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THE
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA.

ARTICLE I.

ST. ELIZABETH¹

BY PROF. JOHN P. LACROIX, DELAWARE, OHIO.

THE age we live in is not fond of saints. It is too self-conscious for that. It is so bedazzled with the glories of the great present as to be but blear-eyed for the shining places of the past. And it is too intensely democratic to be very apt in perceiving the exceptional worth of any that break in upon the monotony of its own dead-level. It scarcely even believes in saints at all. At least, so far as it believes in them, it is not in saints of the stumbling past, nor of the working present, but only of a certain ill-defined, longed-for future. And the church, in its vital (Protestant) phase, is similarly disposed. It has so vehemently protested against its former (Catholic) self as to have damaged its sense for history — as to have obscured its consciousness of the continuity of its own self-development. Having too largely isolated itself from its past, it is in no slight danger of super-self-exaltation; that is, in view of the unquestionably great work yet before it, and in forgetfulness of the fact that it is itself simply a fruit of its own much-disdained past, — simply a single link in the great chain of divine, world-regenerative influence, handing to the future the good it receives from

¹ Histoire de Sainte Elisabeth de Hongrie Duchesse de Thuringe, par Le Comte de Montalembert. — Die Heilige Elisabeth: Vortrag am 20. März 1868, in Leipzig gehalten von Dr. K. F. A. Kahnis.

the long past, augmented by the (exceptionally great, it may be) momentum of *one* additional factor, — it is in danger, in each present generation, of exalting its mission above measure, and of losing sight of its simply co-ordinate relation to the generations of the past, into whose accumulative fruit it has in its turn entered. And this tendency involves not merely the danger of a temptation, but also the actuality of injustice and ingratitude. If the extensive Christian activity of the present generation should result in the ushering in of millennial time, it would, in fact, not be simply *we* who should have been instrumental in this great work; but this work would be the composite result of the accumulative Christian development of all the ages of the past *plus* the increment of one generation.

But the whole Protestant church is not guilty of this characteristic sin of inexperienced youth. And the revival of an interest in sound historical criticism, now so extensively prevalent, will do much toward awakening the whole church both to its obligations to, and to the instruction it may derive from, its own past. And precisely here will be one of the happiest results of this form of study, namely, not merely that abstract justice will be done to the past, but also that the church itself will rise out of the sin of historical injustice — that it will be brought to a thorough consciousness of the truth that its own past history and the lives of its long-departed saints can be judged justly, not in the reflected light of our own advanced stand-point, but solely and simply in that of the stand-point to which the church had, in the particular age in question, attained.

The application of this solely just criterion of history leads to some admirable results. It is a wonderful equalizer. The man who by the aid of a press prints a thousand pages in an hour is not necessarily more thorough in the virtue of work than the monk of the past, who with his single pen could prepare but a single page. The virtue is not in the material result, but in the obstacles overcome in accomplishing it. Given an equally sincere conscientiousness in working for

the honor of God, and we cannot less admire the Christian knight of the Middle Ages, who, forsaking home and goods, risked his life for the rescue of the holy sepulchre, than the modern missionary, who, taking wife and money along with him, devotes his life to instructing the heathen. And, in one respect the advantage of sympathy is in favor of the man of the past. The element of the romantic and tragic belongs to those times when the real and the ideal were as yet far apart. And in proportion as humanity is raised to a normal condition, this element seems destined gradually to vanish away. Our heart thrills with pity and admiration, not for him whose harmonious inner nature harmoniously develops itself under harmonious outward conditions, but for him who amid inner chaos and heart-breaks tragically struggles, in the face of outward hostilities and obstacles, toward a but obscurely perceived ideal. We shed our tears not for the angels who kept their first estate, but for the wandering and suffering children of Eve in their obscure and oft-baffled groping after the good which they have not. And these tears and this sympathy are not merely an æsthetic luxury; they are also a fine antidote to narrow-heartedness, and an excellent nurturer of a healthful Christian disposition.

In the light of this historical criterion, we propose here a hasty excursion into the past, into the so-called dark ages, and a brief interview with an eminent daughter of the church — one whose gentle spirit and rich virtues entitle her to a front place among the elect women of the race.

The background of our picture is formed by the first three decades of the thirteenth century — that wonderful age (between the fourth and the fifth crusades) when knight-errantry was at its height; when Jerusalem was the bone of contention between the hordes of the East and the chevaliers of the West, when the magnificent popes Innocent III. and Gregory IX. raised the tiara to its most dreadful glory, when the high-spirited Philip Augustus and the chivalrous St. Louis made France respected and admired, when the

sturdy barons of England extorted the Magna Charta from the treacherous John, when Saracen children still shuddered at the mention of the lion-hearted king Richard,—in a word, when the Catholic church was in its noon-day glory, and when some of the greatest movements of all history were taking place.

The local scene of our narrative is the romantically situated Wartburg castle, in central Germany—the spot which became so celebrated, three centuries later, from having given a hiding-place to the outlawed reformer of Wittenburg. At the period in question, the Wartburg was the fortified seat of power of the powerful landgraves or dukes of Thuringia. Here the widely-related house of Wettin had ruled from time almost immemorial. Here prevailed in the highest degree the spirit of chivalry, the inspiration of the minnesingers, and the enthusiasm for the crusades. Into this age, and into such influences when they were at their very highest, falls the transient, but halo-encircled life of St. Elizabeth.

The sources from which we draw, in the main, are the two works above inscribed. The authors stand at the opposite poles of the Christian world, and their works happily complement and correct each other. The elaborate work of the Count de Montalembert is manifestly a labor of love and was written at a time when he stood in special need of a more deeply religious heart-life to console him for his partial sacrifice of cherished political principles, the advocacy of which he had given up at the behest of his church. A Catholic by thorough conviction, and an admirer of mediaeval Catholicism as the ideal of the church, he has gone back to this remote age, and after infinite pains has wrought out a life of St. Elizabeth which reads like a very romance, and which has consequently enjoyed immense popularity. The labor bestowed upon his work may be judged of from the fact that he cites as sources actually used in its preparation no less than forty-three printed works (fourteen of them anterior and twenty-nine posterior to the

reformation, seventeen of which are of Protestant authorship), most of them special biographies of the saint, and sixteen unprinted works, some of them quite ancient. But the so deeply-rooted Catholic faith of the great Catholic layman has rendered the result of his studies a "splendid compound of truth and poetry." He records unhesitatingly the innumerable miracles which the inventive popular imagination of later times attributed to Elizabeth, and which monkish writers have carefully collected. Indeed, he expressly says: "We confess, without qualification, that we believe, with the best faith in the world, in all the most miraculous incidents that have been related of the saints of God in general, and of St. Elizabeth in particular." In all essentially historical data, however, he coincides with the more judicious Protestant historians.

Our second source — in fact, the one which we have most closely followed — is a careful historical portraiture, which was delivered as a lecture, in Leipzig, in 1868, by the evangelical theologian, Dr. Kahnis. His work is based on a discriminating study of the earliest and best sources. Of the general subject, this author says: "The main facts of the life of Elizabeth rest on data which every capable student of history holds as worthy of confidence. There are three sources, especially, whose contents, with the slight sifting which must be applied to all historical documents, are stamped throughout with the character of credibility. First, the 'Report of Conrad of Marburg,'¹ the confessor of Elizabeth, to Pope Gregory IX. This document relates nothing of her life which is not entirely credible, as is evidenced by the fact that, though the report was prepared in order to induce the pope to canonize her, yet it contains not a single miracle, — which surely would not have been the case had there been any to record. Secondly, we possess the sworn 'Utterances of her four maid-servants,'² who were unquestionably capable of

¹ *Epistola magistri Conradi de Marburch ad Papam, de vita B. Elisabeth.*

² *Libellus de dictis quatuor Ancillarum S. Elisabethae, sive Examen miraculorum et vitae ejus.* — Imprimé dans la collection "des Scriptores rerum Saxoniarum."

telling the truth, and who evidently intended to do so. These utterances were carefully sifted by an ecclesiastical court devoid of prepossessions in favor of Elizabeth. Also, this source of information, though containing much that is wonderful, yet contains no miracles proper. Thirdly, there exists a 'Biography'¹ of her consort, Lewis IV., by Berthold a monk of Reinhardsbrunn." "All other sources," says Kahnis, "must be used with great caution." We shall, of course, take Dr. Kahnis as the safer guide in all cases where the element of the miraculous presents itself.

At the opening of the thirteenth century, the ruler who swayed his sceptre from the chateau of the Wartburg was the knightly Hermann, Landgrave of Thuringia and Hesse and Count Palatine of Saxony. He was among the most potent of the minor crowned-heads of Europe, and was widely respected as a generous and high-minded prince. His wife, Sophie of Bavaria, was of kindred spirit, and both were obedient members of the traditional church. Their ardent fondness for poetry induced them to make their chateau a hospitable resort for the minstrels and minnesingers who in that age wandered from court to court in Europe. The greatest of these bards, Walter von der Vogelweide, says of Hermann: "Many other princes are very gracious; but none is so generous as he. He was such in the past, and he is such still. No one suffers from his caprice. The flowers of Thuringia bloom in the midst of snow; its summer and its winter glory are gentle and beautiful as its spring-time."

In the year 1206 — so runs a popular tradition — Duke Hermann was visited by six of the most eminent minnesingers. A bitter strife having broken out among them it was thought necessary to despatch one of them, Heinrich von Osterdingen, to distant Hungary, in order to beg the great necromancer and astrologer, Klingsohr, to come and

¹ Das Leben des edeln tuginthaftin lantgraven Ludewigis der da was elich gemahel unde wert der heiligin hochgebornen Frouwin Elisabeth. . . . d. beschrebin hat er Berlt sin cappellan der yme heymelich gewest ist von jogge bis yn synen tod.

settle it. Now, when said Klingsohr arrived the next year, he not only settled the rivalry of the singers, but also, on being asked by some Thuringians to relate to them something new, suddenly cast a wise look at the stars, and oracularly said: "I see a beautiful star, which, rising in Hungary, beams from thence to Marburg, and from Marburg sheds its light upon the whole world. Know ye that this night there is born to the king of Hungary a daughter, who shall be called Elizabeth, who shall be given in marriage to the prince of this country, who shall be a holy woman, and whose holiness shall delight and console all Christendom." Hermann, hearing of this strange incident, called for Klingsohr and treated him for some days with great munificence, after which he went back to Hungary — "in a single day." As the age was not free from superstition, the Thuringian duke and duchess were awakened to no little curiosity. They made careful inquiry of all travellers who arrived from Hungary, and learning that, in fact, a princess was born to King Andrew II. and Queen Gertrude in the year in question (1207), and that while yet a mere infant she gave evidence of great piety, they conceived a strong desire actually to fulfil the prediction of Klingsohr, and to obtain the promising child in marriage for their young son Lewis.

The myth of Klingsohr seems to have sprung up as a means of explaining how the young Elizabeth came to be brought from so distant a place as Hungary. The most probable supposition is, that it was brought about through Bishop Eckbert of Bamberg, who was both brother to the Hungarian queen and also under close relations to the Thuringian duke. However this may be, a stately embassy of high-born men and women actually arrived from Thuringia at Pressburg, in 1211, begging for the young Elizabeth, as a consort for the eleven-year-old Lewis. The king and queen of Hungary welcomed the embassy, and, after hearing a statement of the potency and virtues of the Thuringian family, consented to affiance their child, and to send her away with the embassy forthwith. "I confide to thine honor as a knight," said the

king to Varilla, the chief of the embassy, "this my choicest treasure." To which Varilla replied: "I will gladly take her under my protection, and be true to her so long as I live." Thereupon the royal pair delivered to the embassy their four-year-old daughter, "laden with silk and gold, and lying in a golden cradle." And they threw into the bargain manifold goblets, precious crowns, rings, bracelets, and a silver bath-tub, together with an abundance of garments in purple and silk, and a large sum in coin. After a series of gay festivals, the embassy set out with their little treasure, and in due time arrived in Thuringia. Here the betrothment was celebrated with great state, and the little pair placed side by side in a little bed, whereupon a second season of gay banqueting, dancing, and minstrel-singing ensued.

The young Elizabeth was treated with the greatest care. She was confided to Judith, a woman who remained faithful to her through sunshine and sorrow. The utterances of Judith afford us many glances into the earlier life of her mistress. Elizabeth, it appears, had playful ways, like other little girls. She hopped and danced and played hide-and-seek. In all her plays, however, she made religion play a part.¹ Her most preferred hiding-place was near the chapel door. When measuring herself with other children she uttered a sly *Ave* while prostrate on the ground. In dancing she would take her turn only once, "giving up the others for God's sake." All the pawns she won she gave away to poor girls. Her preferred tarrying-places were consecrated spots. Before she could yet read, she loved to kneel at the altar with an open psalm-book before her. At mass she laid aside her ornaments. "From early childhood," says Judith, "she had God before her eyes, calling upon him in all things and considering everything in relation to him." "In every human being," says Kalnis, "there is an innate current

¹ V ans avoit d'age droit
 Sainte Ysabiaux la Dieu aimée,
 La fille le roi de Hongrie,
 Quant a bien faire commensa.

— Monk Butebeuf, 14th Century.

toward God, which in Christian children, receives the consecration of the spirit of Christ. Very rarely, however, has the sense for God been so lively in children as in the case of this wonderful maiden." This religious tendency is not explainable from any surroundings of her childhood, whether in Hungary or in Thuringia. "It is simply a mystery of divine grace."

Two circumstances of her experience at the Wartburg, however, served to give deep root to her religious tendency. Two years after her arrival she had to hear that her beloved mother had been cruelly murdered. And the serious impressions wrought upon her by this were rendered doubly deep and permanent by the innumerable petty vexations and persecutions inflicted upon her by the worldly-mindedness of her companions. This unpleasantness was greatly increased after the death of the Landgrave Hermann, in 1216. So long as he lived he had treated the little princess with the greatest tenderness, and allowed no one to embarrass her in her religious practices. But the duchess Sophie, under whose care Elizabeth now fell, was of a different spirit. She was displeased with the excessive devotion of the little girl, and frequently manifested her disapprobation. And her vain little daughter, Agnes, took delight in seconding this disapprobation, not hesitating to tell Elizabeth that she was fit only to be a chamber-maid. In fact, it soon became a settled opinion in the whole court, with one exception, that she had very little resemblance to a princess.

This state of things could but render the condition of Elizabeth uncomfortable. She was, says one of her historians, like a lily among thorns.¹ She felt constrained to seek out new companions: she found them among the humble citizen daughters of Eisenach, and even among the maids set apart to her service. Above all she delighted to see gathered around her the children of the poor, and to distribute little

¹ *Velut liliū inter spinas, innocens Elisabeth florens et germinans pungebatur aculeis, sed humilitatis ac patientiæ fragrans suavitatis diffundebat odorem.* — Monk Theodore, first printed in 1520.

gifts to them. And her humility was not only charitable, but also deeply religious, as a little incident will show. On occasion of a church festival, the duchess and all the ladies of the court repaired to a solemn service in gayest attire. While kneeling before an image of the dying Saviour, Elizabeth was overcome by her emotions, and, laying aside her glittering crown, devoutly prostrated herself on the floor. On seeing this her mother-in-law was deeply chagrined, and addressed her in sharp reproaches. Elizabeth rose up in tears and said to her: "Dear lady, do not blame me. Behold here before my eyes my God and my King, this gentle and merciful Jesus, crowned with piercing thorns; who am I but a vile creature? and should I remain crowned with pearls and gold and precious stones in his presence? My crown would be but a mockery of his." And immediately she gave utterance to her heart in tears.¹

There remained to her but one human consolation, — the love of the young Lewis. All the intrigues of the young princesses and all the wiles of his mother, had not sufficed to check his affection for the little stranger. From the time when they were first brought together, his young heart seems to have found a home in hers. They had constantly associated together, and called each brother and sister. Rarely did he return from even a brief absence without some little pledge of his affection, a chaplet, a crucifix, or purse, or jewel. On one occasion, however, when the present was lacking, the enemies of Elizabeth attempted to make capital of it at her expense. Saddened at this, she improved the first opportunity to open her heart to the sturdy Varilla, to whose protection her royal father had confided her. The good chevalier was deeply touched at this confidence, and took an early occasion to sound the young duke. "Be pleased, my young lord," said he to the duke, "to answer me a single question." "Speak out," said Lewis, "I will give you satisfaction." "What, I pray you, do you think of doing with

¹ *Vulneraverat jam tunc charitas tenerum cor, gladiusque dominicæ passionis pertransierat animam ejus delicatam. — Theod.*

lady Elizabeth, whom I brought for you? Will you make her your wife, or will you violate your word and send her back to her father?" Hereupon Lewis rose up, and, stretching his hand toward the Inselberg, said: "Do you see that mountain standing before us? Now, if it were of solid gold from base to summit, and if all that gold were given to me on condition of sending away my Elizabeth, I would not think of doing it. Let people think and say what they please of her, for my part I love her, and I love nothing on earth but her." On saying this, he drew from his pocket a precious gift, and asked Varilla to bear it to her, as a new pledge of his devotion.

The moment was now approaching when Lewis was to fulfil his promise to Elizabeth, and recompense her for the chagrin she had suffered. In 1218, at the end of his eighteenth year, he had received the solemn consecration of knighthood. Shortly thereafter he successfully drew his sword against the warrior archbishop of Mayence. On returning from this short and brilliant campaign, he expressed his intention of accomplishing the marriage.

The marriage took place in 1220, and was celebrated, according to the custom of the age, with a series of gay festivities,—with song and dancing and knightly sports. Elizabeth was fourteen years old and her husband twenty. They clung to each other with the tenderest and most spiritual love,¹ and still continued to call each other brother and sister. Elizabeth could conceive of no higher bliss than to lead a humble pastoral life in the society of her husband. Once she said to him: "I have thought out a manner of life, how we two might live right happily and pleasing to God." "Very well," answered the duke, "what kind of a life would that be?" "I would wish that we were poor," said she, "and had but one spot of land that could be tilled with one plough, and two hundred sheep; you could do the

¹ Sanctus cum sancta, innocens cum innocente, et non tam carnale quam spirituale connubium sortiti, invicem se in caritate Domini, supra quam credi valeat, dilexerunt. — Theod.

ploughing and I would care for the sheep." "Ay, my sister," answered the duke, "if we had a farm and two hundred sheep we would no longer be poor, but well off." But their quiet home-life suffered many interruptions. As a prince of the empire, Lewis was required to march into North Germany and help bring about peace with Denmark. Then he had to march to Italy and help Frederic II. in his struggle with the confederates of Milan. So that he was frequently long absent. During his absence Elizabeth uniformly demeaned herself as a widow. So soon as he returned she adorned herself anew; not, as she said, from worldly vanity, but in order to please her husband, so that he might love her alone, and that she might receive from the heavenly Author of marriage the prize of eternal life. Whenever it was practicable, she was accustomed to go with him on his journeys. At one time she rode with her husband thirty-three miles in a single day, without partaking of anything but bread and water. Berthold relates that on one occasion, while attending mass, she was so absorbed in the contemplation of the majestic form of her husband, as to forget the presence of Christ, and that thereupon she fell into a paroxysm of uncontrollable penitence.

So beautiful a soul as that of Elizabeth cannot well be conceived of without a beautiful body. According to Ursinus she was very beautiful, though not as the old German painters represent her, of slender form and blond hair, but of medium size and a brunette. Nowhere is she presented as a highly-intellectual woman with talents for ruling. All that she has uttered is significant only as the expression of a deep heart pouring its life out in its words. In fact, heart was her whole being; her life element and her gift from God was love. Though loving her husband above all other creatures, this love was only a reflex of her love to God.¹ Though touched with that mysticism in which the Middle Ages so

¹ Apropos to her wedlock life Montalembert quotes:

'La lor concordia e i lor lieti sembianti,
Amore e meraviglia e dolce sguardo
Faceano esser cagion de' pensier santi.'

Dante, *Parad.*, c. xi.

abounded, her religion never degenerated to a mere mystical enjoyment. She is ever conscious that true love to God consists in the breaking of self-will and in virtualizing this love in love to our fellows.

Elizabeth was extremely strict and conscientious in the fulfilment of her duties toward God. She prayed day and night. Not unfrequently she lay kneeling at her bedside until her exhausted powers yielded to sleep. One of her maidens, Ysentrude, who was deep in her confidence, relates that she was required to awaken her to prayer at midnight by pulling her by the toe. Tradition has it that on one occasion the maid-servant pulled, by mistake, the duke's toe, and that the surprised warrior sprang for his armor and was on the point of creating a little tragedy. An explanatory word from Elizabeth, however, sufficed to change the tragedy into a pleasant little comedy.

As an instance of her conscientiousness, it is related that having made a vow to partake of no food that had the least appearance of having been unjustly obtained, and, that at one period, the relations between landlord and serf having become complicated in legal disputes, she was reduced, by this vow, to very great embarrassment. It sometimes so happened that at splendid banquets she could partake of nothing but a little honey or venison, or even of bread and water. On these occasions she felt required to apply the same rule to her own handmaids. She had often to say to them: "To-day we can only eat, or to-day we can only drink." But whenever she could with a good conscience do both, then she said, clapping her hands like a little child: "To-day we will have it nicely, for we can both eat and drink."

With the full consent of her husband, Elizabeth had submitted her own broken will unreservedly to the will of her confessor. This priest was Conrad of Marburg, and "his will was as hard as iron." His principal means of discipline was blows. An example or so will illustrate it. On one occasion, while visited by the duchess of Meissen, Elizabeth received an order from Conrad to attend one of his sermons. She allowed

this visit to prevent her from obeying. Thereupon Conrad sent word to her that he would resign his office. She hastened at once with her maidens into the presence of the stern confessor, and begged upon her knees for forgiveness. Conrad finally yielded, attributing the chief blame to her servants, who then received, on the spot, a sound thrashing. A religion that consisted largely in legal forms and external discipline was so thoroughly characteristic of the Middle Ages, that it is not to be expected that so humbly devout a woman as Elizabeth would rise above it. She was free of all Pharisaic pretense, however, and retained a cheerful spirit in the midst of tears and bitter self-tortures. The beautiful myth, that on one occasion, when bearing a basketful of bread to the poor, she was unexpectedly met by the duke, and somewhat sharply accosted as to what she was there carrying, and that in her embarrassment having answered, "Roses," God intervened in her behalf and made good this untruth of abashed love to the poor, by transforming the bread into roses, expresses finely her own sense, but not that of the duke, who, in fact, conceded to her the fullest liberty in such things.

There is no good evidence that she ever performed real miracles. There is evidence, however, that she believed herself in mysterious communion with a higher world. She believed that deeply significant spiritual manifestations had been made to her. Her deep humility, however, never permitted her to explain them. She carefully avoided attracting to herself the eye of the multitude. When making her ceremonial visit to church after child-birth, she avoided the gaudy display usual on such occasions, and went in woollen dress and bare-footed down the stony declivity of the Wartburg to some humble church in the distance, and thus presented her child to God. Her leisure hours at home she spent with her maidens in spinning wool and in making clothes for the poor. In poor families she often volunteered to be god-mother. She gave special attention to poor women at their confinement, often visiting them at a distance and bearing to them gifts. She delighted to attend the burials

of poor people. Her love to Christ induced her to show the greatest kindness to the most wretched of those for whom he had died. But she always exercised her charity with the least possible publicity. Once her maidens surprised her, washing the sores and dressing the hair of a frightful looking beggar in a secret recess of her garden.¹ Though of delicate health she hesitated not in the hottest weather to enter the pestilential hovels of all manner of sick persons. At the time of taking the eucharist she not only washed the hands and feet of numerous lepers (meaning thereby to do a direct service to Christ), but even "kissed their horrible ulcers."

For the permanent benefit of the sick she founded at the foot of the Wartburg a hospital, and received into it all kinds of sufferers, especially poor and abandoned children. When she descended from the Wartburg and visited them, the little ones gathered about her and called her mother, and rejoiced in her little gifts. In the years of scarcity 1225-26, the Wartburg was visited by swarms of the poor from far and near, and Elizabeth was a very Joseph to the starving. Everything possible was given away. She even gave her royal garments, bidding the receivers to dispose of them in distant markets, and thus help their necessities. To those who could labor she gave, until the next harvest, shoes, shirts, and sickles. One poor woman was so delighted with her gifts as to exclaim that she never before knew such a joy, and to fall dead on the spot.

When her husband, after these years of scarcity, had returned from Italy, the frivolous-minded at his court endeavored to represent to him Elizabeth's charity in a displeasing light. But the duke disregarded their complaints, and said: "Let her continue well-doing, and give away what she pleases for God's sake, so only that she does not give away the Wartburg itself and Neuenburg."

¹ *Menicum horrendum aspectu capitis infirmitate laborantem, secrete assumpsit, caputque ejus in sinu suo reclinans, horridos capillos ipsius sanctis manibus totondit, etc. . . . Supervenientibus correpta pedissequis ridebat et tacebat. — Theod.*

To all appearance, happy days were now dawning for Elizabeth. Her husband had returned from a long absence. God had already given them two children. Their oldest was a son, the subsequent duke Hermann; the second, a daughter, became the eminent Sophie of Brabant. A third, yet unborn, they dedicated to God in the cloistral life. It became Gertrude, celebrated as abbess at Wetzlar.

But alas for all earthly hopes! As the happy wife one day, in gay, child-like fondling with her beloved, put her hand into his pocket, she drew out thence a crucifix, the badge of a crusader. At this sight she was so overcome with forebodings that she fell breathless to the floor. As a submissive Catholic, however, she could not in sober judgment say anything against this Christian undertaking. She quenched her feelings as a wife, and made the terrible sacrifice.

Lewis collected his warriors at Kreuzburg on the Werra, settled the regency, and on the day appointed took solemn leave of his assembled and afflicted¹ people, and set out upon his last march. His parting with Elizabeth is one of the most affecting scenes in all history. But the gentle wife was unable to take a formal leave once and for all. She rode after him from town to town—from day to day.² Finally, the stout-hearted Rudolph von Vargila manned himself, and suggested to them both that it was time for the final separation. The duke showed his Elizabeth, at the final moment, a ring, as a badge of his love for life or death, and then, invoking the blessing of God upon her, set out for Italy. Here he joined the hosts of Frederick II. But as they were on the point of embarking for Palestine, a violent fever seized upon the duke. He tarried a few days in

¹ *Erat ibi tunc moestitudo maxima, luctus et planctus ingens, voces miserabiles, larga lacrymarum effusio cum rugitu anxio et clamore. — Theod.*

² *Tunc reversuram vis amoris et separationis dolor retinuit, et ad iter unicus diei progredi compulit; sed nec ista suffecit progressio, processit adhuc discessionis impatiens, diei alterius iter complens. . . . Quis gemitus, quae suspiria, quis singultus, quae lacrymae, quis motus vel strepitus cordis, ubi tam importuna et vehemens scissio, etc. — Theod.*

Otranto; but the disease advanced so rapidly that he soon gave up all hope. He then called for the holy eucharist. When in the very hands of death, he opened his eyes from delirium, and said to his attendants: "See you not those white doves?" Then he added: "With these white doves I must soar away."¹

These were his last words. Amid the unutterable grief of his brave knights, an embassy was despatched with the sad tidings to the bereaved duchess. It was thought best to reveal the matter first to her mother-in-law. This woman, on obtaining the control of her own grief at the loss of her favorite son, ventured into the presence of the unsuspecting Elizabeth. "Be strong, my daughter," said the duchess widow, "and give not way at that which Providence has brought upon thy husband, my son." Elizabeth thought of imprisonment. "Well," said she, resignedly, "if my brother is captured, then he can be delivered by the help of God and our friends." But Sophie answered: "He is dead." Elizabeth, dropping her folded hands upon her knees, exclaimed: "Dead! dead, is he! Then is the world and all the glory of the world dead for me!" Then, rising distractedly, she ran in utter bewilderment through all the chambers of the Wartburg, finding no consolation. "But," says the good monk Berthold, "the Comforter of widows and orphans, the Holy Ghost, proved also her Comforter."

But more misfortune came soon upon her. The brothers of her husband, Henry and Conrad, in contempt of her son Hermann, seized the ducal authority. And with them the worldly party came into power on the Wartburg. It was an hour of darkness for Elizabeth. In ruthless defiance of all right, human and divine, duke Henry drove his sister-in-law from the home of her beloved Lewis.

In the cold of mid-winter, in January, 1228, Elizabeth descended from the Wartburg to Eisenach. Strange to say,

¹ Quo dicto, in pace obdormiens, vir christianissimus pro Christi nomine exsul et peregrinus, Christi cruce signatus a peregrinatione vitee presentis rediens ad patriam, ad Dominum emigravit. — Theod.

no one was willing to receive her. Fear of offending the new dukes shut all doors against her. Finally, a humble tavern-keeper ventured to allow her to pass the night in a miserable kennel of a room that sometimes served for swine. Early the next morning, before it was yet light, she crept to the Franciscan cloister, and begged that a *Te Deum* be sung in praise to God for having permitted her to suffer for his cause. Now came also her maid-servants from the chateau, with her little fatherless children. While in perplexity whither she should seek refuge from the bitter cold, an order came from the Wartburg that she should repair to the house of a certain officer, an old enemy of hers. This man assigned her in his great house a narrow, damp corner. She could not stay long here, and, bidding the cold walls adieu, she returned to the wretched den where she had passed the first night. In this condition she could not retain charge of her children.¹ She entrusted them to persons, we know not whom. For a short time they are lost sight of.

Now begins for Elizabeth a series of sufferings and persecutions at the very thought of which the blood runs cold. Many of the incidents recorded of this period of her life are doubtless colored and distorted. From their general outlines, however, we can readily infer the spirit of their truth. She remained in Eisenach till spring in circumstances of the deepest abasement. It is related of her here, that when once passing to a church she was met, upon a narrow pathway across a body of muddy water, by an old woman upon whom she had formerly heaped benefits. The thankless hag rushed upon her, thrusting her full into the filthy water. "You would not act like a duchess when you were one. Now, take that for you." But Elizabeth answered her only with gentle words, and cheerfully repaired to a clear brook to wash away the filth — at the same time, says her historian, "washing her patient soul in the blood of the Lamb." A

¹ O stupenda et inscrutabilis Dei compensatio! Quae solebat pauperum parvulos ut mater nutrire et tanquam nutrix reficere, nunc pressa inopia, parvulos uteri sui. . . . compulsas est a se propter alimoniam elongare. — Theod.

column was erected at this spot in eternal advertisement of this act of infamous ingratitude ; and it stood there for five centuries — till 1735.

In the spring Elizabeth repaired to her aunt, the abbess of Kitzingen. From here she went to her uncle's, bishop Eckbert, of Bamberg. This worldly-minded prelate wished to help Elizabeth to a new marriage. She was as yet but twenty years old, and the project was natural enough. But Elizabeth informed him that she had in the days of her prosperity vowed never to belong to any but her adored husband, and that now no amount of sufferings or threats or attractions would tempt her to forget her vow. She threatened to disfigure her face, rather than to marry.¹

The next turn in her life was occasioned by the return of the Thuringian crusaders, bearing the bones of their deceased duke.² The bishop, at the head of his clergy, marched out to meet them. Under the clang of bells and the intonation of the service for the dead, the coffin was borne into the cathedral. On beholding all that remained of her beloved, Elizabeth burst out in Thanksgiving. "I thank thee, my Lord," said she, "that thou hast answered the desire of thy maid-servant to behold the bones of her beloved. Him who offered himself for the protection of the Holy Land I begrudge thee not. Thou knowest, my God, that I would a thousand times have preferred his presence to all the joys of the world. . . . But now I submit entirely to thy good pleasure, and if with a single hair of my head I could call him back to life, I would not do it, against thy will." After thus giving vent to her heart, she turned to the noble knights of Thuringia, and, with the dignity of the daughter of a king, related the outrages that had been heaped upon her. They promised her to stake their life in redressing her wrongs suffered during their absence. They then started for Thuringia, and Elizabeth went with them.

¹ *Occulte nasum proprium meis truncarem manibus, ut sic me omnia abhorreret homo turpiter maculatam. — Theod.*

² According to the usage of the age, they had boiled the body to separate the flesh from the bones.

Poor and rich, peasant and noble — almost the whole population — went out to welcome their return. Never was prince more sincerely wept for by a whole people. At the grave of the duke Elizabeth came face to face with the brothers who had so outraged her. Here ensued a scene in which the virtues of genuine knighthood stood brightly forth. The sturdy Rudolph von Vargila reproached Duke Henry with his injustice, in ungloved words. The remedy was good. Duke Henry evidenced his repentance in streams of tears, and proffered to Elizabeth a brother's hand. She asked but for her widow's portion, and to be permitted to devote herself in quiet to God.

For a short time she dwelt again upon the Wartburg. But it was not congenial to her there. Henry and his companions remained still of the same spirit. It was, therefore, very welcome to Elizabeth when the town of Marburg was assigned to her as her widow's residence. Having made arrangements to have the rights of her son Hermann respected on his attaining his majority, she retired to Marburg, in the summer of 1229, and, under the direction of her confessor Conrad, set about appointing officers for its administration. With her sojourn in Marburg begins for Elizabeth the evening of life. The chief feature of the rest of her days is her complete dependence, as well spiritually as materially, on the priest Conrad. Hitherto her will had been only conditionally in his hands; but now, with the approbation of Gregory IX. and the free consent of Elizabeth, her will was placed absolutely in the hands of this man; so that he stood henceforth to her in the relation of an absolute representative of God.

“The character of this Conrad,” says Kahnis, “is a historical enigma, which will perhaps never be fully solved.” In the chronicles of the times he is lauded to the skies as the new star of Germany. “He was learned, pure in life, zealous for the Catholic faith, and a persecutor of heresy. For temporal goods and ecclesiastical position he had no ambition. He was content with his office of simple priest,

and was of strict habits and austere appearance." In his relations to Elizabeth there are some favorable phases. As an energetic business man, he successfully directed her worldly affairs. With his consent she entirely renounced the world, though he would not consent that she should enter a cloister. Though wearing the garb of the sisters of St. Francis, she never became a nun. It was with Conrad's approbation that she distributed an immense sum of money, received from the Wartburg, to the poor. But afterwards he forbade her to give at once more than a single coin. When she did this too frequently, he permitted her to give only bread; and when she gave away too much bread, he forbade her to give more than a single piece. Finally, he forbade her to visit and wait upon such as were suffering from infectious diseases. But we are not at liberty to consider the brighter phases of his relation to her, apart from the principle that underlay them. The one central purpose of his spiritual guidance was to break Elizabeth's will. To exercise her in this, he even bade her to do contradictory things. When her lively nature transgressed in the very least, he applied to her rude chastisements. Not unfrequently he smote her on the ears. In the more serious cases he liberally applied the rod. Once he bade her to go to Wetzlar, where the child whom she had borne after the death of her husband was being trained. The governing nuns of the convent begged Conrad that Elizabeth might enter within the cloister. "Let her but enter, if she desires," said Conrad. Mistaking this for consent, Elizabeth went inside. On hearing this, Conrad informed her that she had rendered herself subject to a severe punishment, and would have to suffer it.¹ Her maid-servant, Irmengarde, had, indeed, not gone within, but she had opened the door with a key. Consequently Elizabeth and Irmengarde had to suffer a severe infliction with a long, heavy stick, while Conrad himself stood by and sang the *Miserere*. According to

¹ Ut bene verberaret eas cum quadam virga grossa satis longa. — Dicta Irmengardis.

Irmengarde's testimony, the marks of these strokes remained visible three weeks. To separate Elizabeth more fully still from all earthly delight, Conrad required her to send away her trusted and beloved hand-maidens, Judith and Ysentrude, and to take in their place a coarse girl, and a deaf, irascible old widow, who had the duty of disciplining her in patience.

Such are some of the peculiar features of the spiritual guidance with which this papal nuncio treated this angelic woman. But this was only of a piece with his general conduct toward all. His ruthless measures brought their own remedy. Some time after Elizabeth's death he was murdered by some nobleman whom his conduct had outraged. He has been called, by some, a hypocrite. This, unquestionably, he was not. He was simply a rational fanatic, pursuing a goal set up by the abstract understanding, with an abstract will. This goal was the domination of the mediaeval church, at the sacrifice and on the ruins of every truly human element. His high-handed measures in this early period of the national life of Germany had one good result, — to render the inquisition in Germany impossible.

On first arriving in Marburg, Elizabeth dwelt in the town itself. But soon the people began to show her such honor as to wound her Christian humility. She therefore retired to a mean village, Wehrda, three or four miles distant, and took up her quarters in a dilapidated peasant's hut. Here she erected a hospital and devoted herself entirely to serving the sick. The services which her love here rendered, though perfectly authenticated, are almost incredible. We dare hardly name the filthy and disgusting services which she unhesitatingly rendered to her patients.¹ She herself went about constantly in a grey woollen dress that finally

¹ Circa horridos et foetidos et omnibus abominatos miseros inaudita a sacculis et stupenda ferebatur sancti Spiritus vehementia, et incredibili et miranda commanendi, contractandi, procurandique studiosissima diligentia. . . . Nulla scriptura loquitur sanctorum quemquam tanta sedulitate tantaque familiaritate sordidissimorum infirmorum immunditias obsequiosis manibus contractasse, tanque indefesso corde omnibus misericordiae operibus usque ad mortem insudasse. — Theod.

almost fell to pieces. Once while standing by the fire absorbed in prayer to God, it was seriously damaged by catching fire from the sparks. It was mended so often as finally to lose almost all trace of its former identity.¹ She also took her turn, unskilful as she was, in cooking the miserable food in which she yet indulged her humble household.

“Elizabeth in Marburg, we must confess it,” says Kahnis, “is a less attractive figure than Elizabeth at the Wartburg.” At the Wartburg we saw her in the normal religious relations in which God had placed her,—a playful maiden, a gracious, religious young lady, the devoted wife of a knightly man. In Marburg we meet her as a widow, cut off from all human relations, passively submitting to a heartless bigot who knows no other way to God than that of the mortification of everything that is human. Is it not, however, our secular-mindedness that attracts us more to the former than to the latter picture? That which renders Elizabeth attractive to many is not the element of holiness, but that of the beautifully human. She stands before the eyes of such as a form of matchless beauty surrounded with the drapery of a chivalrous, poetic, and romantic age, whose life of love was simply a bloom of genuine humanity. But such persons fail to comprehend the inner essence of her character. This essence was love to God; a blossom warmed into life not by an earthly but by a heavenly sun. And this blossom came, in Elizabeth, to the fairest maturity that her churchly surroundings admitted of. The defectiveness of her religion, as judged from a modern stand-point, is to be attributed simply and solely to the form under which the only Christian church of which she knew presented itself to her. Her plastic soul-life assumed the shape of the vase² into which it was poured.

¹ *Panniculos viles et abjectos cujusque coloris et undecunque collectos. . . . Propriis manibus, ut poterat, jacturam incendii laris coquinae restaurabat veteraque scissuras. . . . acu imperita. . . .*—Theod.

² In a different sense this figure is applied to her by Gregory IX. : *O vas admirabile! vas electum! vas misericordiae! in quo tyrannis principibus et magnatibus mundi vinum verae compunctionis propinasti.*

It is easy enough for us, on looking back to Elizabeth from to-day, to see her mistakes, — to see that the happy human life of the happy wife and mother and princess, in the midst of all the abundance of earthly good, was the true and proper life of the Christian woman, — that there was no need of loving husband and children and comfortable life less, in order to love God more. We see that there is no antagonism between the two, — that the receiving and enjoying earthly good is normally and properly a reason for, and a stimulus to, a higher life in God.

These higher views, however, were not within reach of Elizabeth. The false spirit of the mediæval church approached her in the person of Conrad, teaching her that the more she broke away from the relations of this life, the more intimate grew the bond between her and God. And this spirit bore her away captive so soon as she had lost, in Lewis, her greatest earthly good. It was this spirit that wrung from her the expression that she regretted having entered into the marriage state, and that induced her to separate from her children, — that led this over-loving heart that never wearied in rendering the last forms of drudgery to the children of others, to entrust the education of the children of her own body to strangers, — that enabled her to rejoice that she had sacrificed to God her love for her children, so that she could say: "I care for my children just as for any of my neighbors; I have surrendered them to God, let him do with them as he will."¹ So should speak no mother. This holy relation is not to be sacrificed, but to be exalted. No priest can absolve a mother from her duties to her children.

It was also this monkish spirit that led this matchless flower among women to throw aside the dignity of her rank and condition, and surround herself with squalor and rags. The very thought of this profanation of her beautiful young life and refined tastes, stirs the heart with involuntary indig-

¹ Ipsos etiam uteri mei dilectissimos parvulos, quos tenerrimo amplexu affectabam, jam velut alienos intueor, Deo teste; ipsi eos obtuli et commisi, ipse de eis ordinet, et impleat sue beneplacitum voluntatis. . . . Nullam creaturam, sed solum omnium diligo Creatorem. — Theod.

nation at the perverted system that occasioned it. But the over-goodness of this intensely womanly heart, led her even beyond the wishes of the monkish church. Even Conrad saw that in her the virtue of giving had almost sunk to a morbid vice. But this coarse-grained priest was a poor guide for so delicate a soul. As far as concerns a correct conception of true religion, Elizabeth was by far his superior. What she chiefly lacked was a knowledge of justification by simple faith. The brightest significance of such a life as hers is the clear light in which it sets the fact, that the church itself must be doctrinally right before it can be a safe physician for souls. Situated as she was, Elizabeth did not and could not find and come to spiritual rest. The mediæval church, whose diademed head could give to Elizabeth such a guide as Conrad of Marburg, only turned into discord the sweet music which the spirit of God had awakened in her heart, and finally crushed to pieces also the outward instrument.

Elizabeth had passed something like a year and a half in and near Marburg. But her delicate life soon fell a prey to its unnatural surroundings. The hour of her release drew rapidly near. After making a thorough round through her hospital, visiting and consoling with gentle words all the poor and sick, and distributing to them such goods as were at her disposal, she invoked the blessing of God upon them, and returned to her humble home in great exhaustion. A violent fever seized upon her and rapidly consumed the feeble remnants of her vitality. She saw herself compelled to take to her bed. Here she languished twelve or fifteen days, in great suffering, but uniformly joyous and cheerful and incessantly engaged in prayer. Finally, one day, as she was lying with her face to the wall seemingly asleep, one of the attendants seated at her bed-side, heard escaping from her lips a sweet and exquisite melody. A moment afterwards Elizabeth changed her position and turning to her companion said: "Where art thou, my dear?" "Here I am," was the answer; "how sweetly you have sung!" "What!" exclaimed Elizabeth, "hast thou heard anything?" On being answered

affirmatively, the fast-sinking woman resumed: "A charming little bird came and stood between me and the wall, and sang so beautifully and gently as to rejoice my heart and soul so much that I could not refrain from singing myself." And she added that she felt assured that she would now soon take her flight homeward. Taking now a final leave of many friends that wished to see her, she henceforth excluded from her presence all persons save her confessor and a few specially intimate sisters. On being asked why she had thus excluded the world, she replied: "I wish to be alone with God, and to meditate upon the terrible day of my judgment." Then she set herself to prayer and weeping and invoking the mercy of God. Her physical sufferings had now entirely ceased. She made a rational disposition of all her effects, and then engaged in the most serious and hopeful conversation on heavenly things, exhorting the friends at her bedside in the most affectionate words. For a moment, once, she felt herself approached by the tempter, and cried out with a loud voice: "Away, away!" Then she resumed: "Let us speak only of God and of his Son." Then, hearing the crowing of a cock, she said: "It is now midnight, the hour when our Saviour was born, and when a new star never seen before was given to our world." Shortly after she said: "Now comes the hour when the Almighty will call those who are his friends," and then adding in a low voice: "Silence, silence!" as if to hearken for the nearing call, she gently passed away.

Her death occurred on the nineteenth of November, 1231, when she was as yet in her twenty-fourth year. Documentary evidence of her life and virtues was almost immediately prepared by the Archbishop of Mayence and Conrad in view of procuring her canonization by the Holy See. The procedure was interrupted, however, by the death of Conrad, and was fully carried out only some four years later, when earnestly taken in hand by her brother-in-law, Conrad, who had now repented and entered upon a religious life, and who sought to make amends for his former injustice to her as a widow by his devotion to her as a saint.

Her canonization was not rashly accomplished by the grave conclave of the nonogenarian, Gregory IX. After a careful examination by the reverend fathers of voluminous sworn evidence, a day for solemn prayer on the subject was set apart, on which occasion the pope begged all present to pray, as he himself would also do, that God might not permit him to be deceived in the matter. After all had thus prayed, the Pontiff intoned the solemn hymn: *Veni, Creator Spiritus*, which was sung by the entire assembly. Thereupon the pope and all the assembly kneeled down and passed a few moments in silent prayer, after which the venerable Gregory arose and declared the name of Elizabeth inscribed in the calender of the saints (May 26, 1235).

One year later, another not less honor was conferred on the memory of the humble Elizabeth. The first of May, 1236, was fixed upon for the translation of her body from a humble chapel to the church of Marburg. It was, so to speak, the official inauguration of her sainthood in Germany. As the day approached, immense multitudes — chroniclers say more than a million — streamed toward Marburg from far and near, even from France, Bohemia, and distant Hungary. Many high dignitaries were there, — besides a multitude of princes and prelates, the venerable archbishops of Mayence and Cologne and Treves and Bremen, and the bishops of Hamburg, Halberstadt, Bamberg, Worms, Speyer, Paderborn, etc. On the second of May, made his appearance the emperor,¹ Frederick II., wearing his imperial crown, but dressed in a grey garb of penance, and marching bare-foot. In transporting the body the emperor himself served among the pall-bearers. After the celebration of high-mass, by Monseigneur of Mayence, the emperor advanced and deposited upon the casket containing the now venerated remains a golden crown. Then, turning and taking the little Hermann by the hand, he led him also up to the altar, that he might venerate his mother, and make a votive offering

¹ Ipse gloriosissimus Romanorum imperator, omnibus postpositis negotiis fama sanctitatis B. Elisabeth attractus et illectus. — Ancient Ms.

to her memory. Thereupon came the homage and gifts of princes and prelates, nobles and people — a countless multitude, with inestimable offerings.

“There is something sublime,” exclaims Kahnis, “in this solemn scene, where pope and emperor, princes and bishops, rich and poor, join hands in recognition of the shining virtues of this handmaid of the Lord.”

In the quiet town of Marburg there stands to-day one of the earliest constructed and purest Gothic churches of Europe. It is the church of St. Elizabeth, built in honor of her virtues by the Teutonic knights, and completed in 1283, fifty years after her death. Within the church a magnificent sarcophagus, richly set with gems and precious stones, was prepared for the remains of Elizabeth. Here they reposed until more than two centuries after her death — till 1539 — at which time one of her descendants, Philip the Magnanimous, now become a Protestant, removed them from the sarcophagus, in order to check, as some say, the superstitious veneration of the multitude, and deposited them no one knows where. Under Jerome Bonaparte, the sarcophagus was removed to Cassel, and stood there for some time in the cabinet of a French officer. While here it lost seven hundred of the eight hundred and twenty-four precious stones — some of them of inestimable value — which yet ornamented it in 1810. Since 1814 the sarcophagus stands again in the church of St. Elizabeth, at Marburg.

In 1854, while some repairs were being made, a leaden casket, containing human bones, and inclosed in a stone sarcophagus, was found deeply buried under the crypt. These are thought to be the remains of the saint, but whether justly or not is far from certain. One thing is certain, however, — that, until ardent love to God and self-forgetting devotion to the poor and needy cease to be admired,¹ the memory of Elizabeth of Thuringia will not pass away from among men.

¹ In te misericordia, in te pietate,
In te magnificenza, in te s' aduna,
Quantunque in creatura è di bontate. — Dante Parad., c. xxxiii.