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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.)

Cast your eye along the same geographical line, we see Poland already manifesting the foundations of the orthodox kingdom: Archbishop Henry of Gnesen, the legate of Innocent III, restored discipline and ecclesiastical freedom, despite the opposition of Duke Ladislaus: St. Hedwige, aunt of our Elizabeth, seated on the Polish throne, gave the example of the most austere virtues, and offered up, as a holocaust, her son, who died a martyr for the faith, fighting against the Tartars. Poland, presenting an impassable barrier against the advance of those terrible hordes, who had enslaved Russia, and overrun Hungary, poured out rivers of her best blood during all that century—thus preparing to become, what she has ever since been, the glorious martyr of Christendom.

Descending once more towards the South of Europe, and contemplating that Italy which was wont to be the most brilliant and the most active of the Christian nations, the soul is at first saddened at the sight of those cruel and interminable struggles of the Guelphs and Ghibelins, and all that vast empire of hatred which diffused itself throughout the land under favor of that war of principles in which those parties had their origin. It is this fatal element of hatred which seems to predominate at every period of the history of Italy. It was connected with a certain pagan and egotistical policy—a lingering memory of the old Roman republic, which prevailed in Italy, through all the middle ages over that of the Church or the empire, and blinded the Italians in a great degree to the salutary influence of the Holy See, whose first subjects they should have been, and whose power and devotion they had a good opportunity of appreciating, during the long contest between the Emperors and the Lombard cities. But, however disgusted we may be by those dissensions which rend the very heart of Italy, we cannot help admiring the physical and moral energy, the ardent patriotism, the profound convictions impressed on the history of every one of the innumerable republics which cover its surface. We are amazed at that incredible fecundity of monuments, institutions, foundations, great men of all kinds, warriors, poets, artists, whom we behold springing up in each of those Italian cities, now so desolate and forlorn. Never, assuredly, since the classic ages of ancient Greece, was there seen such a mighty development of human will, such a marvellous value given to man and his works, so much life in so small a space! But when we think of the prodigies of sanctity which the thirteenth century saw in Italy, we easily understand the bond which kept all those impetuous souls together, we remember that river of Christian charity which flowed on, deep and incommensurable under those wild storms and raging seas. In the midst of that universal confusion, cities grow and flourish, their population is often tenfold what it now is; master-pieces of art are produced—commerce every day increases—and science makes still more rapid progress. Unlike the Germanic States, all political and social existence is concentrated with the nobles in the cities, none of which, however, was then so predominant as to absorb the life of the others; and this free concurrence amongst them may explain, in part, the unheard of strength which they had at command. The league of the Lombard cities flourishing since the peace of Constance, successfully withstood all the efforts of the imperial power. The Crusades had given an incalculable stimulus to the commerce and prosperity of the maritime republics of Genoa and Venice; the latter, especially, under her doge—Henry Dandolo—a blind old hero of four score—became a power of the first order by the conquest of Constantinople, and that *quarter and half* of the Eastern Empire, of which she was so long proud. The league of the Tuscan cities, sanctioned by Innocent III, gave new security to the existence of those cities whose history equals that of the greatest empires—the cities of Pisa, Lucca and Siena, which solemnly made themselves over to the Blessed Virgin before the glorious victory of Arbia; and Florence especially, perhaps the most interesting coalition of modern times. At every page of the annals of these cities, one finds the most touching instances of piety, and of the most elevated patriotism. To quote but one amongst a thousand, when we see people complain, like those of Ferrara, that they are not taxed heavily enough for the wants of the country, we cannot bring ourselves to be severe on institutions which allow of such a degree of disinterestedness and patriotism. By the side of this purely Italian movement, it is certain that the great

struggle between the spiritual and the temporal power was no where so manifested as there; and, indeed, the latter, reduced to the necessity of being represented by the atrocious Eccelin, the Lieutenant of Frederick II, sufficiently demonstrates the moral superiority of the cause of the Church. The South of Italy, under the sceptre of the house of Swabia, was indebted to Frederick II and his Chancellor—Pierre des Vignes—for the benefit of a wise and complete legislation, with all the splendor of poetry and the arts; but at the same time it was overrun, through that Emperor and his son—Mainfroi—with Saracen colonies, until Rome called in a new French race—the house of Anjou—which came, like the brave Normans of old, to maintain the independence of the Church, and close that gate of Europe against the infidels.

But if the Catholic historian has much to deplore in studying the history of Italy, he finds in the Spain of the thirteenth century an object of unmitigated admiration. That was, in every respect, the heroic age of that most noble nation, the age in which it gained both its territory and independence, with the glorious title of the *Catholic monarchy*. Of the two great divisions of the Peninsula, we first see in Aragon—after that Peter III, whom we have seen voluntarily holding his crown from Innocent III, and yet dying at Muret in arms against the Church—his son, Don James the Conqueror, whose wife was a sister of St. Elizabeth, who won his surname by taking Majorca and Valencia from the Moors, who wrote, like Cesar, his own chronicle, and who, during a reign of sixty-four years of unceasing warfare, was never conquered—gained thirty victories, and founded two thousand Churches. In Castile, the century opens with the reign of Alphonso the Short, founder of the order of St. James, and of the University of Salamanca; those two great events redound to the fame of the illustrious Roderick Ximenes, Archbishop of Toledo (1208-1215), the worthy predecessor of him who was, two centuries later, to immortalise the same name; he was, like many of the Prelates of that age, an intrepid warrior, a profound politician, an eloquent preacher, a faithful historian, and a bountiful almoner. This king and this primate were the heroes of the sublime achievement of las Navas de Tolosa (16th July, 1212.) when Spain did for Europe what France had done under Charles Martel, and what Poland afterwards did under John Sobieski, when she saved her from the irruption of four hundred thousand Mussulmans, coming on her from the rear. The sway of the Crescent was broken in that glorious engagement—the true type of a Christian battle—consecrated in the memory of the people by many a marvellous tradition, and which the great Pope Innocent III, could not worthily celebrate but by instituting the feast of the *Triumph of the Cross*, which is even now solemnised on that day in Spain. Alphonso was succeeded by St. Ferdinand, a cotemporary and cousin-german of St. Louis—who was no disgrace to his illustrious kindred, for, like St. Louis, he united all the merits of the Christian warrior to all the virtues of the Saint, and the most tender love for his people, with the most ardent love for God. He would never consent to load his people with new taxes: "God will otherwise provide for our defence," said he, "I am more afraid of the curse of one poor woman than of all the Moorish host." And yet he carries on, with unequalled success, the work of national enfranchisement; he takes Cordova, the seat of the Caliphate of the West, and after having dedicated the principal mosque to the Blessed Virgin, he brings back to Compostella, on the shoulders of the Moors, the bells which the Caliph Almanzor had forced the Christians to carry away from it. Conquering the kingdom of Murcia in 1240, that of Jaen in 1246, of Seville again in 1248, he left the Moors only Grenada; but humble in the midst of all his glory, and extended on his bed of death, he weeping exclaims:—"O my Lord! Thou hast suffered so much for love of me! and I—unhappy that I am!—what have I done for love of thee?"

Spain had her permanent Crusade on her own soil; the rest of Europe went afar to seek it, either northward against the barbarians, or southward against the heretics, or eastward against the profaners of the Holy Sepulchre. That great thought prevailed from time to time over all local questions, all personal passions, and absorbed them all into one. It expired only with St. Louis; and was still in all its vigor during the first half of the thirteenth century. In its opening years, Foulques of Neuilly—the rival of Peter the Hermit and of St. Bernard, in eloquence and power of persuasion—going from tournament to tournament, makes all the French chivalry take up the Cross.—An army of barons embarks at Venice, and in passing overthrows the empire of Byzantium, as the first stage to Jerusalem. Notwithstanding the disapproval of Innocent III, founded on strict equity, we cannot dispute the grandeur of this astonishing conquest,

nor even the Christian sentiment by which it was inspired. We always see the French knights laying down, as the basis of their negotiations, the reunion of the Greek Church with Rome, and making it the first result of their victory. This conquest was, moreover, but a just chastisement inflicted on the Greek Emperors for their perfidy, in having always betrayed the cause of the Crusades, and on their degenerate and sanguinary people, who were ever either the slaves or the assassins of their princes. Although the idea of the Crusade, bearing on different directions, must necessarily lose much of its force, yet that force is revealed to us by all those generous princes, who did not think their life complete until they had seen the Holy Land; such were Thibaut de Champagne, who celebrated that expedition in such noble verses; the holy Duke Louis, husband of our Elizabeth, whom we shall see die on the way; Leopold of Austria, and even the king of distant Norway, who would go in company with St. Louis. The wives of these noble knights hesitated not to accompany them on those distant pilgrimages, and there were almost as many princesses as princes in the camps of the Crusaders. Even boys were carried away by the general enthusiasm; and it is an affecting sight to see that Crusade of boys in 1212 from all parts of Europe—whose result was most fatal, for they all perished—but still it was a striking proof of that love of sacrifice, of that exclusive devotion to creeds and convictions which actuated the men of those times from the cradle to the tomb. What those boys had attempted in their early age, worn-out old men failed not to undertake; witness that Jean de Brienne, king of Jerusalem, who, after a whole life consecrated to the defence of faith and the Church even against his own son-in-law, Frederic II, sets out when upwards of four-score, to undertake the defence of the new Latin empire of the East; after almost miraculous success, he expires at the age of eighty-nine, worn-out by conquest still more than by age, and having first stripped off the imperial purple and his glorious armor, to assume the habit of St. Francis, and to die under that insignia of a last victory (1237.)

Besides these individual manifestations of zeal, Europe once more welcomed the appearance of that permanent militia of the Cross, the three great military orders, the martial brotherhoods of the Temple, of St. John of Jerusalem, and St. Mary of the Germans. These last had for their grand master, during the first years of the thirteenth century, Hermann de Salza, famous for his noble and indefatigable efforts to reconcile the Church and the Empire, and under whose government the first expedition of the Teutonic knights into Russia took place, whilst one of the principal seats of the Order, and subsequently its capital, was near the tomb of St. Elizabeth of Marbourg.

Thus then, in the East, the taking of Constantinople, and the overthrow of the Greek Empire by a handful of Franks; in Spain, las Navas de Tolosa by St. Ferdinand; in France, Bouvines and St. Louis; in Germany, the glory and the fall of the Hohenstaufen line; in England, the Magna Charta; at the summit of the Christian world, the great Innocent III, and his heroic successors; this is sufficient, it seems to us, to assign to the time of St. Elizabeth a memorable place in the history of humanity. If we seek its fundamental ideas, it will be easy to find them, on one side, in the magnificent unity of that Church whom nothing escaped; who proclaimed, in her most august mysteries as in her smallest details, the final supremacy of mind over matter; who consecrated, with wise and paternal solicitude, the law of equality amongst men; and who, by securing to the meanest serf the liberty of marriage and the inviolable sanctity of the family—by assigning him a place in her temples by the side of his masters—but, above all, by giving him free access to the highest spiritual dignities, placed an infinite difference between his condition and that of the most favored slave of antiquity. Then over-against her rose the lay power—the Empire—royalty—often profaned by the evil passions of those who exercised them, but restrained by a thousand bonds within the ways of charity, meeting at every turn the barriers erected by faith and the Church; not having yet learned to delight in those general legislatures which too often crush down the genius of nations to the level of a barren uniformity; charged, on the contrary, to watch over the maintenance of all the individual rights and holy customs of other days, as over the regular development of local wants and particular inclinations; finally, presiding over that grand feudal system which was wholly based on the sentiment of duty as involving right, and which gave to obedience all the dignity of virtue and all the devotion of affection. The horrors perpetrated by John Lack-land, during his long contest with the Church, the miserable decrepitude of the Byzantine Empire, clearly shew what the lay power would then have been if left to itself, whilst its

alliance with the Church gave to the world crowned Saints like St. Louis of France, and St. Ferdinand of Spain; kings whose equals have never since appeared.

So much for the political and social life of those times. The life of faith and of the soul, the interior life, in as far as we can separate it from the foregoing, presents a spectacle grander and more marvellous still, and is much more nearly approximated to the life of the Saint whose virtues we have attempted to portray. By the side of those great events which change the face of empires, we shall see revolutions greater and far more lasting in the spiritual order; by the side of those illustrious warriors, those royal Saints, we shall see the Church bring forth and send abroad for the salvation of souls, invincible conquerors and armies of Saints drawn from every grade of Christian society.

In fact, there was a great corruption of morals creeping in amongst Christians; fostered in heresies of various kinds, it rose up with a threatening aspect on every side; piety and fervor were relaxed; the great foundations of the preceding ages, Cluny, Cîteaux, Prémontré, the Chartreux, were no longer sufficient to vivify the masses, whilst, in the schools, the very sources of Christian life were too often dried up by harsh, arid logic. The disease of Christendom required some new and sovereign remedy; its benumbed limbs required a violent shock; strong arms and stout hearts were required at the helm.—This necessary and much-desired succor was speedily sent by God, who has sworn never to desert His spouse, and never will desert her.

They were, indeed, prophetic visions wherein Innocent III and Honorius III saw the basilic of Latran, the mother and the cathedral of all Christian Churches, about to fall, and supported either by an Italian friar or a poor Spanish priest. Behold him!—behold that priest descending from the Pyrenees into the south of France, overrun by heretics—going barefoot through briars and thorns to preach to them. It is the great St. Dominic de Guzman,† whom his mother saw, before his birth, under the form of a dog carrying a blazing torch in his mouth—prophetic emblem of his vigilance and burning zeal for the Church; a radiant star was shining on his brow when he was presented for baptism; he grew up in holiness and purity, having no other love than that divine Virgin whose mantle seemed to him to cover all the heavenly country; his hands exhale a perfume which inspire chastity in all who approach him; he is mild, affable, and humble towards all; he has the gift of tears in great abundance; he sells even the books of his library to relieve the poor; he would even sell himself to redeem a captive from the heretics. But, in order to save all the souls who were exposed to such imminent peril, he conceives the idea of a religious Order, no longer cloistered and sedentary, but wandering all over the world seeking impiety to confound it; an order to act as *Preachers* of the faith. He goes to Rome, in order to have his saving project confirmed; and on the first night after his arrival, he has a dream in which he sees Christ preparing to strike the guilty world; but Mary interposes, and, in order to appease her son, presents to him Dominick himself and another person unknown to him. Next day, going into a Church, he sees there a man in tattered garments, whom he recognises as the companion who had been given him by the Mother of the Redeemer. He instantly throws himself into his arms:—"Thou art my brother," said he, "and dost run the same course with me; let us work together, and no man can prevail against us." And from that moment, the two had but one heart and one soul.—That mendicant was St. Francis of Assisium, "the glorious beggar of Christ."

He also had conceived the idea of re-conquering the world by humility and love, by becoming the *minor*—the least of all men. He undertakes to restore her spouse to that divine poverty, widowed since the death of Christ. At the age of twenty-five, he breaks asunder all the ties of family, of honor, of propriety, and descends from the mountain of Assisium to offer to the world the most perfect example of the *fully of the Cross* which it had seen since the planting of that Cross on Cavalry. But, far from repelling the world by that folly, he overcomes it.—The more that sublime fool degrades himself voluntarily—to the end that by his humility and contempt of men he may be worthy of becoming the vessel of love,—the more his greatness shines forth and penetrates afar off,—the more eagerly all men press on in his footsteps; some ambitious to strip themselves of all like him, others anxious, at least, to hear his inspired words. In vain does he go to seek martyrdom in Egypt; the East sends him back to the West, which he is to fructify, not with his blood, but with

\* We read in the inscription—the sole remains of the ancient front—on the modern portal of St. John of Latran:—"Dogmati papali datus ac simul imperiali, quod sim cunctorum mater et caput ecclesiarum," &c.

† Born in 1170; began to preach in 1200; died in 1221.

\* The title since given by the Popes to Poland.