

# The Life of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary



by A Secular Priest

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# **Chapter 1 - Birth and early childhood of Elizabeth - She is betrothed to the young Duke Louis of Thuringia, and sent to be educated at his father's court - Her early trials there - Her marriage**

There are few names in the calendar of the saints so full of tender and poetical associations as her's who has come down to us through six long centuries, as the "dear Saint Elizabeth."

Her history has the brilliancy of a romance of chivalry with the deep pathos of a tale of human affection, added to the more sacred interest which belongs to the biography of a saint.

In her short life of four-and-twenty years, she passed through all the trials of wife, mother, and widow: she had her brief taste of more than common happiness, and then a bitter draught of sorrow, such as is given to none but those highly favoured souls, who drink of our Lord's own chalice, and are baptized in His own baptism of blood.

Her image stands out before us in the pages of her chivalrous biographer like one of the beautiful frescoes often discovered under the whitewash of an old gothic church - "a spirit, yet a woman too," with the expression of a bright and playful child on the features of some youthful martyr smiling at the rack.

*Her* tortures were of the soul and spirit. The slow wringing of all earthly affections out of a heart which cherished them

only next to God, the early death of her princely husband, the ingratitude of her poor, the persecution of her kindred, the separation from her early friends and her beloved children, the mysterious harshness of her director, and the utter loneliness and isolation of the last few years of a life which had been so full of love, made that short life as full of sorrow as its days were few. And yet the prevailing feature in the character of this lovely saint is an infantine joyousness in the midst of anguish and bereavement, well befitting the cherished daughter of Saint Francis.

She sheds a gleam over the stern times in which she lived like the little golden flower which bears her name, and looks brightly up to heaven from its home on the wild heath or mountain side, fit emblem of "the dear Saint Elizabeth;" or like the star which presided over her birth, and which her father's minstrel-astrologer announced to the nobles of Thuringia.

The Maitre Klingsohr had come all the way from Hungary to settle a dispute among the noble minstrels of the Landgrave's Court. They asked him to tell them something new, and he replied: "I will tell you something new, and joyful withal. I see a fair star which arises in Hungary, and shines from thence to Marburg, and from Marburg over the whole earth. Know, that this very night, there is born to my Lord the king of Hungary a daughter, who shall be called Elizabeth; she shall be given in marriage to the son of the prince of this land; she shall be a saint, and her sanctity shall be the joy and consolation of Christendom."

In accordance with this prediction on the day and hour named by Klingsohr at Eisenach, the queen of Hungary gave birth to a daughter, who was baptized by the name of Elizabeth.

Andrew the second, king of Hungary, the father of Elizabeth, was noted alike for his successful wars against the pagans, his earnest piety and his generosity towards the church and the poor. Some of the vast gold mines, which at this day form the wealth of Hungary, were discovered in his reign, and their produce enabled him to multiply his alms in building churches, endowing convents, and increasing his already abundant liberality to the poor.

His queen Gertrude, the descendant of Charlemagne and sister of Saint Hedwige, equalled him in piety and goodness. The most tender affection united these two holy souls, and they watched with joy the early promise of sanctity which marked the infancy of their lovely child. The first words which passed her lips were the names of Jesus and Mary, and even at the age of three years the germ of that tender compassion for the poor, for which she was hereafter to be distinguished, shewed itself in looks of pity for their distress, which she strove to alleviate by gifts. Thus was her first deed an alms, her first word a prayer.

The Hungarians were already rejoicing in this blessed child, when a noble embassy arrived from Herman Landgrave of Hesse and Thuringia, and Count Palatine of Saxony, to ask her hand in marriage for his son Louis.

The request was granted, for the Landgrave's fame as a noble Christian knight and sovereign had reached the ears of the king and queen of Hungary, and they feared not to entrust their precious child to his keeping. So the little princess, now four years old, was laid in a massive silver cradle, and as the king gave her into the hands of the Lord of Varila, the Landgrave's ambassador, he said, "I entrust my chief earthly comfort to your knightly honour," to which the good knight replied: "I receive her right willingly into my

keeping, and will ever be faithful to her." He kept his word, as we shall see.

The long journey into Thuringia was safely made, the Landgrave pressed his little daughter to his heart, and thanked God for having given her to him. She was solemnly betrothed to the young duke Louis, who was now eleven years old, and from that day forward the two children were brought up together, and called each other by the sweet names of brother and sister, a touching practice, which in their wedded life they never laid aside.

The early piety of the little Elizabeth seems to have been deepened by a sorrow which befell her soon after her arrival in Thuringia. Her mother, whom she tenderly loved, was cruelly murdered by traitors, who aimed at the life of the king. The Landgrave chose out seven of the noblest maidens of his court of about her own age, to be brought up with the princess of Hungary. One of these ladies, named Guta, remained with her nearly to the end of her life, and was one of the principal witnesses at the process of her canonization. From her deposition are derived the following details of Saint Elizabeth's childhood. She would go, says her loving companion, into the castle chapel as often as she could, and place herself at the altar step with a great psalter open before her, though she did not yet know how to read, then she would fold her little hands together, and raising her eyes to heaven, become absorbed in prayer.

When at play with her companions, she would hop on one foot towards the chapel, whither the others were obliged to follow her, and if she found it closed she would kiss the lock, the door, the very walls for love of the hidden God who dwelt there. If she had missed an opportunity of making some of her accustomed prayers or genuflections, she would say to her little companions, "come let us lie down on the

floor and measure which of us is the tallest." And then she would stretch herself beside each of the little girls in turn, and take this opportunity to humble herself before God and recite a hail Mary.

After she had become a wife and a mother, she loved to tell of these innocent little artifices of her childhood.

Her young companions looked up to her with a loving awe, and declared that the child Jesus used often to come to play with her and salute her tenderly.

The boundless charity, which was afterwards her characteristic, shewed itself very early in her life: she distributed all the money which was given to her among the poor, and wandered about the kitchens and offices of the castle collecting scraps for them, greatly to the displeasure of the servants.

She practised great reserve in her words, and on festivals always laid aside some portion of her rich attire in order to honour her Lord by this trifling humiliation. She daily sought to break her will in little things, and thus prepared herself for the great sacrifices which she was hereafter to offer Him. She loved dancing, which was the favourite amusement of the countries, both of her birth and of her adoption, but would stop at the end of one turn, saying: "One turn is enough for the world; I will give up the rest for the love of Jesus Christ."

Elizabeth had scarcely attained her ninth year when a new grief befell her in the death of the Landgrave Herman, the brave and pious father of her betrothed. In his lifetime no one had dared to molest the child he so dearly loved; but now, although the young Louis was sovereign of Thuringia, he was in a great measure under the direction of his mother,

the Landgravine Sophia, who regarded what she accounted Elizabeth's excessive devotion with great disapprobation. The beautiful princess Agnes, who was brought up with her future sister-in-law, but who had acquired none of her spirit of detachment from the world and its vanities, bitterly reproached her with leading a life so unbecoming her rank, and told her in plain terms that she was fitter for a housemaid than for her brother's wife. The young ladies of the court soon adopted the tone of the two princesses, and even knights and gentlemen behaved to the friendless child with very unchivalrous discourtesy. It was agreed on all hands that she had nothing of the princess about her.

On her side Elizabeth shrank more and more from the society of the noble maidens around her, and sought her companions among the poor; but no tinge of bitterness or even impatience shewed itself in her gentle spirit. The injustice of men had no other effect than to throw her more entirely upon God. "Like the lily among thorns," says one of her historians, "she budded and bloomed amid troubles, and shed around her the sweet and fragrant perfume of patience and humility."

It was about this time that an incident occurred, which has been related by all her historians. On the feast of the assumption the Landgravine Sophia said to Agnes and Elizabeth, "Let us go to Eisenach to the church of our Lady to hear the grand mass of the Teutonic Knights, by whom she is so specially honoured. Perhaps we shall hear a sermon in her praise, Put on your richest robes and your crowns of gold." The two young princesses, having arrayed themselves as they were commanded, went down into the city, and on their entrance into the church, knelt upon faldstools prepared for them before a large crucifix. At the sight of the image of her dying Saviour, Elizabeth took off her crown, and placing it upon her seat, prostrated herself upon the

ground with no other ornament upon her head but her flowing hair. When the Landgravine saw her, she said sharply, "what is this for, my lady Elizabeth? what new fancy is this? do you want to make every body laugh at us? Young ladies ought to hold themselves upright, and not throw themselves upon the ground like mad women or old nuns, who bow themselves down like broken reeds. Can you not do as we do, instead of behaving like an ill brought up child? Is your crown too heavy, that you lie there all bent together like a peasant girl?" Elizabeth rose and replied humbly: "dear lady, be not angry. See there before my eyes my God and king, that sweet and merciful Jesus, who is crowned with sharp thorns, and shall I, vile creature that I am, come before Him crowned with gold, and pearls, and jewels? my crown would be a mockery of His." Then she began to weep bitterly, for the love of Jesus had already wounded her tender heart, and continued praying so fervently that a fold of her mantle, with which she had covered her eyes, was all wet with her tears. The two other princesses were obliged for shame to follow her example, and to cover their faces also, "which," adds the old chronicler, "they would have been as well pleased not to have done."

As Elizabeth grew older, the persecution against her became more and more envenomed; the chief vassals and grave counsellors of the Landgrave joined in the outcry of the courtiers and ladies, and openly declared that she ought to be sent back to her father, for that a *Beguine* like her was not fit to be the wife of their prince. The Landgravine Sophia did all she could to get her shut up in a convent. Agnes repeated to her continually: "My lady Elizabeth, if you fancy that the Landgrave, my brother, will marry you unless you become something very different from what you are, you are much mistaken."

But the prayers and tears of "the dear Saint Elizabeth" were not poured forth in vain. Though far from her earthly father, her Father in heaven watched over her continually, and contrary to the expectation of her enemies, the young Landgrave never swerved from his faithful affection to his betrothed. He loved her the better for the virtues which drew upon her the contempt and hatred of the court, and took every opportunity permitted by the watchful jealousy of his mother to visit and comfort her. He never left home without bringing her some little present - a crucifix, a coral rosary, a holy picture, a jewel, a chain of gold, something in short which she had not before. She would run joyously to meet him on his return, and receive his gifts as a precious proof that he had remembered her in his absence.

Once, however, when he had been hunting with some foreign nobles, who did not leave him till his return, Louis neglected to bring the accustomed present. The omission was triumphantly noticed by the enemies of Elizabeth, as a sign of a change of feeling in her betrothed. The lonely and persecuted girl keenly felt the neglect, and complained of it to her old friend and protector Walter of Varila, who had brought her from Hungary. He promised to speak of it to his lord. An opportunity of doing so soon occurred, for he was summoned to accompany Louis on a hunting excursion. As they were resting themselves together on the grass, within sight of Inselburg, the highest mountain in Thuringia, lord Walter said to the young Landgrave, "will you be pleased, my lord, to answer a question I am about to ask you?" "Assuredly," said the prince. "Then," said the knight, "what do you purpose doing with the Lady Elizabeth whom I brought to you. Will you take her for your wife, or will you break your plighted troth and send her back to her father?"

Louis sprang to his feet, and stretching forth his hand towards Inselburg, he said: "Dost thou see that mountain

before us? were it all of purest gold from its base to its summit, and all were offered me to send away my Elizabeth I would never do it. Let them say or think what they will: I say this, that I love her, and love nothing better in this world. I will have my Elizabeth; she is dearer to me for her virtue and piety than all the kingdoms and riches of the earth." "I beg of you, my lord," said Walter, "to permit me to repeat these words to her." "Do so," said Louis, "and tell her also that I will never give ear to those who counsel me against her, and give her this as a pledge of my faith;" so saying, he put into his hands a little double cased mirror set in silver, wherein was a picture of our crucified Lord. The knight hastened with the mirror to Elizabeth, who smiled with great joy, and thanked him for having thus acted towards her as a father and friend, then opening the mirror, she fervently kissed the picture of our Lord, and pressed it to her heart.

Louis soon redeemed his word as a knight and a prince, and his marriage with Elizabeth was celebrated with great pomp at the castle of Wartburg in 1220. Louis was but twenty, Elizabeth only thirteen; they loved each other, we are told, in God with an inconceivable affection, and therefore did the holy angels dwell continually with them.

## **Chapter 2 - Elizabeth's husband - The holiness and happiness of their union**

Louis of Thuringia, "the good Landgrave," as he was wont to be called, was worthy to be the husband of a saint. Except in the person of his glorious namesake Saint Louis of France, no more perfect picture of the Christian knight and prince has ever been presented to us. His very exterior bore the impress of the noble character within, and many imagined that in his majestic form, his long hair and smile of irresistible sweetness, they saw a striking resemblance to the traditional portrait of the Word made flesh.

He was distinguished from his earliest years for his angelic purity; he was modest and bashful as a girl, and most reserved in his conversation and demeanour, nor did the atmosphere of a court and the early possession of sovereign power ever sully the brightness of this maidenly purity.

The young Landgrave's courage was such as to fill up the other side of the knightly character; he was without fear as without reproach, and his bodily strength and agility equalled the grace and dignity of his person. The emperor having made him a present of a lion, he was walking one morning unarmed in the court yard, when the savage beast, who had escaped from his den, ran roaring towards him. Without a symptom of fear Louis stood firm, trusting in God, and clenching his hands, he threatened the lion, who came wagging his tail, and lay down at his feet. Some of the vassals who saw their lord's danger came to his assistance, and the lion suffered himself to be chained without resistance, to the amazement of the bystanders, who looked upon this power over savage beasts as a testimony of the Divine favour granted to the piety of the prince, and the

sanctity of the young Elizabeth. To his courage Louis added that noble courtesy which Saint Francis called the sister of charity. Towards women his bearing was full of gentle reverence, to his inferiors he shewed unvarying kindness and affability. He never repulsed any one by pride or coldness, but delighted to give pleasure to all who approached him.

The only passion which seemed to have any sway over him was a love of justice, which, in the cause of God and the oppressed, could be energetic even to sternness, while he seemed insensible to personal injuries. If any of his servants gave him cause of offence, he would simply say: "Dear children, do not act thus again; you grieve my heart." In short the whole 'life and character of Elizabeth's husband may be summed up in the noble device chosen by him in his boyhood: "piety, chastity, justice."

The love of Louis for his saintly bride rested as we have seen on her loveliness before God, the interior beauty of a character which he was well able to appreciate, though, spite of the railleries of the court beauties at the royal "Begaine," Elizabeth was endowed, according to the testimony of her contemporaries, with extraordinary personal beauty, and a grace and dignity of bearing befitting the descendant of Charlemagne.

Never did wedded love more truly typify the union of Christ with his church than in the pure and deep affection of this holy and happy pair. Notwithstanding her extreme youth and the almost infantine vivacity of her love for her husband, Elizabeth never forgot the deep reverence which she owed him as the representative of her heavenly bridegroom. She hastened to obey his slightest sign, or lightest word, and kept watchful guard over her least action and most insignificant expression, lest she should in any

way grieve or displease him. But the yoke she bore was one of love and peace, for Louis not only left her at full liberty in the exercise of her works of piety and mercy, but encouraged and supported her, only cautioning her with loving prudence when her youthful eagerness would have carried her beyond the limits of a safe discretion.

Elizabeth was in the constant practice of rising at midnight to meditate upon the birth of our Lord in the cold and darkness of a winter's night. Her husband would sometimes awake, and finding her kneeling by the bed side entreat her to lie down to rest: "Dear sister," he would say, "take care of thyself, and go to rest." Then he would take her hand and hold it till she returned to her bed, or till he fell asleep with it locked in his, and she would wet with her tears that beloved hand which alone seemed to link her with earth. And so hand in hand they went on their way to heaven.

They could never bear to be separated, so that whenever it was possible the Landgrave took his young wife with him on the journeys which his duties to his subjects obliged him to undertake. Neither storm, nor heat, nor snow deterred her from bearing him company on the roughest road, and on the most toilsome course. She suffered nothing to separate her from him, who never sought to separate her from Christ.

It sometimes, however, happened that on a distant expedition, Louis was obliged to leave her at home, and she then laid aside the royal robes which she wore but to please him, and putting on widow's weeds, spent the time of his absence in vigil, fast and mortification. On his return she arrayed herself again in her richest dress, and hastened to meet him with the eager joy of a child. Elizabeth could never bring herself to sit at a distance from her lord at table, as was the custom of ladies of her rank, but her seat was always placed next to his, and her gentle and holy presence

served as a check upon the light and thoughtless talk of the young knights around them.

So bright and blessed were the days of "the dear Saint's" wedded life, that she seemed to tremble under the excess of her happiness, and sought safety from it in the exercise of the severest mortifications. Her love for her husband, intense as it was, reached not to the surface of those still waters whereon the image of Jesus was mirrored in the depth of her soul. She would leave his side in the cold silence of the night, to take a severe discipline in memory of the cruel scourging which had been endured for her; she wore hair cloth under her royal robes, and continued to exorcise the most austere abstinence in the midst of the ducal banquets. But the severity with which she treated herself never made her sad or morose. She would return to her husband or her guests after the infliction of these austerities, with a bright and gladsome countenance which shed peace and joy around her. She could not endure any display of devotion, or any affectation of solemnity, and said of such as put on an exaggerated gravity of demeanour - "They seem as if they wished to frighten the good God; why do they not give Him what they can cheerfully, and with a good will?" She refused not to bear her part in the festivities over which her rank often called upon her to preside, and could take her place in the dance or give the prize at the tournament without disturbing the interior recollection in which her soul was ever at peace before God.

Yet, though thus free from scrupulosity, the young Landgravine was inflexible whenever she saw that duty required her to be so. She was on one occasion forbidden by her confessor to taste certain articles of food, on which, as he conceived, an oppressive tax had been laid by the prince's ministers. Her obedience sometimes sent her fasting from the splendid banquets where she presided at

her husband's side, and where she concealed her abstinence by every art in her power. Some of her ladies, who imitated her in this mortification, testified that she sometimes tasted nothing but a piece of dry bread. She would go through all the offices of the castle, making the most minute enquiries as to the origin of all the food which was to be served up at the Landgrave's table, and when she found that there was nothing forbidden, she would clap her hands with childlike delight, and say to her maidens: "We shall be well off today, we may eat and drink without fear."

There are many touching traditions of the tender care by which her Divine Lord sweetened the privations endured for his sake. Once during her husband's absence, Elizabeth sat down to her solitary meal of dry bread and water; Louis, happening to return unexpectedly, raised his wife's cup to his lips in token of affection, and to his great surprise found it full of a richer wine than he had ever tasted before. On enquiring of the steward whence he had drawn it, he was told that the Landgravine's cup was never filled with anything but water. Louis held his peace, but inwardly acknowledged that the wedding guest of Cana had been pleased to bless the cup of cold water poured out in His name, and for the love of His poor.

The tender charity which had distinguished Elizabeth from her earliest infancy now flowed forth without restraint, under the indulgent and fostering eye of her husband, and won for her the sweet name which she bears to this day of "Patroness of the poor." She restricted her own personal expenses to the absolute necessities of her position, and often gave away her own clothes when she had no other means of supplying the wants of her poor suppliants.

On one occasion she was met by a crowd of beggars, among whom she distributed all the money she had with

her; one poor man alone was left unrelieved, and, touched by his piteous complaint, the Landgravine took off one of her jewelled and embroidered gloves and gave it to him. A young knight in her train instantly turned and followed the beggar, from whom he bought the precious glove, which he fastened upon the crest of his helmet as a pledge of the Divine protection. From that moment, as he declared, on his death-bed, the lance of that knight was ever victorious on battle-field and tournament. He bore Elizabeth's glove through many a glorious day in Palestine, and as the proud infidels sank beneath his victorious arm, little did they dream that it owed its invincible force to the silken glove of "the dear Saint Elizabeth."

But it was not by gifts alone that she sought to testify her love for the poor of Christ, it was by the patient personal devotion so dear to their hearts and to His. No road was too rough or too steep for her to travel, no cabin too miserable or too noisome to be visited by her gentle presence and cheered by her gladsome smile, no service too great or too little for her to render to those in whom she recognised the presence of her Lord. She devoted herself especially to the care of the lepers, whose most revolting ulcers she would wash and kiss with heroic charity.

Once during her husband's absence she excited the extreme displeasure of his mother, the Landgravine Sophia, by placing one of these unhappy beings in her own bed.

The Landgrave returned to the castle just when Elizabeth was busied in dressing the leper's sores. His mother met him as he was dismounting from his horse. "Fair son," said she, "come with me and I will shew you a wonderful proceeding of your Elizabeth." "What do you mean?" replied Louis in a tone of displeasure, for he was accustomed to the carping tone in which his mother was wont to speak of his saintly

wife. "Only come and see," replied Sophia, "you will see some one whom she loves much better than you." Then, taking him by the hand, she led him into his own room, and pointing to the bed: "See now, dear son," said she, "your wife lays lepers upon your bed, spite of all I can say to her, and will give you the leprosy: you see it yourself." Louis could not resist a slight movement of impatience; he snatched away the covering of the bed, when, says the historian, "the Lord opened the eyes of his soul," and he saw stretched upon his bed One whom alone Elizabeth loved better than himself, the crucified form of Him who for us was accounted as a leper. He was speechless with amazement, as was also the proud Landgravine. At last he burst into tears, and turning to his wife, "Elizabeth," said he, "my sweet sister, I pray thee often bring such strangers to my bed, they shall ever be welcome, and let no one trouble thee in the exercise of thy sweet charity." And then he knelt down and prayed thus to God: "O Lord, have mercy on me a miserable sinner; I am not worthy to behold all these wonders, I know it too well, but help me to become a man after Thine own heart, and according to Thy divine will."

Elizabeth took advantage of the deep impression left by this event upon her husband's mind, to obtain his leave to erect a hospital midway up the rock on which the Castle of Wartburg stands, for the reception of twenty-eight sick or infirm persons chosen from among those who were too weak to be able to climb to the castle itself. She visited them daily, and carried them food with her own hands; she performed also the same labour of love for the poor whose scattered huts lay in the vallies around.

As, with one faithful attendant, she was once slowly descending a very steep rough path, still shewn as the scene of the following miracle, and known by the name of *knie brechen* - "knee breaker," Elizabeth suddenly came upon her

husband and his knightly train returning from a day's hunting. She was bending under the weight of bread, meat, eggs and other food, which she was carrying to the sick poor. Louis insisted upon knowing with what she was laden, and opening her mantle, which she folded tight around her, saw to his amazement that it was filled with red and white roses, more beautiful than any he had ever beheld, which amazed him the more as the season for roses had been long passed. Seeing the trouble of "the dear Saint" at this public manifestation of miraculous favour, Louis sought to soothe her by caresses, but drew back in reverential awe at the sight of a luminous appearance in the form of a crucifix, which was visible over her head. He bade her proceed on her way, and rode slowly home, pondering deeply on the wonders God was ever working through his blessed wife, and carrying with him one of the miraculous roses which he kept till the day of his death. He afterwards raised a pillar on the spot surmounted by a cross, in memory of that which he had there seen hovering over the head of Elizabeth.

Living thus with and for the poor, it is no marvel that God inspired her with that love of poverty which has marked so many of the souls which have been richest in His grace. This king's daughter, at fifteen, in the midst of the chivalry of Germany, already burned with the same desire of evangelical poverty by which the Seraph of Assisi set fire to the world. In the flower of her youth and beauty that fire had already burned up the last roots of worldly glory and pride: "in her sovereign estate," says an old writer, "she longed for the estate of poverty, that the world might have no part in her, and that she might be poor as Jesus Christ was poor."

She made her husband the confident of all the holy and secret reveries of her childlike imagination, and of all her lofty yet lowly aspirations after a life of evangelical perfection. The royal lady's ideas of poverty were at this

period somewhat different from the stern reality which she afterwards endured in her own person.

One night, as she and the Landgrave lay awake in their bed, Elizabeth thus addressed him: "Sire, if it would not weary you, I should like to tell you a thought I have had as to a way of life which we might lead the better to serve God." "Tell me, then, sweet friend," said her husband, "what is this thought of your's." "I wish," said she, "that we had but one small farm which would just yield us enough to live upon, and about two hundred sheep, and then you could till the ground, manage the horses, and endure all these toils for the love of God; and I could take care of the sheep and shear them." The Landgrave smiled at his wife's simplicity, and replied: "Sweet sister, if we had all this land and all these sheep, I do not think we should be very poor, nay, some might think us still too rich."

What would have been the anguish of that noble heart if he could have foreseen that, only a few years later, that loved and loving wife, whom he cherished so tenderly and revered so devoutly, should be cast forth from her princely home, to live houseless, friendless, childless, in a destitution of all outward things equal to that of her great father, Saint Francis, and in a solitude of heart far severer than his.

She had asked to drink of her Lord's chalice, knowing not its depth, and He filled it for her to the brim. In her youthful imagination her husband was associated with all her visions of a devoted and penitential life. The sweet ingredient of human affection was to temper the draught, but He gave it to her, as He drank it Himself on Calvary, full of the red vintage which must be trodden alone.

## **Chapter 3 - Fervent piety of Saint Elizabeth - She receives the cord of Saint Francis - Various miracles attesting her sanctity - Birth of her first child - Master Conrad is appointed her confessor**

The fervent charity of "the dear Saint" towards man sprang, as may well be believed, from her ardent love to God; it was consecrated by unceasing prayer, and fed by frequent communion.

At the holy sacrifice of the mass, as she knelt in profound recollection, her hands meekly folded beneath her mantle, her ducal coronet and ornaments cast down before the footstool of the King of kings, and her veil raised that she might behold His hidden beauty, the ministering priest beheld her surrounded by a supernatural light, and thanked God for having thus made manifest the interior glory of her soul. It was her practice to pass the whole night of holy Thursday in prayer and contemplation of the passion of Christ, and when Good Friday dawned, she would say to her maidens, "this is a day of humiliation to us all; let none of you therefore presume to offer me any token of respect." She would then dress herself in peasant's clothes, and go barefoot from one church to another, mingling with the lowest of the people, who crushed and jostled her like one of themselves, and make her humble offering of a poor taper or a few grains of incense, as if she had been the poorest of the poor: thus doing violence to the royal generosity of her heart, on a day which she said was better honoured by a

humble and contrite spirit, than by the most lavish and princely offerings.

An anecdote, which is told by her chaplain, Berthold, serves to shew the scrupulous delicacy with which she watched over the slightest swerving of her thoughts and actions when in the holy presence of God. As she was hearing mass on some high festival in the church of Saint George at Eisenach, she forgot the sanctity of the sacrifice, and allowed her eyes and thoughts to dwell for some considerable time upon the beloved husband who was kneeling by her side. Her heart swelled within her as she gazed upon his princely brow, and thought of all the noble and holy gifts so visibly impressed upon it. She was still indulging in this dream of human affection when the bell rang for the elevation. Elizabeth raised her eyes in deep compunction to the altar, and, instead of the consecrated Host, beheld in the hand of the priest the crucified and bleeding form of the Divine Spouse, Whom she had for a moment forgotten in the beloved presence of her earthly lord. She fell prostrate upon the ground before the altar to implore pardon for her fault, and remained there bathed in tears until the hour of dinner. The attendants dared not interrupt their lady in her devotions; and at last, finding that she did not appear as usual to receive her guests, the Landgrave himself went in search of her, and said gently: "Dear sister, why do you not come to dinner? why have you kept us waiting so long?" At the sound of his voice she raised her head and looked at him in silence, and he saw that her eyes were red with weeping. "Dear sister," said he in great distress, "why have you been weeping so bitterly?" Then he knelt down beside her to listen to her tale, and when he had heard it, began to weep and pray with her. After a while he rose and said to Elizabeth, "let us have confidence in God, sweet sister; I will be no hindrance to

thee, but will help thee to do penance, and to become still better than thou art."

But seeing that she was too much oppressed with grief to be able to appear at the banquet, he dried his own eyes and returned to his guests, leaving Elizabeth' alone to weep over her fault.

It was in 1221 - the year following her marriage - that the "dear Saint" was received into the third Order of Saint Francis, just then founded for persons living in the world. She was the first in Germany to assume a habit which has since been worn by so many saints.

After the death of her husband, she bound herself by vow to a life of absolute poverty, chastity, and obedience. She is hence accounted the patroness of that: later development of the original design of Saint Francis, which exists, under various modifications, as a religious order, while Saint Louis is the patron of the secular Tertiaries.

There was a deep sympathy between the holy patriarch and his royal daughter; and it has been noticed as a singular coincidence, that the date of her birth was the same as that of his conversion. The missionaries of Saint Francis met with the fullest encouragement from the Landgravine of Thuringia, who founded a Franciscan church and convent in her own capital of Eisenach, on their first introduction into Germany, and chose Brother Rodinger, one of the first Germans who embraced the rule, for her own confessor.

At the request of his friend, Cardinal Ugolini, who was afterwards to be the protector of Saint Elizabeth on earth, and to write her name in the calendar of the saints, Saint Francis sent her the old mantle which he wore as a pledge of his fatherly affection.

"I wish," said the Cardinal, "that, as she is full of your spirit, you should leave her a legacy like that of Elias to his disciple Eliseus."

Elizabeth received the precious mantle, and the letter which accompanied it, with the deepest gratitude, and always wore it when she had any special favour to ask of God.

In the year following Elizabeth's marriage, some nobles of her father's court returning from a pilgrimage to Aix-la-Chapelle, came, by his command, to Wartburg, to enquire after the welfare of his beloved child. The Landgrave received them joyfully, but was suddenly struck with a perplexing thought. The royal bride had already altered her wedding robes to what she conceived to be a more modest fashion, and there was no time to provide any more. Louis, therefore, came with a face of anxiety to her chamber.

"Dear sister," said he, "here are some of your father's courtiers come to visit us. I am sure that they are come to see what state we keep here, and whether you have a train befitting a princess. But in what array can you appear before them? You are so busy with your poor that you forget yourself. You will, never wear anything but these miserable old clothes, which are a disgrace to us both. What a dishonour will it be to me if they return to Hungary and say I let you want clothes, seeing that they find you in so wretched a condition; and now there is no time to provide anything befitting your rank and mine."

But she replied gently, "My dear lord and brother, trouble not yourself about this, for I am well resolved never to set pride upon my dress. Leave me to excuse myself to these lords, and I will try to treat them with so much gaiety and cordiality, that they shall be as well pleased with me as if I had on the finest dresses in the world."

Then she went and prayed to God to make her pleasing to her friends, and having dressed herself as well as she could, went to join her husband and her father's messengers. She not only charmed them by her cordial and gracious welcome, and by the rare grace and beauty of her person, but, to the great admiration of her guests, and the utter amazement of the Landgrave, she appeared arrayed in robes of gorgeous silk, and a blue mantle sprinkled with costly pearls. The Hungarians said that the Queen of France herself could not be more royally attired.

When they were gone, Louis came in great haste to ask his wife how she had contrived to dress herself so magnificently. Elizabeth replied with a grave sweet smile, "See what the Lord can do when He pleases."

The next year, 1222, Louis took his bride to visit her father in Hungary, by whom they were both received with great joy and affection; and soon after their return he celebrated, with great pomp, the marriage of his beautiful sister Agnes, with Henry, Duke of Austria. As the guests were sitting down to table, they remarked that the Landgravine had not taken her place as usual, and declared that they would not begin without her. Meanwhile, as Elizabeth was passing from the church to the banquetting hall, she had seen a miserable half-naked man lying at the foot of the staircase, who looked so wretchedly ill and weak, that she wondered within herself how he had been able to drag himself up from the town to the castle. As soon as he saw the Landgravine he besought her, for Christ's sake, to bestow an alms upon him. She said that she had no time to attend to him, and that, moreover, she had nothing left to give, but that she would send him food from the banquet. But the poor man besought her so piteously to give him something at once, that, overcome by compassion, the Landgravine took off the costly silken

mantle which she wore, and threw it to him. He rolled it up hastily, and disappeared.

Elizabeth dared not enter the banquetting hall without a mantle, which would have been a grievous infringement of court etiquette, and returned to her chamber to recommend herself to God. But the seneschal, who had seen what passed, went and told it to his lord in presence of all the guests. "Judge, my lord," said he, "if what my dear lady the Landgravine has just done be reasonable. While all these noble lords have been waiting for her, she has been clothing the poor, and has just given her rich mantle to a beggar." The good Landgrave laughed and said, "I must go and see what she is about: she will come immediately."

Leaving his guests for a moment, he went to Elizabeth's chamber. "Dearest sister," said he, "are you not coming to dine with us? We should have been at table long ago if we had not been waiting for you."

"I am quite ready to do your pleasure, dearest brother," said she. "But where is the mantle you had on at church?" said the Landgrave. "I have given it away, my good brother," replied she; "but if you will permit me, I will come as I am." Just then one of her maidens came into the room, saying, "Lady, I have just seen your mantle hanging upon a nail in the wardrobe, and will bring it to you immediately." And she came back with the mantle in her hand which the poor man had just carried away. Elizabeth fell on her knees to make a short thanksgiving to God, and then went with her husband to the feast; but while the bride and bridegroom, and the rest of that fair company were full of careless mirth, the Landgrave Louis was serious and recollected, pondering upon the signal graces which were lavished upon his Elizabeth, "for it is plain," says one of her pious historians, "that it was an angel from heaven who brought back the

mantle, and that it was Christ Himself in the form of that poor beggar, who came to try His well beloved Elizabeth, as He had before tried His servant Martin."

In the year 1223, Elizabeth, at the age of sixteen, gave birth to her first child at the Castle of Creutzburg, a few miles distant from Eisenach, whither she had been removed, for greater quiet, from her usual residence at Wartburg. The infant son was baptized by the name of Herman, after his grandfather; and in the following year a daughter was born, named Sophia, the ancestress of the reigning family of Hesse. Elizabeth had afterwards two other daughters, who were consecrated to God in their cradle, and died in religion.

It was the Saint's constant practice, after the birth of each of her children, as soon as she was able to leave the house, to take her new-born babe in her arms, and dressed in a simple woollen garment, to walk barefoot by a steep and rugged path to the distant church of Saint Catherine, without the walls of Eisenach. Carrying her child in her arms, like our Blessed Mother on the day of her purification, she laid it upon the altar, with a taper and a lamb, saying, "Lord Jesus Christ, I offer this precious fruit of my womb to Thee and Thy dear Mother Mary. Behold, I restore it with all my heart, such as Thou did give it to me, to Thee, who art the Lord and the most loving Father, both of the mother and the child. The only prayer which I will address to Thee to-day, and the only favour which I dare to ask of Thee, is that Thou wilt be pleased to receive this little child, bathed with my tears, into the number of Thy friends and servants, and to give it Thy holy blessing."

When Elizabeth was about seventeen, she lost her Franciscan confessor, Roderic, and, at the request of the Landgrave, who wrote to ask a pious and learned director for his wife, the Sovereign Pontiff appointed Master Conrad, of

Marburg, then Apostolic Commissary in Germany, to the office. He was a holy and learned priest, who had steadily declined all the high ecclesiastical dignities which his noble birth, as well as his great merit, placed within his reach, to embrace a poverty so austere as to lead several historians incorrectly to assert that he belonged to a religious order. He was employed by the great Pope Innocent III. on a special mission to suppress the heresies of the Waldenses and the poor men of Lyons, which were gradually finding their way into Germany.

During the twenty years in which he exercised this arduous office, he shewed himself worthy of it by his unwearied zeal and the fearless confidence with which he maintained the truth in the face of the great ones of the earth, when they too often lent the weight of their feudal authority to the heresies which indulged and fostered their evil passions.

He sealed his faithful service with his blood, yet the Church has not allotted to him the martyr's palm, bestowed upon Saint Peter of Verona, who died about the same time for the faith, on account of a certain excessive severity which mingled with his zeal, and of which we find traces in his direction of Saint Elizabeth. It was the direction, doubtless, best fitted to bring her to the high place in heaven which she so early attained. She might have been less saintly, or less early a saint, had a saint been her director.

When the young Landgravine was told that she was to be placed under the special care of a man so highly esteemed for piety and learning, she was filled with humble gratitude. "Poor sinful woman that I am," said she, "I am not worthy that so holy a man should take care of me. My God, I thank Thee for this grace." She threw herself at his feet, saying, "My spiritual Father, deign to accept me for your daughter in Christ. I am indeed unworthy to be such, but receive me for

the love of my brother." Conrad was so much moved by this deep humility in so illustrious a princess, that he could not refrain from exclaiming: "Lord Jesus, what marvels dost Thou work in the souls which are Thine!"

With the permission of Louis, Elizabeth made a vow of obedience to her director in all things not contrary to her husband's rightful authority, adding to this a vow of perpetual chastity in case of his decease. She made these two vows in the hands of Master Conrad in the Church of the Nuns of Saint Catherine at Eisenach. She observed her vow of obedience with the most scrupulous fidelity - an instance of which we have already seen in her strict abstinence from forbidden food at her husband's table. Conrad was most rigid in enforcing this obedience. On one occasion he had summoned her to attend one of his sermons, to the hearing of which an indulgence was attached. She was at the moment receiving a visit from her sister-in-law, the Margravine of Misnia, and, thinking that she could not leave her guest without discourtesy, she disregarded the summons of her director, who, in consequence, sent her word that he could no longer undertake the care of her soul. She flew to him next morning to implore pardon for her fault. He repulsed her at first with the greatest harshness, though she knelt humbly at his feet, and only pardoned her at last on condition that she and some of her ladies who had shared her fault should undergo a severe discipline.

## **Chapter 4 - Zeal of the good Landgrave in protecting the oppressed - He is summoned to attend the Emperor, Frederic II - Famine in Thuringia - Charity of "the dear Saint Elizabeth" - Return of Louis**

While the life of the "dear Saint Elizabeth" was devoted to lovely deeds of charity to the poor and sick members of Christ, the good lance of her chivalrous lord was consecrated to the protection of the oppressed. He undertook a war against the Duke of Poland simply because he had refused redress to some merchants from Thuringia, who had been robbed and ill-treated on their way through Poland. Greatly did the Thuringian chivalry marvel that their lord should set foot in stirrup for so trifling a matter as the property or lives of a few merchants, but they could not choose but follow him; and in three days' time the town of Serbantsk, where the outrage had been committed, was burnt, and its castle besieged by the Landgrave's troops. The Duke of Poland, who had never dreamed that a Landgrave of Thuringia would come so far to invade his dominions, sent him offers of pecuniary satisfaction, but Louis replied that he had better have done so when he wrote courteously to him from a distance, and that he had no mind to come so far for nothing; and he pressed the siege.

The Polish prince then sent a bishop to remonstrate with the Landgrave, and to assure him that if he did not return home without delay, the Poles, who were famous warriors, would fall upon him, under their prince, on the following Monday, and exterminate his army. Louis replied that he desired

nothing better than to make acquaintance with the Duke of Poland, and that, not to hurry him, he would wait eight days after the Monday named by him, in order to see what sort of people his Poles were. But neither Duke nor Poles appeared; the castle surrendered, and Louis, having razed it to the ground, returned to Thuringia, leaving behind him a reputation for courage, justice, and love of his people, which was not soon forgotten in Eastern Germany.

Some time afterwards he drew his sword in a yet more insignificant quarrel. As he was amusing himself at the annual fair of Eisenach with inspecting the different stalls, he saw a poor peddler with a very small pack, from which he was selling thimbles, needles, leaden images, and other feminine ware. The Landgrave asked him if he could make a living out of this little traffic. "Well, my lord," said the peddler, "I am ashamed to beg, and I am not strong enough for daily labour; but if I could only travel in safety from one town to another, I could, by the grace of God, earn my daily bread, and moreover, by the end of the year make my pack worth a little more than it was at the beginning." "Well," said the good Landgrave, "I will give you my safe conduct for a year, and you shall pay neither toll nor tax throughout all my dominions. What do you reckon to be the value of your pack?" "Twenty shillings," replied the peddler. "Give him ten shillings," said Louis to his treasurer, "and get a safe conduct made out for him, sealed with my seal." Then, turning to the peddler, he said: "I mean to go halves with you in your trade. Promise me that you will be a faithful partner to me, and I will engage to keep you harmless." The poor man was delighted, and set off upon his new career, which was so successful that at the end of the year he brought back his pack to his noble partner considerably increased in value. The Landgrave took a few trifling articles as his share of the property, which he distributed among his servants. The peddler made his appearance faithfully at the beginning of

every new year to give an account of his profits, which soon became so considerable that he was obliged to buy an ass to carry the weight of his increased wealth.

But about the end of the year 1225, as he was returning from Venice, - whither he had gone to purchase various precious and curious articles of Venetian manufacture, - he was set upon at Wurzburg, in Franconia, by some of the inhabitants, who thought they should much like to have some love tokens for their wives and daughters without the cost of paying for them, so they carried off the poor man's ass and all his merchandize, in utter contempt of the safe conduct of the Landgrave of Thuringia. The peddler barely escaped with his life, and arrived in piteous plight at Eisenach to complain to his lord and partner of his misfortune.

"My dear comrade," said the prince, laughing, "do not disturb yourself so much at the loss of our merchandize: have a little patience, and leave me to recover it." Then he summoned all the counts, knights, and squires in the neighbourhood, together with a good company of peasants who fought on foot, and, entering Franconia at their head, devastated the whole country to the gates of Wurzburg, enquiring everywhere for his ass.

The Prince Bishop of Wurzburg, astonished at this sudden invasion, sent to ask the Landgrave what he meant by so strange a proceeding. Louis replied that he was come to seek an ass of his, which had been stolen from him by some of the Bishop's men. The Bishop immediately caused the ass and its burthen to be restored to its owner, who returned with it in triumph, to the great delight and admiration of the common people, who hailed him as their champion and defender.

Louis was now summoned by the Emperor Frederic II to aid him in his campaign in Italy, where he served with great courage and distinction; and during his absence a calamity befell Thuringia which gave fresh scope to the tender charity of his saintly wife.

A dreadful famine prevailed over the whole of Germany, pressing most heavily upon Thuringia, in the year 1226. The famished people were scattered through the woods and fields collecting such roots and wild fruits as usually served only for the food of beasts. They devoured horses, asses, and all manner of revolting things; and the roads were strewn with the bodies of the dying and the dead.

Elizabeth's heart swelled within her at the misery of her husband's subjects, and her sole thought and occupation during his absence was their relief. She began by distributing all the money in the treasury, which, in consequence of the recent sale of some of the Landgrave's lands, amounted to 6400 golden florins - an enormous sum in those days. Then she opened her husband's granaries, and in spite of the opposition of the officers of his household, distributed the whole contents among the people. Yet this boundless liberality was directed by the strictest prudence. Instead of giving away the corn in large quantities, which might have been heedlessly squandered, she distributed daily to each person the portion necessary for his subsistence, which had been previously baked in the ovens of the castle to save the poor pensioners all needless expense. Nine hundred poor were thus daily relieved.

But there was a still greater number prevented by sickness or infirmity from climbing the steep ascent to the castle, and these were the objects of the Landgravine's especial care. With her own hands she carried them food from her own table, which she and her ladies scarcely dared to touch for

fear of diminishing the portion of the poor. She placed the sick who required especial care in the hospital, which she had founded half-way up the castle hill, and established two other hospitals in the city of Eisenach, one of which remains to this day. Twice every day did the young Landgravine descend the steep declivity between the castle and these two hospitals, to minister, with her own hands, to their suffering inmates. Her attendants murmured loudly at the closeness and bad smells of the sick rooms in the intense heat of summer, but though naturally peculiarly susceptible to such inconveniences, Elizabeth persevered in her labour of love without shewing, by word or look, that she was even conscious of their existence.

In one of these hospitals she had an asylum for sick, orphan, or deserted children. The poor little creatures crowded round her as soon as she appeared among them, clinging to her dress, and crying "Mother! mother!"

The time which remained after her visits to the hospitals was devoted by "the dear Saint" to seeking out the sick and suffering in their own miserable homes, and visiting the prisoners in the castle dungeons. While thus engaged she was continually lifting up her heart in prayer, and sometimes her interior communings with God would become audible to those around her. Thus she was once heard to utter the following words in the hospital: "How can I thank Thee enough, Lord, for enabling me to gather together these poor people, who are Thy dearest friends, and permitting me thus to serve them myself?" An angel was heard to reply, "Rejoice, Elizabeth, for thou also art the friend of the living God, and dost shine as the moon in his sight."

Other miraculous signs testified the Divine favour towards her. As she was returning from the town, whither she had gone to buy some glass and earthenware toys for the poor

little children in the hospital, her carriage was overturned, by the awkwardness of the driver, upon a heap of stones. She was unhurt by the accident, and not one of the little playthings which she was carrying wrapped up in a fold of her mantle was broken. Another time she had her apron full of broken meat, which she was distributing among a group of miserable beggars, when she saw a fresh company come up just as she had discovered that she had not nearly enough for the first. She continued, however, to give piece after piece, praying all the while in her heart, and as fast as one was given it was replaced by another, till she had fed the whole party without emptying her apron.

The Landgravine did not confine her care to the poor immediately around her; the most distant portions of her husband's dominions had a share in her motherly solicitude; and when the public funds failed to relieve their wants, she sold all her jewels and valuable possessions to supply the deficiency.

Elizabeth continued these extraordinary succours until the autumn of 1227 put an end to the extremity of the scarcity, when she assembled all the poor who were in a condition to work, gave to each a new shirt and pair of shoes, and sent them to work in the fields. To those who were not strong enough to work she gave a suit of clothes and a small sum of money; and when money failed, she took her silk robes and veils and divided them among the poor women, saying, "I do not give you these things to wear, but that you may sell them to supply your wants, and then work according to your strength, for it is written, "He that will not work let him not eat."

The people of Thuringia have forgotten the faith of their fathers, and the memory of the heretic Luther, who found his patmos, as he modestly called it, at Wartburg, has

overshadowed that of the dear Saint Elizabeth. His pulpit is now shewn as the chief object of interest in the chapel where she was wont to pray; but the pilgrim's eye can still trace from the castle height, which overlooks the magnificent landscape below, the steep and rugged paths so often trodden by the unwearied feet of "the princess of the poor." The site of the hospital erected near the gate of the ducal palace, still bears the name of its foundress. A Franciscan convent was built there in her honour in 1331, which, with seventeen other churches and convents in the town of Eisenach alone, was pillaged and destroyed in a single day at the time of the Reformation, the monks and priests withdrawing, two-and-two, in solemn procession from their blazing convents, amid the hissing and insults of the heretics, and chanting the Deum in thanksgiving that they had been accounted worthy to endure the loss of all things for Christ. The stones of the convent were used to repair the fortifications of the castle; but a little fountain of pure and living water, in which she had been used to wash the linen of the poor, still bears the name of Saint Elizabeth; and the peasants call the little coppice wood, surrounded by a broken wall which shades the lonely fountain, Elizabeth's garden.

Meanwhile the Landgrave Louis, hearing of the distress of his subjects, obtained leave from the Emperor to return home. There was joy throughout all Thuringia at the presence of the beloved prince, whose return was hailed by his famished people as the termination of all their miseries. His mother and young brothers rejoiced exceedingly, but no joy equalled that of Elizabeth. It had been her first long absence from that beloved husband, who was the sole confidant of all her holy and happy thoughts, and whose noble and unworldly character she alone thoroughly understood and appreciated.

The officers of the Landgrave's household, measuring his heart by their own, thought he would be much displeased at the lavish prodigality with which his treasures had been exhausted during his absence, and hastened to meet him on his way home in order to throw all the blame upon the Landgravine, who, as they said, had emptied all the granaries and spent all the money in the treasury of Wartburg, in spite of all their remonstrances.

Annoyed by these complaints at such a moment, Louis replied coldly: "Is my dear wife well? - that is all I want to know: what matters all the rest to me?" and then he added, "I wish you to leave my good little Elizabeth to give as much in alms as she pleases; and I would have you to aid instead of contradicting her. Let her give as much as she will, for so long as she leaves us Eisenach, Wartburg, and Naumburg, she will not ruin us by her almsgiving;" and he hastened on to greet his beloved wife, who, in the words of Berthold, an eye-witness of the scene, "threw herself into his arms and kissed him a thousand times over, with her lips and her heart." "Dear sister," said Louis, as he held her in his arms, "what has become of all your poor people during this bad year?" She replied gently, "I have given to God what belonged to Him, and God has preserved for us what belongs to thee and to me."

Tradition adds, that as Louis and Elizabeth were walking up and down the great hall together in long and earnest discourse, they saw corn pouring in under the doors, and through the crevices of the flooring. The seneschal was sent to ascertain the cause, and brought back word that the coffers were so full of corn that it was pouring over, and finding its way through the flooring above the granary. And they returned thanks to God.

The first care of the Landgrave on his return, was to redress all the wrongs sustained from powerful men by the poor, or by religious communities, during his absence. One Saturday evening he visited the Benedictine Monastery of Pjeinhartsbrunn, which was a favourite retreat of his, and heard from the abbot that a neighbouring chief, the Lord of Saltza, had taken forcible possession of a territory belonging to the monastery, on a mountain commanding the valley on which it stood, and had there erected a fortress, to the great annoyance of the religious. Louis wrote immediately to Wartburg for a party of men-at-arms to attend him early next morning with scaling ladders. At daybreak he heard a low mass, charged the abbot not to have the cross carried, nor high mass sung till his return, and then went to meet his soldiers, whom he led at once to attack the castle. The walls were scaled, and the Lord of Saltza taken prisoner. The Landgrave put him in irons and brought him to the abbey. On his arrival he caused the cross to be brought forth, and followed the usual procession before high mass, the usurping knight and his soldiers being led, bound, before the cross, the cantor intoning the versicle: *Domine humiliasti sicut vulneratum superbum*; and all the monks answering, *In brachio virtutis tue dispersisti inimicos tuos*. "Thou hast humbled the proud, and with Thy mighty arm hast dispersed thine enemies."

After mass the Landgrave made the Lord of Saltza swear that he would do no further injury to the monastery, and then dismissed him, with orders for the immediate destruction of the castle which had been taken so early in the morning.

## **Chapter 5 - The good Landgrave takes the Cross - His Death**

The happiness of Elizabeth at her husband's return was but the prelude to a far more sorrowful parting. Germany was now ringing far and wide with the preparation for a new crusade. Scarcely forty years had passed away since the exploits of Richard of the Lion-heart had stirred every brave spirit in Europe; and the splendid success of the fourth crusade, which had seated a French knight on the throne of the emperors of the east, and thus swept away a lurking and treacherous foe from the path to the sepulchre of Christ, seemed to call loudly on the chivalry of Christendom once more to set lance in rest for its deliverance.

The heart of Frederic II had little sympathy with the noble instincts which attracted all faithful and loyal knights to Palestine, yet he was forced to yield at last to the repeated summons of Honorius III and Gregory IX, and to call upon all the faithful of his empire to be ready to follow him to the Holy Land in the autumn of 1227. No sword was more promptly offered to the sacred cause than that of the young Landgrave of Thuringia. Louis the Pious, the brother and predecessor of his father, had fought bravely in Palestine with Coeur le Lion and Philip Augustus; and King Andrew, of Hungary, the father of his beloved Elizabeth, had spent many years of his life in the East in conflict with the infidels. Louis longed to draw his sword in the same quarrel, and eagerly accepted the "flower of Christ," as the cross worn by the Crusaders was called in Germany, from the hands of the venerable Bishop of Hildesheim. But as he rode home his heart sank within him at the thought of the anguish he was about to inflict upon his beloved wife, now soon to give birth to her fourth child; and he determined to conceal his

intention, if possible, until near the time when he must carry it into effect. Instead, therefore, of wearing the cross openly, as was the custom with those about to engage in a crusade, he contented himself with carrying it secretly about him. But one evening, as she was sitting by him, Elizabeth playfully unfastened his girdle, and began to examine the contents of the purse which was fastened to it. The cross usually worn by crusaders fell out of the purse as she opened it, and in a moment she understood the full extent of the misfortune which threatened her, and sank senseless on the floor. Her terrified husband raised her tenderly, and when she came to herself sought to soothe her by the most affectionate and cheering words. He appealed to that faith and piety which he well knew to be the ruling principles of her life. "It is for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ," said he, "that I go. You would not hinder me from doing for God what I should be obliged in honour to do for a temporal prince, for the empire, and the Emperor, were he to command me?" After a long fit of silent weeping, she said to him: "Dear brother, if it be not against the will of God, stay with me." But he replied, "Dear sister, let me go, for I have made a vow to God." Then Elizabeth recollected herself. She made an offering of her will to the will of God, and said to Louis, "Against the will of God I will not keep thee. May God give thee grace to do His will in all things. I have made Him the sacrifice of thee and of myself; may His goodness watch over thee; may all blessings be with thee for ever. This shall be my unceasing prayer. Go, then, in the name of God." After another long silence they spoke of their unborn child, whom they resolved to consecrate to God from the moment of its birth, if a son, in the Abbey of Ramersdorf; if a daughter, in the Convent of Aldenburg.

The Landgrave, having no longer any reason for concealing his intention, announced it publicly at a solemn assembly held at Creutzburg, before which he laid a plan for the

government of the country during his absence, and exhorted the nobles who were to remain behind to rule their vassals with mildness and equity, and to preserve peace among themselves. Before the assembly broke up, he addressed it in the following words, which have been preserved by his chaplain, Berthold, who attended him constantly during the latter years of his life. "Dear and faithful brothers in arms, barons, lords, and noble knights, and you, my faithful people, you know that in the lifetime of my princely father, of pious memory, our country had to endure many cruel wars and long seasons of calamity. You know what labours, toils, and hardships my father sustained to preserve his dominions from utter ruin. He succeeded at last, by dint of courage and generosity and his name is held in honour among us. But to me, God has granted, as to Solomon the son of David, peace and quiet days. I see no neighbours around me from whom I have anything to fear, as no man hath cause to dread lawless violence from me. You ought all to acknowledge this grace from God, and to give Him thanks for it. As to me, for the love of God, Who has crowned me with His favours, to testify my gratitude to Him, and for the salvation of my soul, I am going now into the land of the east to comfort and relieve that dear Christendom which is there most cruelly oppressed, and to defend it from the enemies of the name and blood of God. I shall make this expedition at my own cost, and without imposing any new burthen upon you, my loving subjects. I commend to the protection of the Most High my good and dearly loved wife, my little children, my dear brothers, my friends, my people, and my country - all, in short, that I willingly leave for the honour of His holy name. I strictly charge you to keep peace together during my absence. I specially exhort the nobles to bear themselves like Christian men towards my poor people. Lastly, I beseech you all most earnestly to pray much to God for me, that He may preserve me from all misfortunes during this voyage, and bring me back among you safe and sound,

if such be His holy will, for before all things I submit myself, and you, and all that I have, to the good pleasure of His divine majesty."

As the young Landgrave thus addressed the assembly in a voice which bore witness of the deep emotions of his heart, sobs burst forth from the steel-clad breasts around him, and tears rolled down the cheeks of the old warriors who had gone forth to battle with his father.

Having arranged all his affairs, he specially commended his wife to the care of his mother, his brothers, and the ministers of his household. "I know well," said the cellarer, "that my lady the Landgravine will give away everything she can lay her hands on, and bring us all to want." "I care little for that," said Louis; "God will be sure to restore whatever she gives away."

The Landgrave visited all the religious houses in Eisenach to bestow a parting alms, and ask prayers and blessings in return; and then, accompanied by his whole family, paid a last visit to his beloved monastery of Reinhartsbrunn. As the monks, according to custom, left the choir after compline to receive the holy water, the prince standing beside the officiating priest, embraced each religious as he passed, and even lifted up each little chorister as he went by, to imprint a fatherly kiss upon his brow. The religious melted into tears, and the Landgrave himself was overcome by a sort of presentiment of the sorrows which were to follow his departure.

From Reinhartsbrunn he proceeded to Smalkald, where he had appointed the knights to meet him who were to accompany him to the Holy Land. There he was to take leave of his wife, his mother, and all who were dear to him. He took his brother Henry aside and said to him, "I have done what I

could to walk in the path of salvation, and there is but one thing which troubles me now: it is that I have hitherto neglected to observe an injunction given me by my father to destroy the castle of Eyterburg, which was erected to the injury of the neighbouring convent. I pray you, therefore, sweet brother, to level it to the ground as soon as I am gone; it will be for the salvation of your soul."

At last the day of departure came, which had been fixed for the nativity of Saint John the Baptist. Louis was surrounded by all the knights from the extremities of his dominions, and by the people, who crowded around to take a last farewell of their beloved prince. He affectionately blessed his two weeping brothers, to whom he earnestly commended his mother, his children, and his Elizabeth. His little children hung upon him and cried bitterly as they bade him farewell, saying in their baby language, "Good night, dear father! many thousand times good night, dear, precious father!" He could not restrain his tears as he embraced them; but when he turned to his beloved Elizabeth, the strong man's heart gave way utterly, and his sobs choked his utterance. He threw one arm round her, and the other round his mother, and held them both silently to his heart. At last he said, "My dearest mother, I must leave you; but I leave you in my place your two other sons, Henry and Conrad. I commend to you my wife, whose anguish you see." When at last he tore himself from the arms of his mother, Louis found that he was still hemmed in by the knights who were to remain behind, and by crowds of the common people, to whom he had ever been so gracious a lord and so tender a father. They pressed round to embrace him, to kiss his hand, or at least to touch his clothes. But these were not the only partings that day. Among the host of crusaders who were to accompany the Landgrave, many a bursting heart was struggling with the feelings of husband, father, son, or brother; and the low meanings of wife,, mother, and child mingled strangely with

the triumphant swell of the hymns, in which the crusaders were returning thanks to God that He had deigned to call them to do battle for His name. Louis broke from the loving arms around him, and springing upon his horse, joined his voice to theirs who with heart and mouth were praising the Lord.

Elizabeth was still by his side. She could not bear to bid him farewell with the others, and obtained leave to accompany him as far as the frontiers of Thuringia. They rode in silence side by side, having no heart to speak. When they came to the frontier Elizabeth begged to go a little farther still, and made another day's journey; and after that another, for she knew not how to leave him, nor he how to bid her depart. At the end of the second day the Lord of Varila, the son of that true and faithful friend of Elizabeth, who had stood by her in all her early troubles, drew near to his lord and said: "My gracious lord, it is time for my lady the Landgravine to return: bid her depart, for indeed it must be." Then, as it they recognised the will of God in the words of this faithful servant, those two loving hearts clung to each other with a last embrace. It seemed even then as if they could not part. At last Louis, mastering his grief, gave the signal for departure. He shewed his wife a signet ring which he wore, and said, "Elizabeth, my truest, dearest sister, mark well this ring, on which is engraven the Lamb of God, with His banner: let this be to thee a sure and certain token in all that relates to me. Whoever shall bring thee this ring, dear and faithful sister, and shall bring thee tidings of my life or death, believe thou whatever he shall tell thee." And then he added, "May the Lord bless thee, my own sweetest little Elizabeth, my heart's own loved sister, my precious treasure, may our dear Lord keep up thine heart and thy courage; may He bless the babe which thou bearest in thy bosom! We will do with it what we have promised Him. Farewell! Remember our wedded life and our true and holy love; never

forget me in any of thy prayers. Farewell! I may stay no longer!" - and he departed.

Elizabeth gazed after him in silent anguish, straining her eyes to catch the last glimpse of that beloved form, which her heart sadly foreboded she should see no more on earth; and then retraced her melancholy way to her desolate home. She there laid aside her royal robes to assume the widow's dress, to which she was so soon to acquire a mournful right.

The bitter parting once over, the spirit of the devoted Crusader and adventurous knight rose with the joy of a noble heart in conflict and sacrifice. He was leading a goodly company to the rescue of the sepulchre of Christ. Among his own vassalage were five counts, and a numerous train of barons, knights, and esquires. Five priests, among whom was Berthold, his chaplain and chronicler, accompanied the army to administer to its spiritual wants. Besides his own vassals, the Landgrave, as Commander-in-Chief of the Crusaders of Central Germany, was followed by a train of knights from Swabia, Franconia, and the banks of the Rhine.

This gallant army joined the Emperor in Apulia about the end of August. Scarcely, however, had the Crusaders embarked for Palestine, when a fatal fever broke out among them, to which the young Landgrave of Thuringia was one of the first to fall a victim. He received the last sacraments from the hands of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and died in a spirit of loving resignation worthy of a true soldier of Christ. Not a shadow of regret seemed to cross his mind at dying thus far from home, and friends, and children; from the subjects to whom he had been so just and gracious a prince; and from the wife whom he loved with so single and devoted an affection; dying, also, without a sight of the sepulchre of Christ, and without having been allowed to strike a blow for its deliverance.

It was enough for him to die under the banner of Christ; he had lived for God and in God, and he was well content to die at the moment and at the post assigned by Him.

Louis charged some of his knights to return home to bear his ring and the tidings of his death to his Elizabeth; and he besought those around him, in the name of God and our Lady, to remember him if they should survive their holy enterprize, to carry back his bones to Thuringia, and bury them at Reinhartsbrun, and never to forget him in their prayers. A few minutes before he died he saw a number of white doves hovering over his head, and exclaimed, "See! see! these snow-white doves!" They thought he was delirious. A moment afterwards he said, "I must go with those beautiful doves." With these words on his lips, he fell asleep in the Lord, and the eyes of his chaplain, Berthold, were opened to behold the doves of which he spoke, on their flight towards the East, bearing with them, doubtless, to the Sun of Eternal Justice, that young soul which had preserved throughout its mortal pilgrimage a whiteness and innocence like their's. Deep and true was the mourning of his companions in arms. "Alas!" cried they, "dear lord! good knight I why have you left us thus, exiles on a foreign land? Woe to us! for we have lost the light of our eyes, the leader of our pilgrimage, the hope of our return!" They solemnly swore to fulfil their lord's last commands in the event of their surviving the crusade, and then went on their way to accomplish their war.

The knights charged with the sad office of bearing to Thuringia the tidings of the Landgrave's death, had a long and heavy journey to make, and did not arrive there till the beginning of winter. Elizabeth had just given birth to her fourth child, Gertrude, and was unable to see the messengers when they arrived; they therefore unfolded their sad tidings to the Landgravine Sophia, and the two young

princes, Henry and Conrad. The first thought of all, after the first burst of grief was over, was for the young widow, to whom, in her state of weakness, the announcement of her bereavement might, it was feared, be fatal. The Landgravine Sophia, whose heart now warmed to one whom her son had so tenderly loved, gave the strictest orders that Elizabeth should be kept in ignorance of the truth till she should recover sufficient strength to bear it; and then she took upon herself the painful task of making it known to her. She went to her daughter's room as if only to pay her a visit of affection on her recovery. Elizabeth, wholly unsuspecting of the object of her coming, received her with respect and affection, and making her sit by the couch on which she was lying, began to converse cheerfully with her. At last the mother, making a great effort to overcome her emotion, said: "Take courage, my dearest child, and be not cast down by what has befallen my son, your husband, by the will of God, to which, as you know, he has always been perfectly resigned." Elizabeth, seeing that her mother-in-law spoke these words calmly, and without shedding a tear, never suspected the extent of her misfortune, but, supposing that her husband had been taken prisoner, replied: "If my brother has been made prisoner, by the help of God and our friends he shall soon be ransomed. My father, I am sure, will come to our assistance, and we shall all be happy again." But the Landgravine answered, "Oh! my dear child, be patient, and take this ring which he has sent you; for to our great sorrow he is dead!" "Oh, mother!" said Elizabeth, "what is it you say?" "He is dead," mournfully repeated the unhappy mother. "Oh, my God! my God!" cried Elizabeth, in a choking voice, turning first pale, then red, and letting her hands fall helplessly on her lap, "then is the whole world dead to me - the world and all its joys."

Her brain seemed to have been turned by the sudden anguish which had fallen upon her, for she began to run

wildly through the halls and corridors of the castle, crying, "He is dead - dead - dead!" She never stopped till she came against the wall of the refectory, to which she clung, bathed in tears. Here the Landgravine and some of her ladies found her: they made her sit down, and tried to console her; but she only wept, and sobbed out these broken words: "Now," she repeated incessantly, "I have lost everything. Oh! my heart's own dearest brother! oh, my good and pious husband! thou art then dead, and hast left me in misery! How shall I ever learn to live without thee? Oh! poor forsaken widow! unhappy woman that I am! May He who forsakes not the widow and the orphan, comfort me. Oh, my Jesus! strengthen me in my weakness!"

## **Chapter 6 - Elizabeth is driven from Wartburg - Ingratitude of the people of Eisenach - She is comforted by our Divine Lord and His Blessed Mother**

And she was strengthened. The blow which threatened to crush her utterly brought healing with it; the bond, which, blessed as it was, had bound her to earth, was broken, and her freed spirit mounted steadily towards heaven through regions of such entire self-annihilation, such absolute disengagement from all earthly consolation and all human sympathy, that we can only gaze at them from afar. The air of those heights is too intensely pure to be breathed by any but those whom our Lord has made meet by suffering here to stand at once, without passing through the fire, before the glory of His presence.

One by one was every stay removed which could afford any solace to her lonely widowhood; without one repining thought she let them go one by one, as our Lord called for them; and at last, as if she now understood what He wanted of her, she brought Him, of her own accord, the last precious things still treasured in her heart - her beloved children, and gave them up to Him, that so she might have no love but His.

After the first burst of natural sympathy had subsided, which was called forth by the desolate position of the widow of twenty, old jealousies and prejudices began to revive in the court. Evil tongues whispered to the young Landgrave, Henry, that he would be a far better ruler of his father's dominions than the infant heir of his brother, and that it behoved him at once to seize the sovereign authority, and

expel his fanatical sister-in-law and her children from the country. His younger brother, Conrad, was carried away by the same evil counsels, and, armed with their joint authority, the base courtiers hastened to Elizabeth, whom they found in the apartments of her mother-in-law; and after reproaching her most cruelly with having deceived her husband and squandered his revenues, they bade her, as a punishment for her misdeeds, to withdraw at once from the castle. She begged humbly for a little delay, and the Landgravine Sophia, shocked at the cruelty of her sons, flung her arms around her, crying, "She shall stay with me! No one shall force her from me! Where are my sons? I must speak to them." But the messengers were inflexible; - so, finding all resistance vain, she could only accompany her daughter to the castle gate. The dethroned sovereign was forbidden to carry anything whatever with her; but in the court-yard she found her children waiting for her, with two of her ladies of honour, from whose narrative we learn the details of these days of suffering.

The castle gates closed behind her, and strange to tell, not a hand, or a voice, save that of her mother-in-law, was raised in her defence. The best and bravest of the Thuringian chivalry had indeed followed their lord to Palestine, yet it seems scarcely credible that not one lance was left behind for the defence of the widow and the orphans of their brave Landgrave. Not less amazing was the base ingratitude of the inhabitants of Eisenach. The Landgrave Henry had issued a proclamation forbidding any one, on pain of his severest displeasure, to give food or shelter to his sister-in-law and her children. To the shame of humanity he was obeyed. The exiled princess went from house to house, knocking at the doors of those whom she had visited in their afflictions, and fed in their hunger - not one was opened to her. At last she found shelter in a miserable little inn, the owner of which

could not, or would not, turn her from the doors; for, as she said, an inn was open to her as to all the world.

"They have taken from me all that I had," said she, weeping: "I have nothing left me now but to pray to God."

The host assigned for the resting-place of herself and her children a kind of out-house, in which he usually kept his pigs. He drove them out to make room for the Landgravine of Thuringia, the royal princess of Hungary; but, as if this last degree of humiliation had suddenly restored peace to her soul, she had no sooner entered the vile resting-place assigned her, than a supernatural joy seemed to penetrate her whole being. She remained thus till midnight, when she heard the bell of the Franciscan church hard by, which she had founded during her husband's lifetime, ring for matins.

She went thither to assist at the office, and when it was concluded, she begged the friars to entone the Te Deum, in thanksgiving for the great troubles which God had been pleased to send her.

Prostrate at the foot of the altar while that wonderful hymn went up to heaven, the peace of God, the joy of suffering, the love of poverty, filled her heart to overflowing, never to leave it more.

She gave thanks aloud to Him who had been pleased to give her a share in the poverty of His own crib at Bethlehem. "Lord," said she, "Thy holy will be done. Yesterday I was a Landgravine, with houses and castles many: today I am a beggar woman, to whom no one will give a night's lodging. Lord, if I had served Thee better in my sovereign estate, and had done greater alms for Thy love, my heart would rejoice thereat this day; but alas! it has not been so."

But while the saint rejoiced in her own sufferings, the mother's heart was not proof against those of her children. She heard them crying with cold and hunger. "My God," said she, "I have deserved to see them suffer thus, and I repent me truly for my sins. My children were born princes and princesses, and now they are lying hungry on this straw. This breaks my heart. As to myself, You know, God, that I am unworthy to have been chosen by Thee to the grace of poverty."

She spent the rest of that night and a part of the following day in the church; but the intensity of her children's suffering from cold and hunger drove her again into the streets of Eisenach, to appeal in vain to the charity of those whom she had fed and clothed, and provided with every comfort. At last a poor priest ventured to brave the Landgrave's anger, and offered her a share of his humble dwelling; but she was not suffered to rest there. An order was sent to her from the court to remove to the castle of one of the nobles, who had always shewn the greatest enmity towards her. This wretched man shut her up with her whole family in a miserable hole, where they were left to pass the night without food or fire. When the morning came, the Saint left this inhospitable roof, saying as she departed, "Poor walls! I thank you for having sheltered us this night to the best of your power from the rain and the wind. I would fain from my heart thank your master also, but in truth I know not for what." She went back to her old lodging at the inn, and passed the greater part of the day, and even of the night, in the churches "No one," said she, "dares drive me hence, for these belong to God." In the extremity of her distress, she determined to send her children from her, that they might no longer share it, and that she might not be tempted to sin by witnessing their sufferings; "for," says a contemporary historian, "she loved her children to excess."

So the poor little ones were taken away by some unknown friend and concealed separately in various places of safety.

Now that "the dear Saint's" heart was eased from anxiety about them, her own sufferings seemed easy to bear. Having pledged all the valuables which she had about her, she gained her poor livelihood by spinning, and contrived even now to save something to give to those whose poverty was greater than her own.

But neither her tender charity nor her heroic patience seems to have had the smallest effect upon the iron hearts of the people of Eisenach. Not a single trait of gratitude or compassion has come down to us to relieve the dark picture of their baseness. Some even went so far as to mock and insult their benefactress.

An old beggar woman, who had long been the object of the Saint's unwearied care, met her one day begging her own bread in the streets of Eisenach. They came at the same moment to a stream of muddy water - still pointed out as the scene of one of "the dear Saint's" sufferings. It was crossed by means of a few stepping stones. Instead of allowing the princess to pass, the old woman rudely pushed against her, and cried out as she fell into the noisome stream, "Well done! you would not live like a Landgravine when you were one, so now you may lie there in the mud for me, for I am not going to help you up." Elizabeth arose as well as she could, with her wonted patience and meekness, and said, laughing at her own fall and the mud with which she was covered, "This is for the gold and jewels I used to wear:" and then, as her historian tells us, "she went, full of resignation and unmingled joy, to wash her soiled garments in a stream hard by, and her patient soul in the blood of the Lamb."

But though all men forsook her, the Lord forsook her not. In this period of her extreme desolation, He vouchsafed to her the most abundant revelations of his love. Ysentrude, the most beloved of her companions, who was with her through all this dreary time, saw her often in ecstasy.

On Christmas-day she was thus rapt during mass. On her return to her miserable dwelling, after a slight collation, she sat down on a window-seat and rested her weary head on the bosom of her beloved companion. Ysentrude thought that she was ill and wished to sleep, but she soon saw her face kindle, and a heavenly smile play on her lips. Presently it was succeeded by a flood of tears, and these again by an angelic expression of joy; and so, in these alternations of supernatural joy and sorrow, she passed the time till compline, her head still resting on the heart of her friend. Towards the end of this silent ecstasy she exclaimed: "Yes, Lord, assuredly if Thou wilt stay with me, I will stay with Thee, and will never be parted from Thee." When she came to herself, Ysentrude implored her to tell her the meaning of these words, and what she had seen in her ecstasy.

Elizabeth was loth to tell her secret from humility, but at last yielded to the entreaties of her faithful friend. "I have seen heaven opened," said she, "and my Lord, the most merciful Jesus, has been pleased to abase himself to me, and to console me for all my sorrows. He spoke to me with ineffable sweetness, calling me His sister, and His friend. He shewed me His most Holy Mother, and also His beloved apostle Saint John, who was with Him. At the sight of my Divine Saviour I was full of joy, and when He turned away as if to leave me, I wept, because I deserved not that He should stay with me. Then turning upon me His compassionate eyes. He said: "Elizabeth, if thou wilt stay with me, I will surely stay with thee, and never be separated from thee." And immediately I

replied, "Yes, yes, Lord; I will stay with Thee, and never be separated from Thee, whether in weal or woe."

And from that moment these divine words were engraven on her heart in characters of fire.

On another occasion, when she had received some affront of so cruel a nature as to ruffle the wonted patience of her spirit, she sought relief in fervent prayer for her persecutors, and besought our Lord, with many tears, to bestow a favour upon them for every one of the insults which they had heaped on her. As she wearied herself with the fervour of her prayer, a voice replied: "Thou hast never offered any petition to me so acceptable as this: it has pierced to the bottom of my heart; therefore do I pardon all the sins which thou hast committed throughout the whole course of thy life." And then the voice went on to enumerate all the sins she had ever committed, saying: "I forgive thee this sin and that." Elizabeth exclaimed in amazement, "Who art thou who speaks thus to me?" And the voice answered, "Even He at whose feet Mary Magdalen knelt in the house of Simon, the leper." Afterwards, as the Saint was deploring the loss of her usual confessor, our Lord appeared to her and assigned her Saint John the Evangelist, - to whom from infancy she had been devoted, - as her confessor; and to him she made her confession with a joy and consolation she had never before experienced in the tribunal of penance.

The most minute details of our Lord's sufferings were made known to her. Once, as she was in prayer, a hand was suddenly opened before her, which she knew by the scar in the middle to be that of the Son of God. It was of a dazzling whiteness, but extremely thin, and the fingers very long and slender. The well known voice told her the cause of this extreme thinness: "I was exhausted by nightly prayer and

vigil, and by my daily toilsome journeys through city and country to preach the kingdom of God."

The tender heart of Elizabeth was wrung with anguish when these visions brought before her the thought that her sins had inflicted all these sufferings upon that Divine Victim, but He bade her be comforted. "Grieve not thyself, dearest child," said He, "for all thy sins are forgiven thee. Know that I have been punished for them in every member of the body, in every faculty of the soul, whereby thou canst ever have offended thy Creator; know that thou art thereby made pure from all sin."

"If it be so," replied Elizabeth, "why can I not cease to offend Thee?"

"I have not sanctified thee," said our Lord, "to such a degree as to make thee incapable of sin, but I have given thee grace so to love Me that thou would rather die than commit it."

Not content with these gracious communications of His love, our Lord placed His suffering child under the special care of His Mother, who vouchsafed to converse with her with the most loving familiarity. As the forlorn exile was meditating one day on the flight into Egypt, a fruitful theme of contemplation for the outcast and deserted, she inwardly wished that some holy monk would come and unfold to her all the deep meaning of that mystery.

Immediately our Blessed Mother was at her side. "If thou wilt be my pupil," said she, "I will be thy mistress; and if thou wilt be my servant, I will be thy lady."

Elizabeth replied in joyful awe - "Who are you, who claim me for pupil and servant?"

"I am the Mother of the living God," said Mary; "and I tell thee that no monk can instruct thee better than I." At these words Elizabeth clasped her hands together, and stretched them out in token of homage towards the Mother of Mercy, who took them between her own and said: "If thou wilt be my child I will be thy Mother; and when thou art well instructed and obedient, as a good pupil, a faithful servant, and a devoted daughter, I will give thee back into the hands of my son. Shun all discussions; shut thine ears to all the evil that is said of thee; and remember that my son was forced to fly into Egypt to escape the snares of Herod."

Another time, as Elizabeth was weeping bitterly that she so imperfectly fulfilled the precepts of her heavenly Mother and mistress, the consoler of the afflicted stood again suddenly by her side.

"My child," said she, "why this vehement distress? I did not adopt thee for my daughter in order to do thee harm. Be not discouraged because thou hast not fully observed my precepts. I knew well beforehand that thou would surely fail therein. Say my salutation once, and this offence shall be forgiven thee."

One night, as Elizabeth was reciting the Ave Maria, she who was thus invoked appeared to her and said: "I will teach thee all the prayers which I was accustomed to say when I was in the temple. I asked of God, in the first place, to give me grace to love Him, and to hate my enemies. There is no virtue without this absolute love of God, by which the plenitude of grace is infused into the soul; yet it will not remain there, but will flow away like water, unless the soul hates its enemies - that is, its vices and sins. Let him, then, who would preserve grace from on high, learn to reconcile this love with this hatred within his heart. I would have thee do all that I did myself. I used to rise at midnight and

prostrate myself before the altar, where I asked grace of God to observe all the precepts of His law, and I besought Him to grant me all the graces needful to render me pleasing in His sight. I prayed especially that I might live to see that most holy Virgin who was to bring forth His Son, that I might consecrate my whole being to serve and venerate her."

Elizabeth interrupted her by the exclamation - "most sweet lady, were you not already full of grace and of all virtues?"

But the holy Virgin answered, "Be well assured that I believed myself to be as guilty and miserable as thou think thyself to be, and therefore I prayed earnestly to God to grant me His grace."

"The Lord," added the most holy Virgin, "like a skillful musician, who attunes the strings of his harp to perfect harmony, had ordered and regulated my heart, my spirit, my soul, and all my senses, according to His own good pleasure. I was often carried by angels into the bosom of God, and then I tasted such joy, sweetness, and consolation, that I lost all memory of the world below; and I was so familiar with God and the holy angels, that it seemed to me as if I had always dwelt in that glorious company. Then, when it pleased God the Father, the angels brought me back to the place where I had been praying. When I found myself again on earth, and remembered where I had been, that memory so inflamed me with the love of God, that I embraced the stones, the trees, and all created things, for the love of their Creator. I wished to be the servant of all the holy women who dwelt in the temple, and I desired to be subject to all creatures, for love of the supreme Father of all: and thus it befell me often. And so should thou do also, but thou art ever disputing, and saying. Why are such favours bestowed upon me when I am unworthy to receive them? - and then thou fall into a kind of despair, and believe not in the

mercies of God. Take heed that thou speak thus no more, for this greatly displeases God. He can give, as a good Master, His blessings to whom He will; and as a wise Father, He knows on whom to bestow them."

Some time afterwards, as Elizabeth was praying fervently, her tender mother again appeared to her. "My child," said she, apparently in answer to a difficulty which has occurred to most of us when meditating on the marvellous perfections of the Mother of God, "do not imagine that I received all these graces without any trouble on my part. I declare to thee that I never received a single grace from God without much labour, continual prayer, ardent desires, deep devotion, many trials, and many tears. Rest assured that no grace ever descends upon the soul except by means of prayer and corporal mortification. When we have given to God what we can of ourselves, however little it may be. He comes Himself into our soul, bringing with Him those supreme gifts which render it insensible and forgetful of all that it has ever done to please God. We thus become more than ever contemptible in our own sight. What should we do then? Give thanks devoutly to God for all these favours. When He sees the soul to be thus humble and thankful. He makes it promises which far exceed all its secret desires. It was thus that He dealt with me when He sent me His archangel, Gabriel. And what did I then? I knelt down and joined my hands together, saying: Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done unto me according to His word. And then. God gave me His Son, and the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. Know thou wherefore? Because I believed in Him, and humbled myself before Him. I tell thee these things, my daughter, because I wish to cure thee of thy want of faith and hope. When the Lord has made thee any promise, say like me, *Ecce ancilla Domini*, and abide in the firm faith and expectation of that promise until it be fulfilled; and if it be not fulfilled, say to thyself that thou hast committed some

offence against God by which thou hast hindered its accomplishment."

On Christmas Eve, as Elizabeth was asking the Lord to give her grace to love Him with all her heart, the Blessed Virgin appeared to her again, and asked her, "Who is there that loves God? Dost thou love Him?" Elizabeth feared to say "Yes," and could not say "No." While she was hesitating what to answer, Mary continued: "Shall I tell you who have loved Him? The blessed Bartholomew loved Him; the blessed John, and the blessed Laurence loved Him. Would thou be burnt or flayed alive for Him, like them?" Elizabeth was still silent, and Mary went on: "I tell thee of a truth, that if thou wilt consent to be stripped of all things that are dear and precious to thee, and even of thine own will, I will obtain for thee the same merit as Bartholomew, when he was stripped of his skin. If thou wilt bear injuries patiently, thou shall have the merit of Laurence when he was burned. If thou make no reply to insults and reproaches, thou shall have the same merit as John, when his enemies sought to poison him; and in all this I will be with thee to aid and strengthen thee."

These blessed conversations were concluded by a glorious vision of the Assumption, in which Elizabeth saw her heavenly Mother and Teacher rise from a tomb fragrant with flowers, and ascend amidst a host of glorious angels to the arms of her Divine Son.

## **Chapter 7 - The Saint's residence at Kitzingen and Bamberg - Return of the Crusaders with the body of the Landgrave - Elizabeth returns under their protection to Wartburg**

The Landgravine Sophia, finding that she could do nothing to protect her daughter-in-law in Thuringia, sent secret information of her desolate position to her aunt Matilda, the abbess of Kitzingen, and sister of her mother, the queen of Hungary, who immediately sent trusty messengers to bring her niece and her children to the abbey. Elizabeth gladly accepted an offer which gave her the welcome shelter of a religious house, and also enabled her once more to enjoy the company of her children; and, crossing the vast forests and mountains which divide Thuringia from Franconia, she arrived in safety at Kitzingen, on the Maine, where she was received by the good abbess with maternal affection. She remained for some time in this peaceful shelter, finding her chief consolation in following, as nearly as possible, the rule of the religious with whom she dwelt. Meanwhile, her maternal uncle, Egbert, Prince Bishop of Bamberg, having heard of her misfortunes, and of her present residence at Kitzingen, sent to invite her to Bamberg, as a more fitting home than a cloister for her and her children. She obeyed, perhaps somewhat reluctantly; and leaving her second daughter, now only two years old - who afterwards took the veil in the same convent - under the care of her aunt, she set off with her other children for Bamberg, where she was received by the Bishop with every mark of kindness and consideration. He offered to send her to her father in Hungary, but she declined the proposal; and her uncle then assigned her the castle of Botenstein as her residence, with

a household suited to her rank. Thither she repaired with her children and her faithful attendants, Ysentrude and Guta, and resumed her habitual exercises of penance and prayer. The Bishop, thinking that her youth and remarkable beauty, as well as her unprotected position, made a second marriage desirable for her, did all in his power to induce her to consent to a union with the Emperor Frederick, who had just lost his second wife, Yolanda of Jerusalem. This haughty and sacrilegious prince had, it seems, set his heart upon marrying the saintly widow of the good Landgrave, as at another time he was bent upon a union with the beloved daughter of Saint Clare, the holy Agnes of Bohemia. The Prince Bishop of Bamberg, either dazzled by the imperial suitor's rank, or deceived by his well-known duplicity, urged Elizabeth to accept a hand so mighty to protect both her and her children.

"My lord," replied she, "I had once for my lord a husband who loved me tenderly, and who was ever my true and faithful friend: I had a share in his honours and his power. I have had much of the splendour, and riches, and joys of this world. I have had all this; but I have always thought, what you, my lord Bishop, know well - that the joys of this world are nothing worth; therefore do I desire to leave the world, and to pay to God what I owe Him - even the debts of my soul. You know well that all the enjoyments of the world lead to nothing but grief and torment, and the death of the soul. My lord, I long exceedingly to be with our Lord, and I have but one thing on earth to ask of Him. I have two children of my lord with me, who will be both rich and powerful: I should be very glad and grateful to our God if He would shew me so much love as to call them both to Himself."

It does not appear that Elizabeth pleaded with the "Bishop the vow of chastity which she had made during her husband's lifetime, in case of his decease, but she spoke of

it often to Guta and Ysentrude. "I have sworn," said she, "to God, and to my lord and husband, when he was alive, that I would never belong to any other man but him. God, who reads the heart and discovers its most secret thoughts, knows that I made this vow with a simple and pure heart, and in perfect good faith. I trust in His mercy, for it is impossible but that He will defend my chastity against all the devices of men, and even, if need be, against all their violence. It was no conditional vow, subject to the good pleasure of my parents and friends; but a vow, free, spontaneous, and unconditional, to consecrate myself after the death of my well-beloved, wholly and entirely to the glory of my Creator. If they dare, in contempt of the liberty of marriage, to give me to any man whatsoever, I will protest before the altar; and if I can find no other way of escape, I will cut off my nose with my own hand, in order to become an object of horror to all men."

The determined will of the Bishop on this subject filled her heart with no little anxiety; but she had recourse to her never-failing refuge - the mercy of Jesus and the intercession of Mary; and from both she received assurances of protection which silenced her fears.

And now she was summoned by her uncle to Bamberg, to receive the mortal remains of that beloved husband to whose memory she had given such proof of fidelity.

The companions of Louis had left his body at Otranto, and gone on to Syria to accomplish their vow. Some few of them reached Jerusalem, and offered gifts and prayers for his intention at the sepulchre of Christ, On their return they stopped at Otranto, and from that place they carried the bones of their beloved sovereign with royal and religious solemnity till they reached the cathedral of Bamberg, where the bodies of Saint Henry and Saint Cunigunde reposed.

There the office of the dead was solemnly chanted in the presence of all the nobles, clergy, and religious of the neighbourhood.

On the following day Elizabeth arrived, with her faithful Guta and Ysentrude, The coffin was opened, and at the sight of the whitened bones of him who had left her full of life and love, the pent-up anguish of the widow's heart flowed forth afresh. The bystanders, deeply affected themselves, tried in vain to soothe her. But her thoughts soon turned of themselves to God, and she was calm again. "I thank Thee, Lord," said she, aloud, "that Thou hast deigned to hear the prayer of Thy servant, and to grant my intense desire to look upon the remains of my beloved, who was also Thine. I give Thee thanks for having thus mercifully consoled my afflicted and desolate heart. He offered himself, and I also offered him, for the defence of Thy holy land, and I repent me not of the sacrifice, although I loved him with all the strength of my heart. Thou know, my God, how I loved this husband, who so truly loved Thee; Thou know that if it had been Thy holy will to leave him to me, I would have preferred his beloved presence a thousand times to all the joys of this world; Thou know that if Thou had permitted it, I would joyfully have spent my life in misery with him, and have begged my bread with him from door to door all over the wide world, only for the happiness of being with him! Now I abandon him and myself wholly to Thy will, and I would not, if I could, buy back his precious life at the price of one single hair of my head, unless it were Thy will, my God."

This was the last cry of vanquished nature, the last sigh of earthly affection expiring in that young heart of twenty, under the overmastering power of the love of God.

The Prince Bishop seems to have spoken no more of the imperial bridegroom.

Elizabeth calmly left the church, and seating herself in a little enclosed garden adjoining the cathedral, she sent to beg the Thuringian nobles who had brought back her husband's body, to come and speak with her. She rose at their approach, and begged them to sit down beside her, as she did not feel strong enough to remain standing. She then - but with great sweetness and charity - told them the history of her wrongs, and besought them, in the name of God, to defend and protect her children. The Bishop came in his turn to confirm his niece's statement, and entered into the sad and shameful details of the persecution which she and her innocent children had endured.

There was a burst of noble indignation from that knightly band, as, with flashing eyes and hand on sword, they listened to the simple tale of their royal and saintly mistress, and the calm and dignified appeal of the Prince Bishop to their faith and loyalty. They declared with one voice that they acknowledged the widow of their deceased lord as their liege lady and mistress, and were ready to defend her to the death. The noble Rodolph of Varila, in the name of his companions-in-arms, besought the Bishop to entrust his niece and her children to their faithful guardianship.

He consented; and after having celebrated a pontifical mass for the dead, sent them away with his blessing.

Slowly and sadly the mournful procession moved on to the abbey of Reinhartsbrunn, which the good Landgrave had chosen for his burial-place. The news of its approach soon spread far and wide through the land; and from the farthest ends of his dominions, high and low, rich and poor, noble and serf, bishop, priest, and monk, poured forth to do him honour. The funeral rites were celebrated in the abbey church, in presence of the mother, the wife, and the children of Louis, and of the two young princes, Henry and Conrad,

now forced to meet their injured sister-in-law in the calm, still presence of the dead. Many miracles were wrought at the tomb of the good Landgrave, who was popularly honoured as a saint, though the church has never set her seal to the devotion.

After the funeral ceremonies were over, the Lord of Varila and his companions-in-arms consulted together as to the course to be pursued in order to reinstate their lady in her rights. "We must now," said Rodolph, "keep the faith which we have sworn to our noble prince and our lady Elizabeth, who has already endured so many miseries, or I fear me, we shall rue it in the eternal fire of hell."

It was agreed that four of the knights, headed by Rodolph of Varila, should ask an audience of the two princes, and remonstrate with them on their treatment of their brother's widow and orphans.

As spokesman of the party, Varila thus addressed the Landgrave Henry. "My lord, your friends and vassals, who are here present, have prayed me to speak to you in their name. We have heard things of you in Franconia, and here also in Thuringia, so grievous that we have been utterly confounded, and blush to think that in our country, and among our princes, such impiety, infidelity, and forgetfulness of honour should be found. What have you done, young prince? - and who have been your counsellors? You have ignominiously driven from your castles and your cities the wife of your brother - the poor desolate widow - the daughter of an illustrious monarch, whom you were bound, on the contrary, to comfort and honour, as if she had been some vile abandoned woman. To the slander of your own princely honour, you have exposed her to misery, and left her to wander like a beggar in the streets. While your brother was giving his life for the love of God, his little

orphans, whom you were bound to defend and support as a faithful guardian, have been cruelly driven from you, and even forced to part from their mother, lest they should perish for hunger with her. Is this your brotherly love? Is this what you have learned from that virtuous prince, your brother, who would not thus have dealt with the lowest of his subjects? No! the rudest peasant would not have treated his fellow as you, prince, have treated your brother, while he was gone to die for the love of God, How can we trust hereafter to your faith and honour? You know well, that by your knighthood you are bound to protect the widow and the orphan, yet you outrage the widow and orphans of your brother. I tell you plainly that this cries to God for vengeance!" The Landgravine Sophia burst into tears at this address; the young prince hung down his head and answered nothing. "My lord," continued the brave speaker, "what have you to fear from a poor lone woman, sick, sad, and solitary, without friend or ally in this country? What harm would that holy and virtuous lady have done you, had she remained mistress of all your castles? What will be said of us now in other lands? I blush to think of it. Oh, shame! shame! You have dishonoured the whole country of Thuringia; you have stained your own reputation and that of your princely house; and verily I fear that the wrath of God will fall heavily upon this land, unless you do penance before Him, seek reconciliation with this noble lady, and restore to the son of your brother the inheritance which you have wrested from him?"

God made use of the bold words of the noble knight to melt a heart too young to be utterly hardened. Henry burst into tears, and, after weeping for a long time in silence, he said: "I repent sincerely for what I have done. I will never again listen to those by whose advice I have thus acted; give me back your confidence and friendship, I will do willingly whatever my sister Elizabeth shall require of me. I give you

full power to dispose of my life and my goods for this purpose." The Lord of Varila replied: "It is well! it is the only way to avert the anger of God." Henry could not, however, help adding, in a low voice: "If my sister Elizabeth had the whole empire of Germany for her own, she would keep none of it; for she would give it all away for the love of God."

Rodolph went immediately to make known the result of his remonstrance to Elizabeth. When he began to speak of the conditions to be imposed upon the Landgrave Henry, she exclaimed, "I want none of his cities, or castles, or lands, or anything which can distract me; but I shall be very grateful to my brother-in-law if he will give me, out of my dowry, wherewithal to provide for the expenses I desire to incur for the soul of my well-beloved and my own." The knights then went in search of Henry, who came accompanied by his mother and brother. He besought Elizabeth to forgive him, assuring her that he felt the deepest remorse for his conduct. Sophia and Conrad joined their entreaties to his. Elizabeth's only reply was to cast herself into her brother's arms and weep.

The rights of her children were also secured. Herman, the eldest, was acknowledged as the lawful heir of Hesse and Thuringia, the regency during his minority remaining in the hands of his uncle Henry.

The crusaders then returned to their homes, and Elizabeth and her children to Wartburg.

## **Chapter 8 - Elizabeth removes to Marburg - She takes the three vows of religion**

The Landgrave Henry kept his word, and did all in his power to wipe out the memory of his past cruelty. He treated Elizabeth with all the respect and affection due to her, and left her at full liberty to exercise the works of charity in which she delighted.

She received about this time the great consolation of a fatherly letter of encouragement from the Supreme Pontiff, Gregory VII, who, as Cardinal Ugolini, had specially commended her to the glorious Saint Francis. He assured her now that he took her and her children into his special care, and again commissioned Master Conrad, his representative in Germany, to undertake the care of her soul, and also to be her protector against all her enemies and persecutors.

And now Elizabeth felt that she was free to embrace the religious state to which, from the first moment of her widowhood, she had aspired. She was already a child of Saint Francis, and she longed to follow his rule in its utmost severity, and to beg her bread from door to door; but her director sternly forbade her to embrace a way of life which he judged to be unfitted for her age and sex.

She then besought her brother-in-law to assign her some place of residence, where she might live undisturbed, to herself and to God. Henry ceded to her the city of Marburg, in Hesse, with all its dependencies and revenues, in full possession, for the maintenance of herself and her household, and 500 marks of silver to defray the expenses of her first establishment there.

Elizabeth gratefully thanked her brother for a bounty far beyond her wishes or expectations, and a year having now elapsed since her return to Wartburg, she set off with her spiritual guide to the city which her sanctity was to render so illustrious. To avoid the clamorous homage of the citizens, who came in crowds to do homage to their young sovereign, she retired to a village called Wehrda, a few miles from Marburg, where she chose a deserted cabin as her abode, until her residence at Marburg should be ready for her. This was to be a little cottage of mud and wood, like the huts of the neighbouring peasants, built close to the Church of the Friars Minor. She wished to make it plain to all that she came, not as a wealthy princess to establish herself in her capital, but as a simple and patient widow, to serve the Lord in all humility. As soon as her home was prepared for her, she took possession of it with her children and her faithful attendants.

And now, as her confessor persisted in his refusal to allow her to embrace the Franciscan rule in all its strictness, or to enroll herself among the daughters of Saint Clare, she desired at least to approach the perfection of their life as nearly as obedience permitted. She obtained leave therefore to make the three solemn vows of religion as a member of the third order of Saint Francis. She is thus accounted the first religious and patroness of the nuns of that order, although it was not till a later period that it assumed a strictly monastic character, by the general adoption of enclosure and of the three vows of religion.

Notwithstanding her vow of poverty, Master Conrad compelled her to keep in her own hands the administration of the revenues granted her by the Regent, which, after paying certain debts of her husband, she was to devote to the relief of the poor.

For many days before her profession, Elizabeth was engaged in fervent prayer for the graces needful in her new state. She told her friend Ysentrude that she prayed continually for three graces: first, an absolute contempt for all earthly things; next, courage to despise the insults and calumnies of men; and, last and chiefly, the diminution of the excessive love which she bore to her children. One day she came to her companions radiant with a joy which is not of this world, and said, "The Lord has heard my prayer, for behold all the things of this world, which I once loved, are become like dust in my eyes. As to the calumnies of men, the lies of the wicked, and the contempt which I excite, they make me feel proud and happy. My dear little ones - the children of my bosom, whom I loved so much, whom I was wont to embrace so tenderly - even these beloved children are, I take God to witness, no more than strangers to me. To God I offer them; to Him I entrust them. May His holy will be done in all things. I love nothing now; I love no creature any longer; I love nothing but my Creator."

Such was the heroic detachment from all earthly ties, by which the saint prepared herself to assume the habit consecrated by the use of Saint Francis and Saint Clare. "If I could find a habit," said she, "poorer than Saint Clare's, I would take it to console myself for not being able to enter her holy order; but I know of none."

On Good Friday, when the altars are laid bare in memory of Him who was stripped of all things for the love of us, and in the Church of the Friars Minor - the most perfect imitators of the poverty of Christ - Elizabeth laid her pure hands upon the naked altar-stone and swore to renounce for ever her own will, her friends, kindred, children, and all the pomps and pleasures of this world. While Master Conrad said the mass, Brother Burchhard, the Provincial of the Friars Minor in Hesse, cut off her hair, clothed her in a grey tunic, and

girded her with the cord, which is the distinctive mark of the Order of Saint Francis. She wore this habit till the day of her death, and always went barefoot.

Guta, her maid of honour, took the habit of the third order at the same time with her beloved mistress, and solemnly renewed the vow of chastity which she had made privately in the lifetime of the good landgrave.

"The dear Saint" now made her last sacrifice of human affection, by sending from her the children to whom she had clung with such intense love. The two elder, whose lot was cast in the world, Herman and Sophia, were sent to the Castle of Creutzburg, to remain under sure guardianship until the one should be of age to assume the government of his dominions, the other to be given in marriage to her betrothed, the young Duke of Brabant. The second daughter returned to her aunt, the Abbess of Kitzingen, and the little Gertrude, who had been devoted to God before her birth in the parting anguish of her father and mother, was sent to the convent of Aldenburg, a poor but holy house, of which she was elected abbess at twenty-one, after a novitiate marked by every monastic virtue.

Elizabeth was now left alone with God, to lead the life of poverty and abnegation which she had chosen: for herself. As she was forbidden to beg her bread, she resolved to earn it by the labour of her hands. She employed herself in spinning wool (she was not skillful enough to spin flax), and sold the produce of her labour for a poor pittance to the nuns of Aldenburg. When confined to her bed by sickness, she employed herself in preparing the wool for spinning. She saved from the produce of her labour enough to make some poor offerings to the Church; the rest supplied her own coarse and scanty nourishment. The whole of her princely revenues were devoted to the poor, to whom she still

rendered the same lowly personal services which it had been her delight to lavish upon them when Landgravine of Thuringia.

No religious ever excelled her in the practice of poverty. Her coarse habit was pieced over and over again with patches of all shades and colours, till its original texture could scarcely be distinguished. She collected these pieces wherever she could, and sewed them on as well as she could, for she was a bad needle-woman.

She insisted upon doing the cooking and all the work of the little household herself, and waited like a menial upon her companions, who remonstrated with her in vain upon a humility so painful to them.

"It is true, dearest lady," said one of them, "that you are gaining great merit by your behaviour to us, but you forget the danger we run of being puffed up with pride, when you cook our dinner for us, and then insist upon our sitting down by your side to eat it with you;" to which Elizabeth answered: "Well, if you will not sit by my side, you must sit on my knee;" and she took her in her arms and made her sit down accordingly.

Her patience and charity were proof against all trials. Never was the slightest expression of discontent forced from her. She often spoke at great length to her companions: the heavenly sweetness and joyousness of her heart overflowed in these intimate conversations; but she would never suffer a vain or light word to be spoken in her presence, or one tinged with anger or impatience. She would interrupt the speaker at once with an authority full of grace and sweetness, saying, "Where is our Lord, then, all this time?"

One of her first cares after her arrival at Marburg was to build a hospital, which she consecrated to Saint Francis of Assisi. Pope Gregory IX, who had just canonized the saint, sent her a relic even more precious than the mantle which she had received with so much gratitude a few years before - some drops of blood from the miraculous wound in the side of Saint Francis. She placed it in the chapel of her new hospital.

There she devoted herself as before, to the care of the sick, choosing for the objects of her special tenderness cases of leprosy, or other diseases which rendered the sufferers objects of honor and loathing to less heroic souls. Nature would sometimes rebel, and was then quelled by means which our fastidious delicacy shudders even to read of. Once, as she was returning from church, she met a poor beggar, whom she brought home with her, and began to wash his hands and feet. A feeling of repugnance overcame her so far that she shuddered at her revolting task. With a holy indignation at what she accounted her own immortification, she drank the water which she had been using, saying, "my Lord, Thou didst drink vinegar and gall for us on the cross; I am not worthy to drink this for Thee: help me to become better."

Elizabeth was no less zealous for the souls of her poor, than charitable in her care of their bodies; and when there was need of it, knew how to use a wholesome severity towards them. A blind man presented himself one day to be received into the hospital. Elizabeth happened to be standing at the door with Master Conrad. She consented willingly to receive him, but insisted that he should first approach the sacrament of penance, which he had long neglected. The blind man began to curse and blaspheme, but Elizabeth reproved him with such force and energy, that he was struck

with compunction, and kneeling down on the spot, made his confession to Master Conrad.

The Saint did not confine her charitable ministrations to the inmates of the hospital, but visited all the surrounding poor in their own miserable dwellings; and when she met with some objects more than usually wretched and loathsome, she would remove them, not into the hospital, but into her own cottage; and devote herself especially to their relief.

She thus took home a poor orphan hoy, who had been born lame, blind, and paralytic. On this forlorn child she lavished all the cares of the tenderest mother, and when he died she replaced him by a poor girl, so disfigured by leprosy that no one in the hospital dared to approach her, or even look at her from a distance. Elizabeth kept her till Master Conrad forbade her to do so any longer, lest she should herself be infected; but she soon found another child hardly less miserable, whom she kept with her till her death.

Meanwhile, the royal father of this poor infirmarian heard from some Hungarian pilgrims returning from Aix-la-Chapelle, of the state of misery to which his daughter was reduced. He was distressed even to tears by the tale, and immediately sent the Count of Banfi, with a numerous suite, to ask an account of the regent, Henry of the strange position of his daughter.

"My sister," replied the young prince, "is mad, as everybody knows. You can go and see her, and judge for yourself." He then gave the Hungarians an account of the extravagancies she was in the habit of committing, and how she lived entirely with lepers, and beggars, and such sort of people. He shewed them that her poverty was entirely voluntary, he having guaranteed to her all, and much more than she desired.

The Count, much amazed, set off for Marburg; and on his arrival, asked the master of the inn where he stopped what he knew of the lady Elizabeth, and why she led so strange a life away from her family and friends. "She is a very pious and virtuous lady," replied the host: "she is as rich as any one can desire to be; for this city, with all its dependent territory, which is not small, belongs to her in absolute possession; and if she had been willing, many a powerful prince would have been glad to marry her; but out of her great humility she lives thus miserably. She will not inhabit any of her houses in this city, but has built herself a little hut close to the hospital which she has founded, for she despises all the good things of this world. God has conferred a great grace upon us in sending us this pious lady, for all those who have anything to do with her, find great benefit to their souls. She never rests from her works of charity; she is most chaste, most sweet, most merciful; but above all, more humble than can be believed."

The Count begged the innkeeper to shew him the way to Elizabeth's dwelling. "Madam," said the good man, "here are some friends of yours come to see you, who wish to speak with you." When the ambassador entered the hut, and saw the daughter of his king spinning wool, with her distaff in her hand, he was moved to tears, and crossing himself, he exclaimed: "Was ever king's daughter before found spinning wool!", then sitting down beside her, he told her that the king, her father, had sent him to fetch her home to her own country, where he would cherish and honour her as his dearly beloved child; but Elizabeth turned a deaf ear to all his entreaties. "For what do you take me?" said she; "I am but a poor sinful woman, who have never served God as I ought to have done."

"But who has reduced you to this state of misery?" enquired the Count.

"No one," replied she, "unless it be the Son of my Heavenly Father, who, being infinitely rich, has taught me by His example to despise riches, and to prize poverty above all the kingdoms of this world;" and then she told him the history of her life since her widowhood, and her intentions for the future, and assured him that she had nothing to complain of; that she wanted nothing, and was perfectly happy. The ambassador still urged her father's wishes, beseeching her to return and share his kingdom and inheritance. "I trust well," said she, "that I already possess my Father's inheritance - that is, the everlasting mercy of our dear Lord Jesus Christ." When the Count urged her not to do her father the wrong of leading a life so unworthy of her birth, the Saint made answer: "Tell my lord and father that I am happier in this contemptible life than he can be in all his royal pomp; and that, far from grieving on my account, he ought rather to rejoice that he has a child in the service of the great King of heaven and earth. I have but one favour to ask of him, and that is, that he will pray, and get others to pray, for me, and I will pray for him as long as I live."

The Count left her in deep sorrow; but she returned to her distaff, happy to be able to realize beforehand those sublime words which the church puts into the mouths of those who, like her, have left all things for Christ: "I have despised the kingdoms of this world, and all the pomp thereof, for the love of my Lord Jesus Christ."

## Chapter 9 - Last trials and victories

It might have seemed that there was nothing more for the Saint to give up - no material left for farther sacrifice; but Master Conrad had discovered that there was still a fibre in her heart to which self-will might attach itself, and he set himself relentlessly to pluck it out. He began to restrict her in her works of mercy, and forbade her to give more than a single penny to any poor person at a time. She tried, by various stratagems, to evade this hard precept, causing silver pennies to be struck instead of copper; and when the poor complained of the sudden diminution of her bountiful alms, she would say to them, "I am forbidden to give you more than a penny at a time, but I am not forbidden to give to you as often as you come and ask me." The pensioners were not slow to take the hint, and encircled the house continually, entering by one gate and going out at another. Her director having discovered these stratagems of charity, reproved her severely, and even inflicted blows upon her, which she received with joy, in memory of the buffeting endured for her by her Divine Redeemer. Conrad next forbade her to give away money upon any pretext whatever, but permitted her to distribute bread in small slices, for she was not to give a whole loaf to any one. At last she was forbidden to give any kind of relief, and her charity was restricted to the care of the sick, with the exception of lepers, whom, as the chosen objects of her tender compassion, she was forbidden to touch.

The restraint laid upon her charity to the poor of Christ was perhaps the hardest to be borne of all the crosses which, one after another, she took up for His love; but she thus learned the perfection of that obedience which is more acceptable in His sight than any other sacrifice which can be offered to

Him. She accepted the bitter discipline with her whole heart, and became most expert in this last and most difficult point of the science of the saints. Her obedient soul spoke of victories. No command could be too hard, no obedience too humiliating or too trying to be instantly rendered to one who did not treat her with the ordinary courtesy due to her sire and rank, or even with the charity which belongs to the relation of priest and penitent. "The holy man," says a writer of the time, "did all this to break her will, that she might set all her love upon God, and remember no more her former glory; and in all things she was prompt to obey and firm to suffer, so that she possessed her soul in patience, and her victory was ennobled by obedience." She did not conceal the fear which she felt of her director - not for himself, but as the representative of God. "If I thus fear a mortal man," said she to her companions, "how much more should I tremble before God, who is the Lord and Judge of all men."

Master Conrad used his power over her with the most extreme severity. He sent for her once to meet him at the convent of Aldenburg, where she had placed her youngest child, and where he had some idea of placing herself. On her arrival, the nuns asked his permission for her to enter the enclosure. Conrad, who had previously warned her that any person, of either sex, who entered it without permission, incurred excommunication, replied: "Let her enter, if she will." Elizabeth understood the words as a permission, and entered the forbidden precinct. Conrad immediately sent for her, and having shewn her the book in which her oath of obedience was registered, ordered a monk who was with him to inflict a certain number of blows, with a long staff, upon the Saint and her attendant, Irmengarde, while he recited the Miserere. Elizabeth endured this humiliating punishment without a murmur, and spoke of it thus afterwards to Irmengarde: "We ought to suffer such chastisement with patience, like the reeds by the river's side, which bend

without breaking, under the weight of the inundation, and when it is past, rise up with new strength and life. So we must sometimes be humbled and bowed down to the earth, to rise up again with joy and confidence."

Another time, the Saint, being engrossed by the care of one of her patients, neglected to attend a sermon, preached by Master Conrad, on the Passion, to the hearing of which an indulgence was attached. As soon as the sermon was over he sent for her, and enquired what she had been doing instead of coming to the sermon; and then, without waiting for an answer, he gave her a violent blow, saying: "This is to teach you to come another time, when I send for you!" She only smiled, and was about to explain the cause of her absence, when he struck her again, and this time the blow drew blood. Elizabeth raised her eyes to heaven and kept them fixed there for some time, and then she said: "Lord, I thank Thee that Thou hast chosen me for this!" Her women asking her how she could bear such treatment, she replied: "For having suffered it patiently, God permitted me to see Christ in the midst of His angels: the Master's blows have raised me to the third heaven." When these words were repeated to Conrad, he said: "I am sorry that I did not send her to the ninth heaven!"

And now a new form of trial came upon the patient sufferer - the hardest, perhaps, of all, to a woman's nature. Elizabeth had been long called foolish, prodigal, and mad; her fair fame was now assailed by the same evil tongues; and her submission to her stern director was said to proceed from a criminal attachment! These reports assumed so serious a form that her faithful friend and champion, Rodolph of Varila, thought it right to enquire into their origin. He therefore went to Marburg, and addressing Elizabeth with great respect - "May I be permitted, madam," said he, "to speak to you with freedom and plainness?" Having received

ready permission to do so, he continued: "I beseech my dear lady, then, to look well to her fair fame, for her intercourse with Master Conrad has given occasion to vile suspicious and evil surmises among perverse and vulgar spirits."

Elizabeth raised her eyes to heaven, and without the smallest discomposure of countenance, replied: "Blessed in all things be our most sweet Lord Jesus Christ, my only friend, who vouchsafes to receive this poor offering at my hands for His love; to devote myself to His service I have renounced my royalty of birth; I have despised my riches and possessions; I have disfigured my youth and beauty; I have forsaken father, country, children - all the consolations of this life I had reserved to myself but one only treasure - my womanly honour and reputation. But now it seems that He calls for this also; and I give it to Him with all my heart, since He deigns to accept my fair fame as a special sacrifice, and to make me pleasing in His sight by this ignominy. I consent to be accounted henceforth a dishonoured woman. But, dearest Saviour! my poor children, who are yet innocent, vouchsafe to preserve them from all shame and disgrace which might come upon them through me."

She desired, however, to reassure her noble and faithful friend, and shewing him the marks of the blows which she had lately received, "These, sir knight," said she, "are tokens of how this holy priest loves me - or rather, of how he teaches me to love God."

Amid all her sufferings "the dear Saint" had enjoyed one human consolation - the love and sympathy of the two companions of her childhood, Guta and Ysentrude. She was perhaps scarcely conscious how much the loneliness of her now childless widowhood was soothed by the presence of those who had shared all her joys and sorrows, and taken part in all her exercises of devotion and charity. But the keen

eye of Master Conrad had marked the spot where human affection still lingered, and having already dismissed all the other members of her household, with whom her clinging and tender heart could not part without sensible pain, he came to the two cherished companions of her childhood. Ysentrude, the best beloved, the sharer of her most secret thoughts and feelings, was the first to be sent away; then Guta, who had been her companion ever since she was five years old, and whom she loved most affectionately, was taken from her. Bitterly did she weep for the loss of these two last objects of her love. She was left indeed alone with God, but she was not to enjoy the blessedness of that solitude, for Conrad replaced her two dear friends by two companions chosen for the purpose of trying her patient spirit to the utmost. One of them, named Elizabeth, was a peasant, coarse and rough to excess, and so frightfully ugly that she served as a bugbear to frighten children. The other was a widow, who was old, deaf, and ill-humoured. Elizabeth submitted to the change in her companions with the most perfect sweetness, and set herself to advance in humility by her intercourse with the rude peasant girl, and in patience by enduring the scolding of the ill-tempered old woman.

The two women tried her to the utmost by continual ill-treatment. In a spirit of penance Elizabeth took upon herself all the hard work of the household, which they left to her without any scruple; and when, being absorbed in contemplation, she made some blunder in the preparation of their miserable meal, they would reprove her harshly, telling her she was fit for nothing, and could not even make a basin of soup; "as if," says her chronicler, "she had ever been taught to cook." They were also always on the watch to report to her director the slightest deviation - of which they suspected her - from his commands respecting alms-giving; and they thus often drew down severe chastisements upon her. But no provocation could induce her to swerve for a

moment from the obedience she had vowed to him as the representative of Christ. So scrupulous was her fidelity, that when her old and beloved friends came sometimes to visit her, she never ventured to offer them refreshment, or even to speak to them, without having first obtained the permission of her director.

Elizabeth had sent her children from her, yet it would seem that some of them occasionally came to see her, when she would indulge her mother's love by caressing them, and imprinting fond kisses on their foreheads; but, either at Master Conrad's suggestion, or finding that their presence, even at these distant intervals, disturbed her union with God, she deprived herself of this last solace, and the children came no more.

Ten years afterwards, when Saint Louis was holding his court at Saumur, a young German prince, about eighteen years of age, was seen in attendance upon the queen mother, Blanche of Castile. He was pointed out with admiration as the son of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, and queen Blanche would reverently kiss the fair brow which had been consecrated by the pressure of her lips. We love to picture to ourselves the son of Saint Elizabeth thus adopted by the mother of Saint Louis.

Meanwhile, "the dear Saint" was filling her lonely hours with fresh deeds of miraculous charity. On her daily visit to the hospital she one day found a poor helpless child lying upon the threshold. He was not only deaf and dumb, but his limbs were so twisted and distorted that he could only drag himself along on his hands and knees, like some miserable animal. His mother had brought him there by night, and left him, in the hope that the good Landgravine would have compassion upon the miserable being whom she herself was ashamed to own.

As soon as Elizabeth saw him she stooped over him with tender pity, and said: "Where are thy parents, dear child, who brought thee hither?" But as the boy did not seem to understand her, she repeated her question in a still softer tone, and said, as she caressed him, "What ails thee, poor child? - why wilt thou not speak to me?" The child then fixed his eyes upon her, but without speaking. Not knowing that he was dumb, she thought he was possessed, and said in a loud voice: "In the name of our Lord, I command thee and him who is in thee to answer me, and tell me whence thou earnest." The child stood upright before her; his speech was immediately restored, and he said: "My mother brought me here;" and then he told the Saint that he had never seen or heard before, and that he had been born in the state in which she had seen him. "But now," said he, as he stretched out his limbs one after another, "now God has given me motion, speech, and hearing; and I speak words which I have never heard nor learned from any one." And then he began to weep, and thank God. "I knew not God," said he: "all my senses were dead; I knew not what a man is; but now I feel that I am no longer like a beast. I can now speak of God. Blessed be that question of yours, which obtained for me the grace from God not to die as I have hitherto lived."

At these words Elizabeth perceived that God had been pleased to work a miracle by her means, and she fell on her knees and mingled her tears with those of the child whom she had saved. "Return now," said she, "at once to thy parents, and tell no one what has happened; above all, say nothing to any one about me. Say only that God has helped thee; and guard thyself day and night from mortal sin, or thou may soon fall again into thy sickness. Never forget what thou hast suffered, and always pray for me, as I will always do for thee;" and then she escaped from him to avoid the glory of the miracle. The child's mother came to the spot just as she disappeared, and, amazed to see her child

standing upright, and to hear him speak, said: "Who has restored thy speech?" - to which the child answered: "A sweet lady in a grey gown spoke to me in the name of Jesus Christ, and words were given me to answer her." The mother immediately went in pursuit of Elizabeth, and having recognized her at a distance, published the miracle all over the country.

This is but one of many instances of the miraculous attestation granted to the sanctity of Elizabeth; and yet, strange as it may seem, all these proofs of the love of God towards her, were unable wholly to remove from her mind a sort of distrust of the Divine mercy, arising from her keen sense of her own unworthiness. It was this for which our Lady had reproved her in the first days of her widowhood. She was one day speaking upon this subject to her old friend and confessor, Father Rodinger, who had come to visit her, as they walked together on the banks of the Lahn. "There is one thing, reverend father," said she, "which troubles me above all. I cannot help having a sort of doubt of the love of God for me; not but that I know Him to be infinitely good, and most lavish in His love, but because of my many demerits, which set me far off from Him, although I be all on fire with His love." "You have nothing to fear on this account," replied the father, "for the Divine goodness is so great that it is impossible to doubt that God loves those who love Him far more than He is loved by them;" and pointing to a beautiful tree on the other side of the river, he told her that that tree should sooner cross over to the bank on which they were walking together, than God should suffer Himself to be surpassed in love by one of His creatures. He had hardly uttered the words, when, to the amazement of all present, the tree of which he spoke was seen to cross the river, and take root on the opposite side. At this marvellous testimony to the Divine love, Elizabeth cast herself at the

feet of Father Rodinger to confess her want of faith and trust,  
and to obtain forgiveness.

## **Chapter 10 - Sickness, Death, and Canonization of the Saint**

Two years had hardly passed away since Elizabeth had received, with the habit of Saint Francis, strength to run with giant steps the remainder of her course, when her heavenly Bridegroom called her home. One night, towards the close of the year 1231, as Elizabeth lay upon her bed in prayer, our Lord appeared to her in the midst of a soft bright light, and said, in a voice of ineffable sweetness: "Come, Elizabeth, my bride, my tender friend, my well-beloved, - come with me into the tabernacle which I have prepared for thee from all eternity. I myself will lead thee thither." On awakening, she hastened, full of joy at her approaching deliverance, to make every preparation for her departure. She made arrangements for her burial, paid a last visit to her poor, and divided everything she possessed between them and her attendants. Master Conrad was suffering at the time from a severe illness, and sent word to her to come to him. He received her with much affection; and when she lamented his sufferings, he said: "What will become of you, my lady and dear daughter, when I am gone? How will you regulate your life? - who will protect you against the wicked? - and who will direct you on your way to heaven?" But she answered: "Your anxiety, father, is needless, for I shall die before you, and shall never want any other protector than yourself."

On the fourth day after this conversation she felt the first approach of the sickness which was to set her free. She was obliged to take to her bed, where she remained for about a fortnight, suffering from a raging fever, but calm and joyous in spirit as usual, and absorbed almost continually in prayer. At the end of this time, as she was apparently asleep, one of

her women, named Elizabeth, who was sitting by her bed, heard a sweet and exquisite melody, which seemed to issue from her throat. The Saint just then changed her position, and turning towards her companion, said: "Where art thou, my beloved?"

"Here," replied the servant, adding, "Oh, madam! how sweetly you have been singing!"

"What!" said Elizabeth; "did you hear anything?" - and on her reply, the Saint continued, "I will tell thee how it was. A beautiful little bird came and perched between me and the wall, and he sang to me for a long time together so sweetly that I could not help singing too. He revealed to me that I am to die in the course of three days." From that moment she refused to admit any seculars to visit her. She took leave of those whom she was accustomed to receive, and gave them her blessing for the last time. She kept no one with her but her women, some religious who were specially attached to her, her confessor, and the poor leprous girl whom she had adopted in the place of the bright and beautiful children whom she had given up to God. When she was asked why she thus excluded every one from her presence, she answered: "I wish to be alone with God, and to meditate on the dreadful day of judgment, and my Almighty Judge." Then she began to weep, and implore the mercy of God.

On Sunday, the 18th of November, 1231, being the vigil of Saint Martin, after matins she confessed to Master Conrad, who was sufficiently recovered to be able to hear her. "She took her heart in her hand," says a contemporary historian, "and read all that was to be read therein; but there was nothing which had not been washed away over and over again by the waters of true contrition." Conrad then asked her directions with regard to her property. "I wonder," said she, "that you should ask me such a question. You know that

when I made a vow of obedience to you, I renounced all my possessions as well as my will, my dear children, and all the pleasures of this world. I have kept nothing except by your command, to pay debts and to do alms. I should have wished, had you permitted me, to renounce all, and to live in a cell upon the daily bread which other poor people would have allowed me. For a long time past everything which I seemed to possess has belonged in reality to the poor. Distribute, then, among them everything that I leave behind, except this old worn habit, in which I wish to be buried. I make no will, for I have no heir but Jesus Christ." But as one of her companions begged for something as a remembrance, she gave her the old cloak of Saint Francis, which had been sent her by the Pope. "I leave thee my mantle," said she; "despise it not because it is old, and patched, and worn: it is the most precious jewel which I ever possessed. I tell thee, that whenever I have wished to obtain any special grace from my dearest Jesus, I have had nothing to do but to wear this mantle while I made my petition, and it was sure to be granted." She then begged to be buried in the church of the hospital which she had built, and dedicated to Saint Francis. After she had conversed for a long time with her confessor, and had heard mass, she received the last sacraments with an ineffable joy, fully known only to Him who thus visited her, but manifested in some measure to all who were present by the supernatural brightness of her countenance. She then remained silent and motionless until the hour of vespers, when her lips were unlocked to pour forth a flood of heavenly eloquence - the more marvellous to all who heard her from her wonted silence and reserve.

She recited at length the whole narrative of the resurrection of Lazarus, and dwelt with deep feeling upon our Lord's visit to the mourning sisters, and the deep mystery of His divine tears. Her words were so moving that all present began to

weep; when, full as ever of tender sympathy, she addressed them in the words of our Lord to the sorrowing women who followed Him to Calvary: Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me; but weep for yourselves; and she sought to soothe her attendants by the most affectionate expressions. "My friends, my dearly loved ones" - such was the language of her loving heart to the rough unsympathizing souls, by whom Conrad had replaced her devoted Guta and Ysentrude. She had won their love by the continual outpouring of her own.

Elizabeth now bowed her head, and remained for some time silent; and then, while her lips continued closed, a soft and exquisite melody was again heard in her throat. When questioned by those present, she replied: "Did you not hear them singing with me? I sang with them as well as I could." Her sweet voice was already mingling with the angels in the new song which is ever sounding before the throne of the Lamb. She remained till near midnight in a state of holy exultation, as if triumphing in her assured victory; but suddenly she exclaimed: "What should we do if our enemy the devil were to appear?" A moment afterwards she cried with a very loud, clear voice, "Fly, fly, evil one! I have renounced thee!" She soon added: "He is gone; let us now speak of God and His Son. Let not this weary you, for it will not be long." At the first cock-crowing she said: "This is the hour at which the Blessed Virgin gave birth to our Lord. Let us speak of God, of the Infant Jesus; for this is midnight, when Jesus was born; when He was laid in the manger; and when He created a new star, which was never seen before. This is the hour when He came to redeem the world: He will redeem me also. This is the hour when He raised the dead and delivered the souls which were in bondage: He will deliver mine also, out of this miserable world." Her joy seemed to increase every moment. "I am weak," said she, "but I feel no pain, no more than if I were not ill. I

recommend you all to God." Then she said: "Mary, come to my aid. The moment is come when God calls His friends to the marriage. The Bridegroom comes to seek His bride. Silence! - silence!" - and as she said these words she bowed her head, and triumphantly breathed forth her last sigh. A sweet perfume immediately filled the humble cabin, and a choir of celestial voices was heard to chant, in ineffable harmony, the sublime response of the church, *Regnum mundi*, etc. "The kingdom of the world and all its glory I have despised for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, Whom I have seen; Whom I have loved; in Whom I have believed; Whom I have loved." This was on the night of the 19th November, 1231. The Saint had but just completed her twenty-fourth year. Hardly had her happy soul entered into its everlasting rest, when her body became the object of the pious and enthusiastic devotion of her countrymen. It was arrayed in the poor worn tunic which she had chosen for her winding-sheet, and exposed in the humble chapel of her own hospital, to the loving and wondering gaze of the faithful.

She lay before them in more than mortal beauty. Elizabeth had fallen asleep with the marks of grief, and sickness, and austerity upon her face; but the touch of death had glorified even her mortal body; and the loving friends of her girlhood, who came once more to look upon her face, felt that not even in the first freshness of her youth, as the happy bride of the good Landgrave, or the joyful mother of his fair children, had she been so radiantly beautiful as now. A delicious fragrance floated around her bier; and on the night preceding her burial, while the office for the dead was chanted, a strange harmony was heard without. Several persons left the church to ascertain the cause, and saw a number of birds, of a species never before seen, perched upon the roof of the church, and singing this wondrous melody, as if they would celebrate her obsequies after their

own fashion. Some said they were angels, who had been sent from God to carry the soul of "the dear Saint Elizabeth" to heaven, and were now come back to honour her sacred body by their songs of heavenly gladness. "These little birds," says Saint Bonaventure, "bore witness to her purity by speaking their language to her at her burial, and singing with this marvellous sweetness over her tomb. He who once spoke by the mouth of an ass to rebuke the madness of a prophet, might well speak by the song of birds to proclaim the innocence of a saint."

Many remarkable miracles attested the sanctity of a life which scarcely needed them to establish its claim to the homage of Christendom.

On the 10th of August, 1233, Siegfrid, the Prince Archbishop of Mayence, in whose diocese Marburg was situated, at the request of Master Conrad consecrated two altars, erected in her honour in the church where she was buried. Conrad was busily engaged in collecting the evidence necessary for the process of her canonization, when his violent death interposed a delay. Another Conrad, the younger brother of the good Landgrave, took up the cause, and was the apparently most unlikely instrument of its success. The young prince had become a true penitent, both for his cruelty to his saintly sister, and for a course of reckless wickedness by which it had been followed up. He took the cross of the Teutonic Order in the church of the hospital of Saint Francis, founded by Saint Elizabeth at Marburg, endowed it with all his possessions in Hesse and Thuringia, and made it one of the principal stations of the Teutonic Order - all in honour of the Landgravine Elizabeth; and in farther reparation for the wrongs done to her when on earth, he devoted all the influence of his princely station and sacred character to obtain a public recognition of her exalted place in heaven.

In the spring of the year 1235, Conrad went to the Pope at Perugia, where he had canonized Saint Francis seven years before, and besought him to write the name of the holy patriarch's humble daughter by his side. After a long and very severe investigation, the petition was granted; and on the Feast of Pentecost of the same year, the hand of Gregory IX, which had already been permitted to inscribe the names of Saint Francis of Assisi, and Saint Antony of Padua, in the catalogue of the Saints, wrote the name of "the dear Saint Elizabeth," beside them.

The bull of canonization was received with great enthusiasm in Germany. The 1st of May was appointed by the Archbishop of Mayence for the translation of the relics of the Saint; and all that was sacred in the church, or exalted in the world, poured into Marburg to do her honour. The Emperor Frederic II, now reconciled with the Pope, and at the summit of his glory, came in the humble garb of a penitent to lay his rejected diadem upon the tomb of her who had despised the empire of the world for Christ. Twelve hundred thousand Christians, we are told, gathered round the tomb of the humble Elizabeth, and bore back to their homes the tidings of the wonders which were wrought there before their eyes.

When the coffin was opened, previous to the translation of the sacred body, it was found still to retain the beauty and flexibility in which it had been laid to rest five years before. A sweet perfume exhaled from it, and the spectators saw with amazement a pure and fragrant oil distil from the remains of her whose mortal life had been embalmed with charity and fragrant with prayer. The oil was carefully preserved, and numerous cures were wrought by its application.

The humble servant of the poor was borne to the stately resting-place prepared for her on the shoulders of the proudest and noblest of the chivalry of Germany, with the Emperor at their head. At the offertory he laid a crown of gold upon her shrine, saying: "I might not crown her living as my empress; I desire at least to crown her to-day as an immortal queen in the kingdom of heaven." He then led the young Landgrave Herman to the altar, to make his offering; and the Empress (Isabella of England) in like manner led the little princesses, Sophia and Gertrude, by the hand. The old Landgravine Sophia, with her two sons, Henry and Conrad, followed to do homage to her whose life they had once accounted folly. How must the hearts of those who had been so near to her on earth, have swelled, and yet trembled within them, as the *Ora pro nobis sancta Elizabeth alleluia* proclaimed to heaven, and earth, and hell, that once more *the Lord had put down the mighty from their seat, and exalted the humble!*

## **Chapter 11 - Miracles at the tomb of Saint Elizabeth - Church erected to her honour - Dispersion of her relics and desolation of her Church - Notices of her children and some of her kindred - Conrad - Saint Hedwige**

The tidings of the canonization of Saint Elizabeth spread far and wide throughout Europe, and pilgrims from all countries came to bring their prayers and offerings to her shrine. One of the most touching instances of the exertion of her miraculous power after death, in behalf of sorrow and suffering, was vouchsafed to a simple and pious couple from her own native country - Hungary. They had lost their only child, and on the night of her death, after a day spent in weeping and mourning, they retired to rest. It was long before either could sleep, but at last the heavy slumber of sorrow closed the poor mother's eyes, and in her sleep she saw a vision which bade her take her dead child to the tomb of Saint Elizabeth, in Germany. When she awoke she said to her husband: "Let us not bury our poor little one, but carry her in faith to Saint Elizabeth, by whom the Lord works so many miracles, that by her prayers she may be restored to life." Her husband consented; and on the morrow, when all the neighbours were assembled to see the child carried to the parish church, the parents, regardless of their astonishment and ridicule, set off for Marburg with the body of their child, carefully wrapt up, and laid in a basket. The Lord had compassion on their sorrow and their faith, and while they were yet on their way to the sanctuary of His beloved servant, restored their child to life. The poor people did not forget, in their overwhelming joy, their debt of

gratitude to their blessed patroness; but accomplished their long pilgrimage, taking with them the living and joyous form which had left Hungary a cold and lifeless corpse.

Their daughter, when grown up, became a nun in a convent of Dominicanesses at Ratisbonne, of which she was afterwards prioress, and where she was still living, in great reputation for sanctity, in the time of the historian who has recorded this miracle.

At the other extremity of Europe, in far distant England, there was a noble lady who, after a union of twenty years, was left by her husband's death a childless widow. To comfort herself in her lonely state, she adopted twelve orphan children, upon whom she lavished all the tender cares of the fondest mother. Whenever she met any poor or suffering object, she gave him an alms for the love of God and Saint Elizabeth, for she had heard of "the dear Saint" in her distant northern home, and her heart clung to her with a love beyond that which she bore to any one on earth, or to any other saint of God in heaven. In her honour she cut off her hair, and wore always a coarse grey habit, like her's; and day and night she meditated upon her holy life.

At last, when God so willed it, this noble and virtuous lady died, and as her friends stood weeping around her bed, her confessor told them that they ought to carry her body to the tomb of Saint Elizabeth, for that in her lifetime she had vowed to make a pilgrimage thither. Her friends obeyed the injunction, and traversed sea and land with the body, until, at the end of seven weeks' time, they arrived at Marburg. There they invoked the Saint with great fervour, when the pious lady suddenly returned to life, saying: "How happy I am! I have rested upon the bosom of Saint Elizabeth." Her friends wished to take her back to England, but she refused to leave the spot sanctified by the presence of her heavenly

friend. She lived there for fifteen years longer, leading a life of great sanctity, but in absolute silence - never speaking to any one but her confessor. When he asked her why she had laid this obligation upon herself, she replied: "When I rested upon Saint Elizabeth's bosom I tasted so sweet a joy that I can never henceforth think of anything else but how to regain it."

The foundation of the noble church, which, cold and deserted as Protestantism can make it, still bears her name, was laid by the saintly penitent, Conrad, a few months after the canonization of Saint Elizabeth. It is one of the most beautiful specimens remaining of the most perfect style of Gothic architecture. The body of the humble Saint remained for three centuries in its place of stately rest beneath the lofty aisles of that glorious temple, guarded by the good swords of the Teutonic knights, the sworn and consecrated defenders of the faith. At last the spoiler came, and the grand master was compelled to stand by in stern and indignant sorrow while the Landgrave of Hesse, the friend of Luther and the worthless descendant of the Saint, rifled the costly shrine which contained her relics, for the sake of the gold and gems with which it was encased. It was in the same year which witnessed this act of unnatural sacrilege, that the miserable man obtained a dispensation, signed by Luther and seven other evangelical theologians, assembled at Wittenburg, to marry two wives at a time.

The relics of Saint Elizabeth were afterwards restored, by command of the Emperor Charles V, to the grand master of the Teutonic knights; but a great portion was found to be missing; and from that time their dispersion has been complete. The heart had long before been sent to Cambray. The skull is preserved at Besangon; other portions are venerated in Hungary; and at Hanover, Vienna, Cologne, and especially at Breslau in the chapel dedicated to her, in

1630, by Cardinal Frederic of Hesse, Bishop of that city, and one of her descendants. In the same chapel is preserved the staff on which she leaned when she was driven from Wartburg. A glass, out of which she used to drink, is preserved at Erfurt; her wedding dress at Andechs, with her marriage ring, her prayer-book, table, and straw chair. Her veil is shewn at Tongres. In 1833 the Count of Boos Waldeck possessed one of the Saint's arms, which he had offered to several of the sovereigns of Europe who number her among their ancestors, but without finding a purchaser.

None of her relics now remain at Marburg. Tradition says that some of them were buried under the high altar, and stolen thence in 1634. No memorial of the Saint is now left in the glorious church dedicated to her honour, except a large piece of tapestry representing the history of the Prodigal Son, which is said to be her work, and which is used by the Lutherans in their communion rite. Through those silent and deserted aisles not a voice has been raised in her honour for the three dark and desolate centuries which have rolled on since the daily sacrifice has been taken away; and, with the worship of the Lamb, the veneration of those who stand around His throne has ceased out of the land. Her country has denied the faith; the children of those to whom she was a ministering angel think it scorn to ask her motherly protection. Her own descendant, the heir of her princely and holy husband, who laid his sacrilegious hand upon her precious relics, has bequeathed his faithless heresy to his descendants and her's. Thuringia and Hesse have renounced Catholicism. From the old towers of Wartburg, where the fame of Luther has eclipsed that of the Saint, the traveller's eye looks in vain for a single church or a single Catholic cottage. In the city where she died, on the marble floor of which may still be traced the footsteps of the devout multitudes who once came to worship at her shrine, her life, her death, her sufferings, and her sanctity, are historical

facts, and nothing more; and the few Catholics who dwell there have not even a mass upon her feast day. When the Count de Montalembert asked the priest of the little Catholic church where, after three hundred years of persecution, mass is now said upon Sundays, whether he offered it up on the Feast of Saint Elizabeth, he replied, that he had never thought of doing so!

We will hope that the question was not asked in vain, and that "the dear Saint" is at least remembered there once a year by her brethren in the faith.

In the country of her adoption, her name still lingers, indeed; but only as a beautiful and poetical tradition. Elizabeth's Garden, Elizabeth's Fountain, Elizabeth's Bridge, the "Infirmarium" - still pointed out by tradition as the spot where she died; the pilgrim's stone, still marking the resting-place of the long files of pilgrims who came to worship at her shrine - all speak of a memory still dear to the hearts of a people who, while they have lost the spiritual instincts which once led them to venerate the Saint, still retain the enthusiastic reverence of the German race for all that is pure and noble in woman.

King Andrew of Hungary died soon after the canonization of his blessed child; his few surviving years being clouded by regret for having so long neglected her, and so little appreciated her virtues.

Her fervent admirer and champion, Conrad, did not long survive the glorious act of reparation he offered to her memory. His piety, courage, and great modesty led to his being elected Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, which he had entered in a spirit of penance; and he devoted the power and wealth which his position gave him, to the

construction of the noble basilica erected to the honour of Saint Elizabeth at Marburg.

In order to superintend the works, he chose that city for his own residence, and the central position of his order. He engaged with great courage and energy in the wars of the Teutonic knights with the heathen in Prussia, and received the investiture of that province from the Pope. Before his death, he desired once more to see Rome, where he was seized by a mortal sickness, during which he attained to so great a degree of interior purity as to be sensibly pained by the presence of any one in mortal sin. All those who waited upon him were obliged to live in great purity of conscience. One day, when his confessor - a venerable Cistercian abbot - came to his bed-side, he found him rapt in ecstasy. Being asked what he had seen in his vision, the prince replied: "I stood before the bar of the Eternal Judge awaiting my final sentence. I was condemned to five years of purgatory, but my good sister Elizabeth came forward and obtained the remission of my punishment. Know, then, that I shall die of this sickness, and go to enjoy eternal glory." He died a few days afterwards, leaving directions that his body should be carried to Marburg, and buried near that of his holy sister, in the church which he had founded in her honour.

The course of his brother Henry was far different. The evil spirit of ambition again awoke within him after the death of Saint Elizabeth; and his memory is branded with the suspicion of having murdered his nephew, Herman, for the sake of his inheritance.

At the age of sixteen this young prince took possession of the dominions of his father, which had till then been governed by his uncle Henry, in his name. He soon afterwards went to France to visit Saint Louis, by whom he was received with reverential affection, as the son of Saint

Elizabeth. This was a name dearly prized by all her children, who, in their charters and other official acts, were accustomed to prefix to all their worldly titles, the glorious name of son or daughter of Saint Elizabeth.

On his return from France, the young Landgrave married Helena, the daughter of Duke Otho of Brunswick; but before the end of two years he was snatched away, at the age of eighteen, from a life which gave every promise of honour and happiness, by a sudden illness - commonly attributed to poison administered at the instigation of his unworthy uncle. Before he died, he expressed an earnest desire to be buried by the side of his blessed mother, at Marburg; but Henry refused this last request, fearing, with the craven superstition which in the wicked takes the place of faith, that his mother would raise him to life again.

Had he forgotten her earnestly expressed desire while yet in life, that the Lord would take her two elder children out of the world in which their lot was cast, when he lent himself as the blind and evil instrument of its fulfillment?

The body of the murdered prince was laid beside that of his father, at Rheinhartsbrunn.

On the death of Henry, without issue, Thuringia. was torn to pieces by a long war of succession. Sophia, the eldest daughter of the Landgrave Louis and Saint Elizabeth, who was married, as we have seen, to the Duke of Brabant, claimed the inheritance of her father for herself and her son - a child of three years old. Her title was acknowledged without much difficulty in Hesse, which she ruled during her son's minority with great wisdom and vigour; but in Thuringia she met with a formidable competitor in her cousin Henry, Margrave of Misnia, the son of Guta, sister to the Landgraves Louis and Henry.

After a long and obstinate struggle, in which Sophia displayed the qualities of a heroine and a sovereign, the contending parties came to an accommodation, by which the Margrave obtained the sovereignty of Thuringia, while Sophia and her son were left in peaceable possession of Hesse. This division subsists at the present day - the present rulers of Hesse and Saxony being descended from the rival princes, whose rights were determined by this treaty. Sophia died in 1284 at the age of sixty, after a life devoted to the welfare of her country and her family.

Her remains repose at Marburg, in the same tomb with those of her son, and in the church consecrated to her sainted mother. Her statue is still to be seen there, with the hands joined in prayer, and with the son to whose cause she had so faithfully devoted herself, represented as still in childhood, by her side. The face is worn by the kisses of the pilgrims, who bestowed on her a share of the love they bore her mother.

Such was the stormy and troubled life of the only one of "the dear Saint's" children who was left to cattle in the world. Her son, as we have seen, went early to his rest. Her two younger daughters ended their lives peaceably in the shelter she had chosen for them - the one at Kitzingen, the other at Aldenberg. Both became abbesses of their respective communities. Gertrude was elected in 1249, and governed her convent for nearly fifty years, following closely in the footsteps of her mother. Miracles have been attributed to her, and she has always borne the name of blessed. She died at the age of seventy, in 1297. Pope Clement VII granted indulgences to those who should celebrate her feast. Her tomb is still shewn at Aldenburg, together with some precious memorials of her mother, which she had collected with pious care.

The maternal aunt of Saint Elizabeth, Saint Hedwige, Duchess of Poland and Silesia, survived her. She bore the greatest love and reverence to the young kins-woman, whose name she lived to see numbered among the saints. She preserved one of her veils, which was sent to her as a memorial, with the greatest care, and wore it constantly to the day of her death.

Saint Hedwige had been married at twelve years of age to Duke Henry of Poland. After the birth of six children, they parted by mutual consent, and Hedwige retired into a convent of Cistercian nuns, of which her daughter was elected abbess. There, with her husband's permission, she took the religious habit, but without binding herself by the vows, either of obedience or poverty, lest she should be restricted in the freedom of her almsgiving. She rivalled her holy niece in her humility and her extraordinary mortifications, which seem scarcely credible in one so delicately nurtured. So great was her humility, that like the Canaanean woman, who called forth an exclamation of admiration from her God, she often sought, as her only nourishment, the crumbs which fell from the table of the nuns, whom she delighted to serve.

But it was in her unbounded charity and overflowing compassion that she most resembled our dear Saint. "Her heart was so tender," says her pious chronicler, "that she could never see any one weep without weeping with him, nor could she ever rest if she saw others in trouble and distress. She had always poor persons at her table, whom she served on her knees before she sat down herself. When she thought no one was observing her, she would often kiss the ground upon which the poor had trod, thus honouring, in their persons, Jesus Christ, the King of Glory, who became poor for us.

The good duchess would never suffer her vassals or serfs to be pressed for the payment of their dues: she made it a point to be present at the tribunals where the causes of the poor were to be heard; and if she saw that the judges were disposed to severity, she employed her chaplain, who always accompanied her, to rectify their sentence.

Her husband, who loved her with a most devoted and reverential affection, gave a touching proof of his warm sympathy with her compassion for the poor, by commanding that whenever Hedwige passed before the gates of the public prisons, they should be thrown open, and the prisoners set at liberty for her sake.

Her fervent piety equalled her tender charity. She daily heard as many masses as there were priests at her court, shedding abundant tears all the while. She had a special devotion to our Blessed Mother, to whom she would speak of all her wants and troubles with the simplicity of a child. She had always a little image of her Divine Patroness with her, which she carried in her hand when she went to visit the sick, and by means of which it was believed that she wrought many miraculous cures. When her husband was on one occasion taken prisoner by his rival, Duke Conrad, she sought the proud and vindictive conqueror with this little image in her hand. Conrad felt as if he stood in the presence of an angel, and immediately concluded peace, at her request, and set the duke, her husband, at liberty.

Hedwige soon afterwards lost both this beloved husband and her son Henry, whom she loved with exceeding affection, and who fell as became a Christian prince, in defence of the independence of Europe against the Tartar hordes. She endured both these losses with the calm resignation of a soul whose supreme love rests upon God alone; but she did not long survive them. On the day of our

Lady's nativity, 1243, the religious who was with her saw a train of beautiful maidens, arrayed in heavenly light, enter the cell and pay their greetings to Hedwige, who seemed to recognise them, for, with a face radiant with joy, she exclaimed: "Welcome, dear saints, and good friends, who are come to see me, Magdalen, Catherine, Thecla, Ursula!" Then she spoke in Latin, and the religious could not understand what she said. On the 15th of October following, she breathed her last sigh giving thanks to God. She was canonized by Pope Clement IV in 1267. When her body was disinterred previous to its translation, the little image of the Blessed Virgin, which she had so much loved, was found still clasped between her fingers.

## About This EBook

The text of this ebook is taken from the book *The Life of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary*, by "A Secular Priest", published in London, England in 1900, which was later published as part of the book *The Sainted Queens*.

The cover image is a statue of Saint Elizabeth giving alms, date and artist unknown. It is in the convent of Saint Elizabeth in Nysa, Poland. It was photographed on 13 July 2014 by Jacek Halicki, and the image swiped from [Wikimedia Commons](#).

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