. It was only in 1240 that the *Ave Maria* came into general use.

‡ He received his first rule from the patriarch Albert, in 1209, was confirmed in 1226, became a mendicant, in 1247. The scapular was given by the Blessed Virgin to St. Linori Stook, who died about 1250.

§ In 1239. The order was confirmed at the Council of Lyons, in 1274.

|| Commenced in 1223, approved of in 1236.