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

TRANSLATED FOR THE "TRUE WITNESS" BY MRS. SADLER.

(Continued from our last.)

After him came Innocent IV, (1242,) who, though up to the very moment of his election, a friend and partisan of Frederic, is no sooner elected than he sacrifices all his former ties to the august mission confided to him, and that admirable unity of purpose which had for two hundred years animated all his predecessors, persecuted, menaced, shut up between the Imperial columns which, from Germany in the north, and Sicily in the south, gather around the doomed city which is now his prison. He must endeavor to escape. Where is he to find an asylum? Every sovereign in Europe, even St. Louis, refuses to receive him. Happily, Lyons is free, and belongs only to an independent Archbishop. There Innocent assembles all the Bishops who could escape from the tyrant, and his venerable brothers, the Cardinals; to the latter he gives the scarlet hat to denote that they should always be ready to shed their blood for the Church; and then, from the midst of that supreme tribunal, which Frederic had himself invoked and recognised, and before which his advocates came solemnly to plead his cause, the fugitive Pontiff fulminates, against the most powerful sovereign of that time, the sentence of deposition, as the oppressor of religious liberty—the spoiler of the Church—a heretic and a tyrant. Glorious and ever-memorable triumph, of right over might—of faith over material interest! The third act of that sacred drama, wherein St. Gregory VII and Alexander III, had already trampled under foot the rebellious element, amid the acclamations of Saints and men! We all know how providence took upon itself the ratification of this sentence; we are familiar with the fall of Frederic and his latter years, the premature death of his son, and the total ruin of that formidable race. As an admirable proof of the entire confidence placed in the integrity of the Holy See, it is worthy of remark that, as Frederic himself was left, when an orphan, in his cradle, to the care of Innocent III, so the friends and allies of his grandson, Conradine, the last of the house of Swabia, would not entrust him to any other guardian than the very Pontiff who had deposed his grandsire; and who managed his trust loyally and well, till it was torn from his grasp by the perfidious Manfred.

The struggle continues against the latter, and all the other enemies of the Church, carried on with the same intrepidity, the same perseverance, under Alexander IV, (1254,) a worthy descendant of that family of Count, which had already given to the world Innocent III and Gregory IX; and after him, under Urban IV, (1261,) that shoemaker's son who, far from being ashamed of his origin, had his father painted on the church windows of Troyes, working at his trade; who had the honor of providing a new aliment for Catholic piety by instituting the Feast of the Most Holy Sacrament, (1264;) and who, unshaken in the midst of the greatest dangers, dies without knowing where to rest his head, but leaving to the Church the protection of the brother of St. Louis, and a French monarchy in the Sicilies. This conquest is completed under Clement IV, who sues in vain for the life of Conradine, the innocent and expiatory victim of the crimes of his family. And thus ends for a while, that noble war of the Church against state oppression, which was to be renewed with far different results, but not less gloriously, under Boniface VIII.

It must not be forgotten that, whilst these great Pontiffs were carrying on this warfare to the very utmost, far from being wholly engrossed by it, they gave to the internal organisation of the Church and of society, as much attention as though they were in a state of profound peace. They continued, one after the other, with invincible perseverance, the colossal work wherewith they were charged since the fall of the Roman empire—the work of grinding and kneading together all the divers elements of those Germanic and northern tribes who had overrun and conquered Europe, distinguishing therein all that was good, pure, and salutary, in order to sanctify and civilise it, and rejecting all that was truly barbarous. At the same time, and with the same constancy, did they propagate science and learning, placing them within reach of all; they consecrated the natural equality of the human race, calling to the highest dignities of the Church men born in the lowest classes, for whatever little learning or virtue they might have; they fabricated and promulgated the magnificent code of ecclesiastical legislation, and that clerical jurisdiction, the benefits of which were the more sensibly felt, in as much as it alone knew neither torture nor any cruel punishment, and that it alone made no exception of persons amongst Christians.

It is true that, in the bosom of the Church which had such chiefs, many human miseries were found mixed up with so much greatness and sanctity; it will always be so whilst things divine are entrusted to mortal hands; but we may be allowed to doubt whether there was less at any other period, and whether the rights of God and those of humanity were defended with nobler courage, or by more illustrious champions.

In front of that majestic Church arose the *second power* before which the men of those times bent in homage; that Holy Roman Empire, from which all secondary royalties seemed to flow. Unhappily, since the end of the Saxon dynasty, in the eleventh century, it had passed into the hands of two families in whom the great and pious spirit of Charlemagne was gradually extinguished, those of Franconia and Swabia. These substituted a new spirit, impatient of all spiritual restraint, glorying only in the force of arms and the feudal system, and always aiming at the amalgamation of the two powers absorbing the Church in the Empire. That fatal purpose, defeated by St. Gregory VII, in the person of Henry IV, and by Alexander III, in that of Frederick Barbarossa, made a new effort in Frederick II; but he, too, found his conquerors on the chair of St. Peter. This Frederick II occupied all that half-century which his reign almost wholly embraces. It seems to us impossible, even for the most prejudiced mind, not to be struck by the immense difference between the commencement of his reign, in the days when he was faithful to the Roman Church, which had so carefully watched over his minority; and the last twenty years of his life, during which the glory of his earlier years was tarnished and their high promise cruelly blighted. Nothing could be more splendid, more poetical, more grand than that imperial court presided over by a young and gallant prince, endowed with every noble quality both of mind and body, an enthusiastic lover of the arts, of poetry, and of literature; himself acquainted with six languages, and well versed in many of the sciences; bestowing on the kingdom of Sicily, whilst the Pope crowned him in Rome (1220) a code of laws the wisest and best-framed, and altogether remarkable for their perfection; and subsequently, after his first reconciliation with the Holy See, publishing at Mayence the first laws that Germany had had in its own tongue; gathering around him the flower of the chivalry of his vast dominions, giving them the example of valor and poetic genius, in the royal halls of Sicily, wherein were brought together the divers elements of Germanic, Italian and Eastern civilization. It was this very mixture that caused his ruin. He would have been, says a chronicler of those times, without an equal on earth, had he but loved his own soul, but he had an unfortunate predilection for Eastern life. He who was at one time thought of as a husband for St. Elizabeth, when she was left a widow, and who was actually a suitor for the hand of St. Agnes of Bohemia, soon after shut himself up in a disgraceful *scraglio*, surrounded by Saracen guards. By the side of this moral sensualism, he speedily proclaims a sort of political materialism which was, at least, premature in the thirteenth century. He shocks all the ideas of Christianity, by going to the Holy Sepulchre as the ally of the Mussulman princes, and no longer as the conqueror of the Holy Land. On his return to Europe, not satisfied with the magnificent position of a Christian Emperor, the first amongst the mighty and the powerful, and not the master of a multitude of slaves—the protector of the Church, and not her oppressor, he begins to scatter amongst men the seeds of those fatal doctrines which have since borne but too abundant fruit. Intoxicated by the height of his power, like Louis XIV and Napoleon in after times, he could not endure the intervention of spiritual power; and he caused his Chancellor, Peter des Vignes, to proclaim that the disposal of all things both human and divine, belonged of right to the Emperor. That age, however, was still too Christian to tolerate such an invasion of the vital force of Christianity. A far different spirit was then required even in the lay power, to govern minds and convictions; such was found in St. Louis of France. Hence, we see this Frederic who, according to that holy king, had made war on God with his own gifts, stricken with the anathemas of the Church, progressing every day in cruelty, perfidy, and duplicity; loading his people with fines and taxes; giving every reason to doubt his faith by his

* King of Sicily in 1198; Emperor in 1215; died in 1250.
† Innocent III, Honorius III, and Gregory IX, had, all three, a share in bringing him up, the first as Pope, and the other two as Cardinals.

‡ She refused him in order to become a Franciscan nun; the Emperor, on hearing it, said:—If she had preferred any other man to me, I would have been revenged; but since she has only preferred God, I can say nothing.

§ For instance, the torture inflicted on the son of the doge Tiepolo, on the Bishop of Arezzo, and the imprisonment of the Cardinals, who repaired to the Council which himself had demanded.

excessive debauchery, and, finally, dying in retirement at the extreme end of Italy, smothered by his own son, in the very midst of his Saracens, whose attachment only served to make him suspected by Christians. Under his reign, as under those of his predecessors, Germany (which, indeed, saw but little of him,) was in a flourishing condition; she saw the power of the Wittelsbachs grow in Bavaria; she admired the splendor of the Austrian princes,—Frederic the Victorious, and Leopold the Glorious, who was said to be brave as a lion, and modest as a young virgin; she extolled the virtues of the house of Thuringia, under the father-in-law and the husband of St. Elizabeth; she saw in the Archbishop Engelbert of Cologne a martyr to justice and public safety, whom the Church hastened to enrol amongst her Saints.—Her cities, like those of the Low Countries, were developing themselves with a mighty and a fruitful individuality; Cologne and Lunenburg were at the height of their influence, and the famous Hanse league was beginning to be formed. Her legislation was grandly developed under the two dynasties of Saxony and Swabia, together with a number of other local codes, all based on respect for established rights and ancient liberties, and breathing such a noble mixture of the Christian thought with the elements of old Germanic right, yet unaltered by the Ghibeline importation of the Roman right. In fine, she already reckoned amongst her knights a true Christian monarch; for, under the shadow of the throne of the Hohenstaufens, there was silently springing up, in the person of Rodolph of Hapsburgh a prince worthy to be the founder of an imperial race, since he saved his country from anarchy, and displayed to the world a fitting representative of Charlemagne. It is easy to guess what his reign must be, when at his consecration, finding no sceptre, he seized the crucifix on the altar, and exclaimed:—"Behold my sceptre! I want no other."

If the Empire seemed to have departed from its natural course,—it was in some measure replaced by France, who took from her that character of sanctity and grandeur which was to shed so much lustre on the Most Christian monarchy. Yet she herself contained within her bosom a deep wound which must be healed at any cost, if she would maintain her unity, and carry out her high destiny. We allude to that nest of heresies both anti-social and anti-religious which disgraced the south, and had its seat amongst those corrupt masses known to history as the Albigenses. The world is now well acquainted with the character and the doctrines of those men, who were worthily represented by princes whose debaucheries make us shudder, and who have been so long extolled by lying historians at the expense of religion and truth. It is well known that they were at least as much persecutors as they were persecuted; and that they were the aggressors against the common law of society at that time. Not only France, but even Spain and Italy would have been then lost to faith and true civilization, if the crusade had not been victoriously preached against that iniquitous centre of pagan and oriental doctrines. There is no doubt that, in putting down that rebellion against Christianity, means were too often employed which Christian charity could not approve, and which were censured by the Holy See even at the height of that fierce contest. But it is now acknowledged that those cruelties were, at least, reciprocal; and no one has yet, as far as we know, devised the means of making war, and especially religious war, with mildness and lenity. It is true that Simon de Montfort, who was, during that terrible struggle, the champion of Catholicity, did somewhat tarnish his glory by a too great ambition and a severity which we cannot excuse; but enough remains to warrant Catholics in publishing his praise. There are few characters in history so great as his, whether in energy, perseverance, courage, or contempt of death; and when we think of the fervor and humility of his piety, the inviolable purity of his morals, with that inflexible devotion to ecclesiastical authority, which made him retire alone from the camp of the Crusaders before Zara, because the Pope had forbidden him to make war on Christians, we may then make allowance for his feelings towards those who distinguished the peace of consciences and overturned all the barriers of morality. His own character and that of his age are conjointly depicted in the words which he pronounced when about to undertake an unequal contest. "The whole Church prays for me—I cannot fail." And again, when pursued by the enemy, and having, with his cavalry, crossed a river which the infantry could not pass, he went back again with five men only, crying out: "The little ones of Christ are exposed to death, and shall I remain in safety? Let God's will be done—I must certainly stay with them."

The decisive battle of Muret (1212,) which secured the triumph of faith, likewise shews the nature of that struggle, by the contrast of the two leaders;

on the one side, de Montfort, at the head of a handful of men, seeking in prayer and the sacraments the right of demanding a victory, which could only come by miracle; on the other, Peter of Arragon, coming there, enfeebled by debauchery, to fight and be slain in the midst of his numerous army.

Whilst this struggle was drawing to a close, and preparing for the direct reunion of the conquered provinces with the crown of France, a king worthy of his surname—Philip Augustus—was investing that crown with the first rays of that glory and that moral influence "based on religion," which it was so long to maintain. While still young, he was asked what it was that occupied his mind during his long and frequent reveries? "I am thinking," he replied, "of the means of restoring to France the power and the glory which she had under Charlemagne." And during his long and glorious reign he never ceased to show himself faithful to that great thought. The reunion of Normandy and the provinces, wrested away by the unprincipled John Lack-land, laid the first foundation of the power of the French monarchs. After having done his best for the cause of Christ in the Crusades, he showed himself, during his whole life, the friend and faithful supporter of the Church; and he proved it by the most painful sacrifice, in overcoming his rooted aversion for the wife whom Rome imposed upon him. Reconciled with his people through his reconciliation with her, he soon after received his reward from Heaven, in the great victory of Bouvines (1215;) a victory as much religious as national, obtained over the enemies of the Church as over those of France. This is sufficiently proved by all that historians have transmitted to us, regarding the impious projects of the confederates, who were all excommunicated—by the fervent prayers of the Priests during the battle, and by the noble words of Philip to his soldiers—"The Church prays for us: I am going to fight for her, for France, and for you." Around him fought all the heroes of French chivalry—Matthieu de Montmorency, Enguerrand de Coucy, Guillaume des Barres, and Guéris de Senlis, at the same time Pontiff, minister and warrior. The enemy being defeated, they joined their king in founding, in honor of the Blessed Virgin, the abbey of Notre Dame de la Victoire, intended to consecrate, by the name of the Virgin, the memory of a triumph which had saved the independence of France.

The greatness of the French Monarchy, and its sway over the southern provinces which it was finally to absorb, continued to increase under the short, but prosperous reign of Louis VIII, and under the brilliant regency of Blanche of Castile—that most tender mother and wise sovereign, who said she would rather see all her children dead than to know them guilty of one mortal sin—and who was not less solicitous for their temporal than their spiritual welfare; Blanche, the worthy object of the romantic love of Thibaut de Champagne, the poet-king, and who had such a tender devotion for our St. Elizabeth. This regency worthily announces the reign of St. Louis, that model of kings, to whom the historian's mind reverts as, perhaps, the most accomplished personage of modern times, whilst the Christian venerates him as having possessed every virtue that can merit heaven. While reading the history of that life, at once so touching and so sublime, we ask, if ever the king of Heaven had on earth a more faithful servant than that angel, crowned for a time with a mortal crown, in order to show the world how man can transfigure himself by charity and faith. What Christian heart is there that does not throb with admiration, while considering the character of St. Louis?—that sense of duty so strong and so pure, that lofty and most scrupulous love of justice, that exquisite delicacy of conscience, which induced him to repudiate the unlawful acquisitions of his predecessors, even at the expense of the public safety, and the affection of his subjects—that unbounded love of his neighbor which filled his whole heart—which, after pouring itself out on his beloved wife, his mother and his brothers, whose death he so bitterly mourned—extended itself to all classes of his subjects, inspired him with a tender solicitude for the souls of others, and conducted him in his leisure moments to the cottage of the poor, whom he himself relieved! Yet, with all these saintly virtues, he was brave even to rashness; he was at once the best knight and the best christian in France, as he showed at Taillebourg and at Masure. It was because death had no terrors for him whose life was devoted to the service of God and his justice; who spared not even his own brother when he violated its holy rules; who was not ashamed, before his departure for the Holy Land, to send mendicant monks throughout his kingdom, in order to inquire of the meanest of his subjects if any wrong had been done them in the king's name, and if so, to repair it immediately at his expense. Hence, although he were the impersonation of supreme justice, he is chosen as the arbitrator in all the great