



CHAPTER III.

HER PIETY; HER CHARITY TO THE POOR; HER
REDEMPTION OF ENGLISH CAPTIVES; HER
MANNER OF PASSING LENT; HER BOOK OF
THE GOSPELS.

§ 22.



THUS it came to pass that this venerable Queen, who (by God's help), had been so desirous to cleanse His house from all filth and error, was found day by day worthier of becoming His temple, as the Holy Spirit shone ever brighter in her heart. And I know of a truth that she was such, because I not only saw the works which she did outwardly, but besides this, I knew her conscience, for to me she revealed it. It was her good pleasure to converse with me on the most familiar terms, and to open her secret thoughts to me; not because there was anything that was good in me, but because

she thought there was. When she spoke with me about the salvation of the soul and the sweetness of the life which is eternal, every word she uttered was so filled with grace that the Holy Spirit, Who truly dwelt within her breast, evidently spoke by her lips. So deep was her contrition that whilst she was talking, she seemed as if she could melt away in tears, so that my soul, pierced like her own, wept also. Of all living persons whom I know or have known she was the most devoted to prayer and fasting, to works of mercy and almsgiving.

§ 23. Let me speak first of all about her prayerfulness. In church no one was so silent and composed as she, no one so wrapt in prayer. Whilst she was in the house of God she would never speak of worldly matters, or do anything which savoured of the earth ; she was there simply to pray, and in praying to pour forth her tears. Only her body was then here below, her spirit was near to God, for in the purity of her prayer she sought nothing but God and the things which are God's. As for her fasting, I will say this alone, that the strictness of her abstinence brought upon her a very severe infirmity.

§ 24. To these two excellent gifts of prayer and abstinence she joined the gift of mercy. For what could be more compassionate than her heart? Who could be more gentle than she towards the necessitous? Not only would she have given to the poor all that she possessed; but if she could have done so, she would have given her very self away. She was poorer than any of her paupers; for they, even when they had nothing, wished to have something; while her anxiety was all to strip herself of what she had. When she went out of doors, either on foot or on horseback, crowds of poor people, orphans and widows flocked to her, as they would have done to a most loving mother, none of whom left her without being comforted. But when she had distributed all she had brought with her for the benefit of the needy, the rich who accompanied her, or her own attendants, used to hand to her their garments, or anything else they happened to have by them at the time, that she might give them to those who were in want; for she was anxious that none of them should go away in distress. Nor were her attendants at all offended

Cherily

may rather each strove who should first offer her what he had, since he knew for certain that she would pay it back two-fold. Now and then she helped herself to something or other out of the King's private property, it mattered not what it was, to give to a poor person; and this pious plundering the King always took pleasantly and in good part. It was his custom to offer certain coins of gold upon Maundy Thursday and at High Mass, some of which coins the Queen often devoutly pillaged, and bestowed on the beggar who was petitioning her for help. Although the King was fully aware of the theft, he generally pretended to know nothing of it, and felt much amused by it. Now and then he caught the Queen in the very act, with the money in her hand, and laughingly threatened that he would have her arrested, tried, and found guilty. Nor was it towards the poor of her own nation only that she exhibited the abundance of her cheerful and open-hearted charity, but those persons who came from almost every other nation, drawn by the report of her liberality, were the partakers of her bounty. Of a truth then this text may be

applied to her, "He hath dispersed abroad, he hath given to the poor, therefore his justice remaineth for ever."¹

§ 25. But who can tell the number of English of all ranks, carried captive from their own land by violence of war and reduced to slavery,² whom she restored to liberty by paying their ransom? Spies were employed by her to go secretly through all the provinces of Scotland and ascertain what captives were oppressed with the most cruel bondage, and treated with the greatest inhumanity. When she had privately ascertained where these prisoners were detained, and by whom ill-treated, commiserating them from the bottom of her heart, she took care to send them speedy help, she paid their ransom and set them at liberty forthwith.

¹ Ps. cxi. 9.

² So great was the desolation of England after the conquest, that many became slaves to any one who would feed them. Remigius, Bishop of Lincoln, and St Wulfstan, Bishop of Worcester, preached against the wicked custom by which men sold their country-folk, sometimes their kinsfolk, to a life of shame or of bondage in foreign lands. (Giraldus, "Vita Rem." c. 3, 4, 5.) The slave trade was severely condemned by the council of London in 1103. ("Mausi Collectio Concil.," xx. p. 1152.)

§ 26. At the period of which we are speaking, there were in many places throughout the realm of Scotland persons shut up in different cells, and leading lives of great strictness; in the flesh, but not according to the flesh; for being upon earth, they led the life of angels. These the Queen busied herself in often visiting and conversing with, for in them she loved and venerated Christ, and would recommend herself to their prayers. As she could not induce them to accept any earthly gift from her, she urgently entreated them to be so good as to bid her perform some alms-deed or work of mercy, and this devout woman did forthwith fulfil whatever was their pleasure, either by helping the poor out of their poverty, or by relieving the distressed in their troubles, whatever these might be.¹

¹ Some of these Anchorites were her own Saxon countrymen, driven by the Norman conqueror into exile. Although seclusion and continual prayer have been practised by Christians in all ages since the commencement of the Church, yet the eremitical life has assumed its external form principally by means of persecutions. Like the days of which the Apostle wrote to the Hebrews, "they wandered about in sheep-skins, in goat-skins, being in want, distressed, afflicted, of whom the world was not worthy: wandering in deserts, in mountains, and

§ 27. Since the church of St Andrews was much frequented by the devout, who flocked to it from all quarters, she erected dwellings on either shore of the sea which divides Lothian from Scotland, so that the poor people and the pilgrims might shelter there and rest themselves after the fatigues of their journey. She had arranged that they should there find all that they needed for the refreshment of the body. Servants were appointed, whose especial duty it was to see that

in dens, and in caves of the earth," (Heb. xi. 37.) Many who thus began this life under compulsion found so great a sweetness in uninterrupted intercourse with God, and in the perfect subjection of the body to the soul, that they clung to it when they might have returned to an easier mode of life. "It is probable that among those Anchorites who commended themselves so much to her favour were the *Cele De* of Lochleven, for we find Malcolm and Margaret, king and queen of Scotia, giving devoutly the town of Ballechristin to God the Omnipotent and the *Keledei* of Louchleven, with the same liberties as before.* Bishop Fothad too, here called Modach, son of Malmy Kel, a man of most pious memory, bishop of St Andrews, with whose life and doctrine the whole region of the Scots was happily enlightened, gives to God and St Servanus and the hermit *Keledei* on the island of Lochleven, living there in the school of all virtues, devoutly and honourably, with the same liberties, the church of Auchterderran." †

* Chart. Prior, S.A., p. 115.

† *Ibid.*, p. 117, W F. Skene. Celtic Scotland, Vol. II., p. 351.

everything that might be required for these wayfarers should be always in readiness, and they were directed to attend upon them with all diligence. Moreover, she provided ships for the transport of these pilgrims both coming and going, nor was it lawful to demand any fee for the passage from those who were crossing.

§ 28. Having spoken of the daily manner of life of this venerable queen, as well as of her daily works of mercy, it is fitting that I should now attempt to say a few words as to the way in which she habitually spent the forty days before Christmas, and the entire season of Lent. After taking rest for a short period at the beginning of the night, she went into the church, and there, alone, she completed first of all the Matins of the Holy Trinity, then the Matins of the Holy Cross, and lastly the Matins of Our Lady. Having ended these, she began the offices of the Dead, and after these the Psalter; nor did she cease until she had reached its conclusion. When the Priests were saying the Matins and Lauds at the fitting hour, she in the meantime either finished the Psalter she had begun, or if she

had completed it, began saying it a second time. When the office of Matins and Lauds was finished, she, returning to her chamber, along with the King himself, washed the feet of six poor persons ; and used to give them something wherewithal to relieve their poverty. It was the chamberlain's special duty to bring these poor people in every night before the Queen's arrival, so that she might find them ready when she came to wait upon them. Having done this, she went to take some rest and sleep.

§ 29. When it was morning she rose from bed and devoted a considerable time to prayer and the reading of the Psalms, and while reading the Psalms she performed the following work of mercy. She ordered that nine little orphans utterly destitute should be brought in to her at the first hour of the day, and that some soft food such as children at that tender age like, should daily be prepared for them. When the little ones were carried to her she did not think it beneath her to take them upon her knee, and to get their pap ready for them, and this she put into their mouths with the spoon which she herself used.

The queen, who was honoured by all the people, did this act of charity for the sake of Christ, and as one of Christ's servants. To this most loving mother might be applied with great propriety that saying of the blessed Job, "From my infancy mercy grew with me, and it came forth with me from my mother's womb."¹

§ 30. While this was going on, it was the custom to bring three hundred poor people into the royal hall, and when they had been seated round it in order the king and queen entered; whereupon the doors were shut by the servants; for with the exception of the chaplains, certain religious, and a few attendants, no one was permitted to be present at their alms-deeds.²

¹ Job xxxi. 18.

² That this access to her might be easier, she is said to have frequently sat in an open field, where every one who pleased might have an opportunity of speaking to her with greater freedom; and there is still shown, on the road to Queensferry, rather more than a mile from Dunfermline, a stone in the form of a seat, which, according to a constant tradition, she sometimes made use of for that purpose. It is marked in the maps of the roads published not long since, as being near the fourteenth mile from Edinburgh, with the name of *St Margaret's Stone* affixed to it. ("The Life of St Margaret," by the Right Rev. T. Geddes, Aberdeen, 1794, p. 34.)

The king on the one side and the queen on the other waited upon Christ in the person of His poor, and served them with food and drink which had been prepared for this special purpose. When this was finished, the queen's custom was to go into the church, and there with long prayers, with tears and sighs to offer herself as a sacrifice to God. Upon holy days, in addition to the hours of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Cross, and Holy Mary, recited within the space of a day and a night, she used to repeat the Psalter twice or thrice; and before the celebration of the Public Mass she caused five or six Masses to be sung privately in her presence.

§ 31. When these were finished, meal-time was at hand. But before it was served she herself humbly waited upon twenty-four poor people whom she fed; for without reckoning any of the alms-deeds which I have already mentioned, throughout the course of the year she supported twenty-four poor as long as she lived. It was her will that wherever she lived they also should be living in the neighbourhood; wherever she went they were to accompany her. Not until

after she had devoutly waited upon Christ in these His poor was it her habit to refresh her own feeble body. In this meal she hardly allowed herself the necessaries of life, since the Apostle teaches us that we ought not to make provision for the flesh in its concupiscences.¹ She ate no more than sufficed for the preservation of her life, and not to gratify her palate. Her meal—frugal and scanty—rather excited hunger than allayed it. She seemed to taste her food, not to take it. From this let it be understood, I pray you, how great was her abstinence when she fasted, remembering what it was when she feasted. Her whole life was one of exceeding temperance, but during the fasts (that is for the forty days before Easter and Christmas), the abstinence she was accustomed to afflict herself with was incredible. By reason of this excessive severity she suffered to the end of her life from an acute pain in the stomach; yet the weakness of the body did not impair her virtue in good works. During this period she was assiduous in reading the sacred volumes, she was instant in prayer, her

¹ Rom. xiii. 14.

alms were unceasing, and she exercised herself wholly and watchfully in all the things of God. And knowing, as she did, that it is written : "Whom the Lord loveth he chastiseth, and He scourgeth every son whom He receiveth,"¹ she willingly accepted with patience and thanksgiving the pains of the flesh, regarding them as the stripes of a most loving Father.

§ 33. Devoted as she was to such works as these, and burdened by the like constant infirmities, God's power was made perfect in her weakness.² Thus passing onwards from strength to strength, each day made her better. And now forsaking all things earthly with her whole soul, she longed for the things of heaven, yea, thirsted after them, exclaiming with the Psalmist in the language both of her heart and lips, "My soul hath thirsted after God, the living fountain ; when shall I come and appear before the face of God?"³ I leave it to others to admire the tokens of miracles which they see elsewhere, I admire much more the works of mercy which I perceived in Margaret ; for signs are common to

¹ Prov. iii. 11, 12.

² 2 Cor. xii. 9.

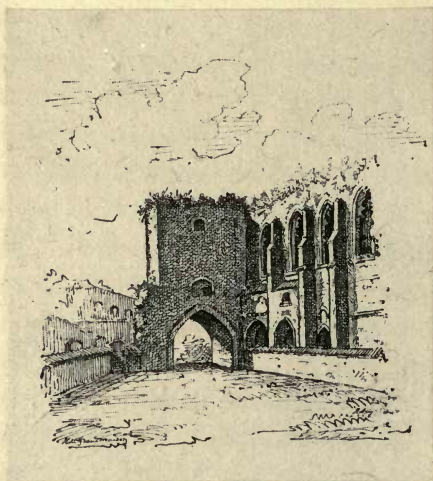
³ Ps. xli. 3.

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the good and the bad, whereas works of piety and true charity belong to the good only. The former sometimes are the proof of holiness, the latter are that which constitutes it. Let us then, I repeat, admire in Margaret the actions which made her a saint, rather than the miracles which, had we any record of them, would have proved that she was one. In her character let us observe with admiration the works of the ancient Saints rather than their miracles — her justice, her piety, her mercy, and her love. Yet it will not be out of place if I here narrate one incident which may go to prove what the holiness of her life was.

§ 33. She had a book of the Gospels beautifully adorned with gold and precious stones, and ornamented with the figures of the four Evangelists, painted and gilt. All the capital letters throughout the volume were radiant with gold. She had always felt a particular attachment for this book; more so than for any of the others which she usually read. It happened that as the person who carried it was once crossing a ford, he let the book, which had been carelessly folded

in a wrapper, fall into the middle of the stream. Unconscious of what had occurred the man quietly continued his journey; but when he wished to produce the book, suddenly it dawned upon him that he had lost it. Long was it sought, but nowhere could it be found. At last it was discovered lying open at the bottom of the river. Its leaves had been kept in constant motion by the action of the water, and the little coverings of silk which protected the letters of gold from becoming injured by contact with the leaves, were swept away by the force of the current. Who could have imagined that the book was worth anything after such an accident as this? Who could have believed that so much as a single letter would have been visible. Yet of a truth, it was taken up from the middle of the river so perfect, so uninjured, so free from damage that it looked as if it had not been touched by the water. The whiteness of the leaves and the form of the letters throughout the volume continued exactly as they had been before it had fallen into the stream, except that on the margin of the leaves, towards the edge, the least possible mark of

water might be detected. The book was conveyed to the queen, and the miracle was reported to her at the same time ; and she, having thanked Christ, valued it much more highly than she had done before. Whatever others may think, I for my part believe that this wonder was worked by our Lord out of His love for this venerable queen.



THE FRATER HALL, DUNFERMLINE ABBEY.