

ROYAL NURSES.

THE DEAR SAINT ELIZABETH; PRINCESS OF THURINGIA.—1207-1231.

In his "Saint's Tragedy" Charles Kingsley puts into the mouth of Isentrudis, a lady in waiting to the Princess Elizabeth of Thuringia, the following words to describe her royal mistress:

"The peerless image

To whom the court is but a tawdry frame,
The speck of light amid its murky blackness."

But, with all due respect to Kingsley, we think that he places the Princess Elizabeth of Thuringia in a frame bounded by his own vision and not by fact. For the setting of "the dear Saint Elizabeth," as she was universally called throughout Germany for many centuries after her death, was not the court of Thuringia; such figures as she are not framed within the confines of courts, cities or countries but they have their setting in the ages, in time that has become space. And the frame encircling our picture of Elizabeth is the thirteenth century—a very wonderful age and a worthy setting indeed for the beautiful Thuringian Princess. Admittedly the times were in many respects characterised by coarseness and by cruelty; life was primitive and rough enough in many of its outer aspects. But the days are near when we shall no longer study history from a more or less superficial and categorical list of events and appearances; the study of history will become more scientific and we shall search into the *impulses* and *causes* of the events which take place from century to century. It is in this sense that we say that the thirteenth century is a fitting frame for Saint Elizabeth. It is an age of inspiration, an age of awakening, an age of action and of enthusiasm and these latter aspects are nowhere more strongly expressed than in the Crusades. In the thirteenth century and round it lay the impulses for a wonderful growth of fine culture, and more especially of fine poetry and architecture, a wealth too of religious development and splendid scholarship; out of the fruits of this age sprang the University of Bologna and many another. From the wealth of its poetry Wagner drew inspiration for the creation of his masterpieces, and, indeed, allowing for considerable poetic licence, we can trace his inspiration for Tannhauser to "the Dear Saint Elizabeth." But there is another aspect also in which we do not find ourselves in agreement with the lines quoted. For the courts of central Europe could not, in that age, be described as "tawdry." Indeed, long before Elizabeth's time, Margaret of Scotland had spent her youth in the court of Stephen of Hungary, one of the most cultured of its day. Hermann of Thuringia, father-in-law of "the dear Elizabeth," was cultured and a scholar, one famed for his generosity to religion and to literature. His court was a home for every man of genius and his admiration for poetry none could surpass. His love for such things he kept alive through tumultuous, war stricken years so that Walther Von der Vogelweide, one of the greatest poets of the time, could write of him, towards the close of his earthly journey. "Other princes are more clement but none so generous. He was so and is so still. No one suffers from his caprice. The flower of Thuringia blooms in the midst of the snow; the summer and winter of its glory are as mild and beautiful as was its spring." It was the privilege and the duty then of such kings and princes as he to gather into their courts the gifted of the gods and in those courts the Meistersingers (poet musicians) gathered, men who played no inconsiderable part in the spread of European culture. A pure ray of chivalrous poetry they have sent down the centuries, and not the least of those who gathered in Hermann's halls was Wolfram von Essenbach who gave at that time a new and splendid outpouring of the Grail Legend; a new outpouring we call it for no one can trace

the first appearance of the Legend of the Holy Grail which keeps rising in some new form ever and again while the ages pass. Great were the contests held between the Meistersingers in the court of Duke Hermann, and on one occasion at least it is said that the hangman was in attendance to make short shrift of any fellow who might show but mediocre proofs of attainment. The results of such contests, such literary tournaments and much generous patronage for beautiful literature at the court of Thuringia are still extant under the title of "The War of Wartbourg," a great treasure of medieval literature and a monument of Germanic culture.

Such then was the setting in which was placed that pearl of saints the Princess Elizabeth of Hungary, and it was after this wise. A great poet, Klingsohr, came to stay at the Hostel of one Henry Hellgref; the nobles of Hesse and Thuringia visited him in the garden of his host, and many officers of the court and townspeople came too that they might listen to what the great Meistersinger would have to say. They begged him to tell them something new. For a long time he sat in contemplation of the starry heavens and at length he said, "I shall tell you something both new and joyous. I see a beautiful star rising in Hungary, the rays of which extend to Marburg and from Marburg over all the world. Know even that on this night there is born to my lord, the King of Hungary, a daughter who shall be named Elizabeth. She shall be given in marriage to the son of your Prince, she shall become a saint and her sanctity shall rejoice and console all Christendom." To make a long story short—Hermann, hearing of this, made enquiries into the matter and found that indeed a daughter had been born that night to the great and good King Andrew of Hungary and to his wife Gertrude, a direct descendant of Charlemagne; such is the line from which "the dear Saint" came. In the course of a ceremony of great magnificence the child received the name of Elizabeth. From minstrels and monks Hermann gathered, from time to time, information about the little Princess and of the prosperity that her coming had brought to her father's kingdom. Ultimately he decided to send an embassy of lords and noble ladies to ask the hand of Elizabeth, then four years old, for his son. The chief lady in the embassy was a certain Lady Bertha, widow of a Thuringian noble, famed for her beauty and piety and "honourable too in all things." She had noble and beautiful ladies in attendance upon her. The ambassadors passed through the country in great splendour with some thirty horses in their train; they were entertained by princes and prelates and celebrated their arrival in Presbourg at last with many masses. They made known to King Andrew the purpose of their visit; Klingsohr the poet was then at the court of Hungary and he eulogised the great qualities of Hermann and his young son Louis. After splendid festivities, lasting over three days, the Thuringian ambassadors took leave of the Hungarian court. The little Elizabeth, dressed in a beautiful robe embroidered in gold, was laid in a cradle of silver and handed to the Thuringians. King Andrew then said to Lord Gauthier de Varila, Hermann's cup-bearer "I confide to thy knightly honour my sweetest consolation." To him and the weeping Gertrude this great knight replied, "I willingly take charge of her and shall be her faithful servant"; nobly indeed did Varila, through long years after, keep his knightly pledge. Thirteen noble Hungarian maidens accompanied the little Princess. Hermann and the Duchess came down from their towers at Wartbourg to meet, at Eisnach, their daughter-in-law to be. Landgraf Hermann returned to prepare for her reception but the Langravine remained all night with the child. Next morning with great ceremony, the little Elizabeth, aged four, was affianced to Louis who was then eleven. A custom existed at that time of bringing up together those who were to be

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